

# Imagining Asia: A Genealogical Analysis

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The Neo-liberal notion of globalization and the notion of “New Empire” that reemerged in the “war against terror” reciprocate with each other and have unveiled the dominating power concealed behind the changes in the contemporary world. The former, the notion of globalization, restructures various social traditions radically according to the Marketism principles of Neo-liberalism, such as legal system related with private property, that the state should withdraw from the economic sphere, transnational production, business, and financial systems. The latter, the notion of New Empire, seizes on the pretext of violence, crisis and social collapses triggered by the process of neo-liberal globalization to reconstruct military and political “New Empire.” The core of the “New Empire” concept is a control mechanism and function of violence that can operate world-wide. It relies on national or supranational political and military organizations, and hence differs from the neo-liberal notion of globalization. The globalization of Marketism cancels out the legitimacy of all political interference with the category of economy, and subsequently prevents the new order from relying on a certain center or centers of power, but the notion of “empire,” from the perspective of market unification and its institutional demand, evinces the inherent connection between the globalization process and a supranational political and military power centered on nation-states or unions of nation-states. However, it is these two apparently different notions that knit together military unions, collaborative economic associations, and international political institutions, setting up an overall order comprised of all levels--politics, economy, culture, and military. It may be termed “neo-liberal empire/ imperialism”.

In order to countervail the pressure of the expansion of neo-liberal empire, the European society attempts to protect itself with a form of pan-nationalism. In his article “Why Europe Needs a Constitution,” Habermas argued that it is necessary to organize nation-states into a unified political community because of the need to conserve the European model of society and

its achievement in modernity. Europe as a political community is a political union, which rejects the idea of Europe built on the basis of neo-liberal market or Euro currency unification and also resists the global order dominated by the United States. Habermas observed, “The question therefore is: can any of our small or medium, *entangled and accommodating* nation-states preserve a separate capacity to escape enforced assimilation to the social model now imposed by the predominant global economic regime?” In regard to the conservation of social welfare, security, democracy and freedom of the European form of life, Habermas proposed three major tasks in the construction of post-nationalist democracy: to form a European civic society, to build a Europe-wide political public sphere, and to create a political culture which all citizens of the EU will be able to share. He suggested 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.<sup>1</sup> A Europe formed according to these three major tasks resembles a super-nation or empire: its component societies retain their own characteristics and autonomy to a certain degree, while it also has unified standing institutions that carry out governmental functions and unified congress and law, and is supported and protected by historically formed civic political culture and social system.

In a similar background, the category of region again becomes a resource for imagination, evinced, for instance, by how prolific new imaginations regarding the notion of Asia are in contemporary times. After the 911 attack, China suggested itself to join the Asean treaty for cooperation and friendship in the formula of “ten plus one” and Japan immediately followed for a new formula “ten plus three” (including Japan and Korea). In 2002, A Japanese news agency published an article, saying that “If the unification of Asia accelerates, ... the sense of distance between Japan and China will tend to disappear naturally in the process of regional unification; eventually, based on a first regional negotiation occasion that excludes the United States—a conference of ASEAN and Leaders of Japan, China, and Korea, Japan and China— may achieve an ‘Asian version of the reconciliation between France and Germany’.”<sup>2</sup> Almost at the same time when the ten nations from East Europe were accepted as formal members of EU in the May 1, 2004, a Japanese diplomat and a India geopolitical scientist suggested that China, Japan and India should be the axes of the Asian version of NATO. This

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<sup>1</sup> Jürgen Habermas, "Why Europe Needs a Constitution," *New Left Review* 11 (2001): pp. 5-26.

<sup>2</sup>Bunsho Nishikyo, "The Relationship between Japan, the Us, China, and Russia from the Perspective of China's Twenty-First Century Strategy," *seikai shupo*, February 12 2002.

form of imagination centered on region, however, does not seem to be in stark contrast with the logic of reality. On this issue, Anthony D. Smith's criticism of Europe "pan-nationalism" is applicable also to many equivalent discussions on Asia. Smith pointed out that while they seem to suggest existing national states should be abandoned for the greater supra-state and supranational interest, the Pan-nationalists actually elucidated the cultural sphere of the national state, strengthened its historical identification, and reinforced the national state through connecting it with a broader category of 'protected' state, and through attacking neighboring countries and enemies. Pan-nationalism has some functions and regional influences as a political forum, but proposes no breakthrough in political or economic relations. Its function is to normalize and hence to justify nation-states.<sup>3</sup> However, what's the political meaning of the new trend of regional integration in a so-called "new empire" era?

Asia differs drastically from Europe in political system, economic structure, and cultural tradition; internally, it is also a highly diversified region. When we discuss the question of Asia, we cannot avoid the following problems. First, since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, different forms of Asianism have always been closely related with different forms of nationalism; even in the context of resisting neo-liberal globalization, Asian imagination is often part of the imagination of nation-state. For instance, for Japan and Korea, the idea of East Asia beyond the national state is itself a means to reconstruct the sovereignty of nation-states. In that case, what role does the national state play in the concept of Asia? Second, in the wave of modern nationalism, the concept of Asia contains two opposing aspects, that is to say, the Japanese colonist