

# OPENING REMARKS: EMPIRE IN THE AGE OF NATIONALISM

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The understanding of the Japanese imperial and colonial legacy varies considerably among different communities. The world outside Japan, on the one hand, knows of the horrors and atrocities, a knowledge that obscures all other dimensions of this historical experience in part because of the Japanese government's own domestic agenda and refusal to come to terms with the past. Post-war Western (principally American) scholarship has tended to focus, on the other hand, upon the developmental consequences of the spread of Japanese formal and informal models of governance. This is most evident in the three-volume series on the Japanese empire collectively edited by Ramon Meyers, Mark Peattie, and Peter Duus.<sup>1</sup> While generating a wealth of new research which often had the effect of redressing the view of Japanese expansionism as an unmitigated disaster for all concerned, the modernization paradigm led to a set of related questions: what were the developmental consequences of Japanese colonialism in comparison with other colonialisms? Why were these developmental consequences kept relatively obscured (or why were the Japanese colonizers so unloved by the colonized)? What was the reason for the failure of this expansionary project?

While acknowledging and absorbing the moral significance and research contributions of these two perspectives, it is important to demarcate a field of inquiry where neither the modernization nor the nationalist paradigms are so central that they conceal other developments. Without rehearsing the extensive critique of these paradigms—themselves over twenty years-old—let me suggest that these paradigms belong roughly to the same moment or period as Japanese imperialism itself and themselves need to be historicized in relation to this imperialism. In these brief introductory remarks, I want to suggest some ways in which we might view Japanese imperialism as sharing many of the same assumptions of these

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<sup>1</sup> Ramon H. Myers and Mark R. Peattie, eds., *The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895–1945* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984); Peter Duus, Ramon H. Myers, and Mark R. Peattie, eds., *The Japanese Informal Empire in China, 1895–1937* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989); and Peter Duus, Ramon H. Myers, and Mark R. Peattie, eds., *The Japanese Wartime Empire, 1931–1945* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996).

paradigms, which in turn represented the dominant global forces of the twentieth century, namely nationalism and modernization. How might this view produce a different agenda of research? In an era where the ideological dominance of nationalism is being challenged by globalization, the historical picture of East Asia and the world will almost certainly have a different look. As several essays in this volume suggest, both imperialism and nationalism were represented by several different agents and actors with complicated and uncertain relationships to the imperial or national cores. Doubtless, many of those who have been accused as "collaborators" will be found to have had legitimate human reasons for doing what they did. Moreover, some "traditional" arrangements will be found to have more globally sustaining value than modernization projects. Yet I am not sure that the alternative morality is sufficiently developed to allow us to call for a definitive break with the old paradigms. The powerful epistemological and moral underpinnings of the old paradigms have informed our own generation's view of the world too deeply for that.

Japanese imperialism took shape within the normative context of modernization and nationalism. First, an East Asian discursive language of the modern (and, hence, of the unique) emanating principally from Japan, circulated in the colonies of Korea and Taiwan and, somewhat less conspicuously, in the Chinese mainland. To be sure, this was a regional mediation of a global trend, but this discourse included distinctive ways of demarcating and representing the spheres of modernity and tradition, state and society, and nation and self. Despite the destructive violence of Japanese imperialism, this imperialism also had to engage, experiment with, and extend this modernizing process—a process that both this violence and reactive nationalism has tended to obscure.

The second context is the transition in world domination from the ideology of imperialism to the ideology of nationalism. The first half of the twentieth century was not only a period when nationalism became hegemonic—when the nation-state system expanded from a European/Northern club to cover most of the globe—but it was one when the surplus of nationalism in the nineteenth century that was imperialism came to be ideologically rejected as foreign to nationalism. Indeed, nationalism now began to define itself as anti-imperialist. Bruce Cumings has suggested that the latecomers to imperialism like Germany and Japan found it particularly vexing to confront this change in the rules of the game whereby imperialism came to be seen increasingly as illegitimate.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Bruce Cumings, "The Legacy of Japanese Colonialism in Korea," in *The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895–1945*, 485.

Yet in many important ways, all nationalisms had to adapt to these new ideological conditions. Both imperial and national states were modern state forms driven by a territorial imperative, and the imperialist or expansionist tendencies of the new nations had to be concealed in nationalism's new ideology. Perhaps conceal is not the right word. Nationalism in this era devised new political forms; forms that were supranational but not overtly or traditionally imperialist. Pan-Asianism, Manchukuo, *kōminka* were the Japanese expressions of this new political form. What is interesting is that there are parallel—though not the same—new political forms which seek to accommodate the expansionist tendencies of the new nations, such as China or India with regard to their shaky claims on their peripheries.

What I am calling the East Asian modern is, first of all, part of the global circulation of discourses of the modern. Once the world comes to be composed of homological nation-states, these states frequently pursue the common goals of scientific modernity, adopt similar or related models to achieve these goals, encounter many of the same problems, and resort to similar solutions. Thus we have the ironic phenomenon of nations proclaiming their authenticity as the mark of their uniqueness even as most other national cultures are doing the same. But of course the global determination is mediated and specified by local, national and regional trajectories both historical and contemporary. Thus we need to focus on the regional mediation of global and national discourses. In this context, we have to establish not only why East Asia is a region, but what is the region of East Asia. Both historical (historical interaction, shared language and culture) and theoretical research are involved here because the cultural geography of East Asia—or what it means and to whom—is a changing one. Thus for instance, the imperial Chinese saw the old tribute region including Burma and Nepal as part of East Asia, whereas the Japanese in the interwar era increasingly saw Siberia and Central Asia as part of this region.

While I am not equipped to speak for the Korean role, central to the formation of the East Asian modern is, of course, the interaction of the Japanese and the Chinese. The conditions of interaction in this region from 1900 to 1945 include Japanese strategic, military, economic, and cultural projects in China; Chinese students, professionals and political exiles in Japan and their return; and the re-importation of the Japanese lexicon of modernity. A large number of studies in English, Chinese, and Japanese have adequately covered the interactions of this period. Among the many, they include the work of Tam Yue-him, Sanetō Keishū, Marius Jansen, Akira Iriye, Douglas Reynolds, and Joshua Fogel. This is an indispensable base for our studies, but I also believe we need to chart out some

new ground relating to the discursive interactions producing the commonly held assumptions about modernity in East Asia and the kinds of subjectivities these generate. Furthermore, while like the above scholars, I can see the historical relationships and parallels as the basis of this encounter, I also see an East Asian modern being produced by this encounter. In other words, we cannot simply invoke historical relationships to explain this modern, but have to see how history is often shaped and reconstituted as a *resource* to serve contemporary imperatives and even construct a new East Asia.

An example of the use of history as a reconstituted resource can be found in the lexicon of modernity. Thousands of specialized and common words, compounds, and phrases of classical Chinese provenance—such as *geming/kakumei* or *fengjian/hōken*—were given new and different meanings in the modern discourses formulated in Japan. When they were brought back to China, this lexicon gave the appearance of a continuous history and a transparent relationship to the Chinese and East Asian past. In actuality, this “lexical effect” incorporated modern Chinese into a new, regional East Asian discourse of the modern formulated first by the Japanese. Indeed, these linguistic transactions perhaps brought modern Chinese, Koreans and Japanese—a temporal community—discursively closer to each other than, for instance, to their peasants. But to be sure, the discursive encounter is not restricted to lexical transfers. This exchange is accompanied by several other modes of cultural interactions.

The profile of the East Asian modern that I want to consider and that is significantly a product of the Japanese dominance of the area is constituted around the question of authenticity. In the era of nation-states, all nations, regardless of whether or not they were imperialistic, were preoccupied with two temporal or historical issues: the universally recognized goal of achieving progress in linear time, and, a less recognized, but equally universal, imperative of having to constitute a core of timeless authenticity. The authentic refers to the true qualities, character, and values that cultures and nations seek to secure while they pursue the goals of modernity, or in other words, while the nation lives in linear time when all is flux and change. Thus the authentic is not only the true but also the unchanging within change, it is identity in a world where all is change. There is a definite tension between the order of authenticity on the one hand, and the order of History or change understood as successive and linear and necessary for both capitalism and modernity on the other. Indeed, this core of authenticity is necessary for the nation’s claim to sovereignty and to withstand the incursions of global capitalism. But the relationship between the two orders is not only conflictual and allows

an elaborate traffic of authorizations and delegitimations between the two.

The order of authenticity is politically very important because it locates the source of authority in a society and can empower those who control this realm. It endows a cultural inviolability to those who can speak for it: whether it be the Shōwa restorationists, the Afghan Taliban, American paramilitarists, or Lee Kuan-yew's anti-Western Confucian essentialism. Internally, it subordinates the individual to the rhetoric of the collective, and externally, it provides an authoritative shield from charges from other states or nations. Often the issue of rights emerging from territorial sovereignty and rights emerging from authentic traditions tend to coalesce: the state has sovereignty because it claims to embody the authenticity of a people and their territory.

The sources of authenticity, their modes of representation, and their effects on subject or identity formation in East Asia were profoundly shaped by—though rarely identical with—Japanese discourses of the authentic. In addition to the better-known influence of “modernizing” categories, such as local self-government or progressive history, I have examined the influence of Japanese discourses of such varied sources of authenticity as the locality or *xiangtu/kyōdo*, the primitive, the self-sacrificing woman, and pan-Asianism. To be sure, the nature of the influence is itself quite varied. Thus, whereas many of the categories and periodization schemes of modern Chinese history until the 1920s were modelled on Japanese ones, in the case of the local or *xiangtu*, which pervaded a range of knowledge practices from literature to geography to rural reform, Japanese discourses shaped one of two influential Chinese models. In yet other cases, Japanese penetration of the mainland and efforts to incorporate “primitive” peoples within Japanese narratives of belonging, led to Chinese formulations of the “primitive” and the periphery in response. We are familiar with how many of the Japanese colonial cultural practices in Korea, such as archaeology or folklore, were absorbed by Korean nationalists into their narratives of Korean greatness. Let me conclude this short essay by turning to one of these sites of discursive interaction: pan-Asianism in China. Through this instance I hope not only to

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<sup>3</sup> Prasenjit Duara, “The Regime of Authenticity: Timelessness, Gender and National History in Modern China,” forthcoming *History and Theory* 37 (October 1998).

<sup>4</sup> Fu Sinian, 1928. “Zhongguo lishi fenqizhi yanjiu” in *Beijing Daxue Rikan* April 17–23 (Reprinted in *Fu Sinian quanji* vol 4: 176–85).

<sup>5</sup> Roger L. Janelli, “The Origins of Korean Folklore Scholarship,” *Journal of American Folklore* 99 (1986): 24–49 and Cumings, “The Legacy of Japanese Colonialism in Korea,” 478–96.

show how the Japanese role in East Asia has to be seen in relation to the two new contexts of the twentieth century, the production of a regional modernity and the hegemony of nationalist ideology, but also how the specificity of Japanese imperialism or military expansionism especially affected the situation.

Pan-Asianism, which perhaps emerged first in Japan toward the end of the nineteenth century and developed a worldwide response during the Russo-Japanese War from a range of Asian leaders such as Sun Yat-sen and Rabindranath Tagore, embodied a variety of meanings. I do not want to reduce this variety to a single interpretation even though it will obviously be necessary to find certain common points of reference. Indeed, to anticipate my conclusion, I believe that Japanese militarism which gained a great deal from this meaningful variety that was pan-Asianism, tended, in the course of its headlong plunge into the Pacific War, to appropriate and reduce its meaning to a single hegemonic one that eliminated alternative visions embedded in pan-Asianism that sought to redeem or reconstruct modernity.

We can see differences in Japanese pan-Asianist thought even in the early stages when we look at the ideas of Okakura Tenshin and his associates, for whom the construction of an alternative civilizational foundation was of greatest importance, and those, for instance, of Ōkawa Shūmei, whose pan-Asianism was backed by a strong nationalist impetus, as discussed in this volume by Christopher Szpilman. Hashikawa Bunso has advised us that the use of pan-Asianism to further Japanese nationalism or imperialism was probably as strong as the desire to basically strengthen Asia.<sup>6</sup> In China, too, pan-Asianist movements were numerous and strong in the first half of this century, but have been basically ignored in the historiography. Here too there were significant differences. There were those "redemptive modern societies" who believed that Eastern religions such as Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism produced a common civilizational, moral, and spiritual fount in the different Asian countries. By turning to these religions, the morally rejuvenated East would be able to redeem true modernity from the decadent West. Some of these societies, such as the Morality Society (Daodehui), the Red Swastika Society, the Dao Yuan, claimed to have many millions of followers; at the very least they had a much larger following than did the May Fourth societies and groups. They were engaged in philanthropy and moral and religious education. Another kind of pan-Asianism that developed in China was based on Sun Yat-sen's vision

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<sup>6</sup> Hashikawa Bunso, "Japanese Perspectives on Asia: From Dissociation to Co-prosperity," in *The Chinese and the Japanese: Essays in Political and Cultural Interactions*, ed. Akira Iriye (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980), 328–55.

of the traditional "kingly way" (*wangdao*), the ideal of rule by moral suasion allegedly pursued by ancient emperors. The way in which Sun and his followers shaped this pan-Asianism also incorporated a strong anti-imperialist dimension, the ideological basis of a kind of united front of colonized nations. Yet another use of pan-Asianism in China was the rhetoric used by the Kuomintang state to appeal to the minority peoples on the peripheries of the Chinese nation to join the nation on the basis of their common brotherhood and animosity toward imperialism.

Despite these differences, it is clear that certain basic conditions had to emerge before such ideologies could flourish as they did. Pan-Asianism embodied an authenticity that was ironically located not in the nation but in a civilizational ideal. The idea that the most authoritative and authentic values arose not out of the nation but from a transnational, civilizational source was, actually and very simply, an effort to mirror the source of authority of Western imperialism: the Christian and Enlightenment civilization of Europe. We shall defer the question of how nations come to, or seek to, appropriate this civilizational authenticity until a later stage of our analysis. The interesting historical question that arises is with regards to when it becomes possible to assert that there is a plurality of civilizations. Through much of the Meiji period, the notion of civilization (*bunmei/wenming*) refers particularly to Enlightenment values as also in China for the period between 1900 and 1920. It is around the time of the First World War when a European critique of material civilization is also launched that a singular notion of civilization referring solely to Enlightenment values is perhaps decisively dethroned. And yet there were surely efforts to construct an alternative Eastern civilization earlier (as with Okakura and Ōkawa). Was it perhaps based on a Christian vision of alternative civilizations that was more catholic than the Enlightenment conception? What role might the Congress of World Religions held in Chicago in 1893 played in constructing the foundations of plural civilizations? At any rate, the securing of the idea of a plurality of civilizations in the aftermath of World War I has much to do with the emerging global force of nationalism.

The transnational source of national authenticity, or in other words, the yearning of the nation to transcend its territorial limits toward a transnational ideal turns our attention to the second context: the growth of the hegemony of nationalist ideology over imperialist ideology. Fred Dickinson's paper in this volume speaks to the important role of Woodrow Wilson's doctrine of the right to self-determination in facilitating this transition. In addition, the support of the Soviet Union for nationalisms all over

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<sup>7</sup> Prasenjit Duara, "Transnationalism and the Predicament of Sovereignty, Modern China 1900–1945," *American Historical Review* (October 1997).

the colonized world as well as in addressing the national question within the Soviet Union, played a significant role in this transformation. As mentioned above, this had the effect of eliminating the rhetorical justification for expansionism without removing the territorial imperative to expansion embedded in the nation-state. Consequently, I have suggested that new political forms appeared, and pan-Asianism was one such expression. As the transnational supplement of nationalism, pan-Asianism could, of course, be practically used for expansionism, but as the source of civilizational authenticity it was always also something more than nationalism.

Japanese imperialism both inherited and transformed the relationship with pan-Asianism that had been developing interactively from the beginning of the twentieth century between various Japanese pan-Asianisms and mainland ones. On the one hand, the militarists, who clearly sought to extend Japanese national power, fostered and propagated these movements; on the other hand, they sought to appropriate these multi-oriented movements for the purposes of the military regime during the Pacific War. Japanese pan-Asianism was welcomed or supported by many pan-Asianist groups in China and by many anti-Western nationalist movements in other Asian countries, such as in Indonesia and the Indian National Army led by Subhash Chandra Bose. In Manchukuo, for example, the puppet government of the Japanese military brought all of the different kinds of Chinese redemptive societies, such as the Morality Society and the Red Swastika Society, under its aegis soon after it established its power and assimilated them into its pan-Asian vision of *wangdao*.

At the time the Chinese redemptive societies encountered the Manchukuo regime, there was a remarkable convergence of ideological interests between them and certain currents in Japan. Similar “redemptive” societies in Japan, such as the Shibunkai, combining Confucianism and Shinto as the spiritual alternative to excessive materialism and individualism, had begun to grow in strength from the 1920s, particularly as social unrest grew under worsening economic conditions. Asian moral systems emphasizing ethical responsibilities were celebrated as alternatives to capitalism and Marxism, both Western doctrines. By the 1930s, the redemptive rhetoric of elite Confucian societies and the right wing nationalist and militarists not only began to come together but were also assimilated in an active political and educational program by the Japanese government.

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<sup>8</sup> Warren H. Smith, *Confucianism in Modern Japan: A Study of Conservatism in Japan's Intellectual History* (Tōkyō: The Hokuseido Press, 1959), 154–66.



Thus it was that Manchukuo state had at its disposal an ideology and language with which to forge an alliance with the redemptive societies in Northeast China. Under the Kuomintang government in Nanjing, these redemptive societies were prohibited and persecuted, largely because their religious and, often, popular religious orientation earned them the opprobrium of superstition and backwardness. Like the Kuomintang, the Manchukuo government censured the “superstitious” character of the redemptive societies, but instead of seeking to eradicate the societies themselves, it saw in them the potential for their transformation into state-controlled civic organizations. In this new political framework, the Morality Society became what in Japanese was called a *kyōka* (*jiaohua* in Chinese) organization—an agency engaged in welfare and enlightenment of the people.

Were these Pan-Asianist societies then co-opted by the Japanese military? Was their redemptive ideology which sought to produce a different society peopled by individuals engaged in spiritual and moral cultivation and rejecting what they considered were the artificial boundaries of nationality and ethnicity hijacked by the Japanese military and subordinated to (someone else’s) nationalist ends? I have studied the records of one of these societies—the Morality Society. Without going into the details, it is clear that the society got a chance to flourish as it had never had before under a regime which professed to pursue its own goals of a Confucian morality (*wangdao*) and “Eastern spirituality.” Indeed, there appears to have been considerable cooperation and even enthusiasm among the active members of the society with the regime’s social and ethical goals. The personal narratives of the Chinese women lecturers of this society reveal some of the motives that led them to the Morality Society. Again and again, we see the importance of their faith in Buddhism and the way in which the Morality Society, which demanded a commitment to public service to the point of self-sacrifice, had opened up this path of service to the world for women. For the first time, says one woman, women could, like men, devote themselves to the social good. Once a woman had satisfactorily served the in-laws, it was incumbent in the next phase to serve the world, in accordance with Buddhist teachings. A Mrs. Chen emphasizes not only the value of self-sacrifice that women had cultivated in the home, but how these values could purify the world once women engage in public service. This same woman later reveals the different ways in which her parents were good people and the way in which she could be a morally pure person. Her parents were good people of a village or a county; she is a good citizen of the nation and the world. While there

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<sup>9</sup> Manzhougou Daodehui bianjike, ed., *Disanjie Manzhougou Daodehui daode jiangxi yulu* (Xinjing: Manzhougou Daodehui Huijike, 1936).

were certainly instrumental goals intermixed in their narratives, I have—against the usual cynical view of pan-Asianism—presented this glimpse of some subjectivities which were shaped by the pan-Asianist programs of the society and the state.

And yet it is just as clear that when the chips began to fall, the regime became more and more committed to its own interests and that of the Japanese nation. Everywhere, in Indonesia as in Manchukuo, what initial enthusiasm there was for the new order and “co-prosperity” began to evaporate. Pan-Asianism had once stood for a yearning among nationals to transcend the confines of a system which their universalizing spiritual values could not sanction. Its co-emergence with a nationalism devoted to rectifying the injustices of imperialism endowed it with a promise to build a new order beyond the nation. And yet in the end, it was the expansionist imperative within nationalism that succeeded in reducing it to one of its political instruments with which it could expand its power under the rhetoric of brotherhood. Whether or not the rhetoric of brotherhood itself would have yielded equal citizenship rights can never be fully known—although the very idea of *kōminka* would suggest that some version was perhaps inevitable. In any event, that the rhetoric of Asian brotherhood could never be fully emptied of meaning is perhaps evident from the essays in this volume by Christopher Braddick and Joachim Glaubitz, who demonstrate the continued popular interest in China that pervaded Japan in the 1950s, 1960s, and beyond.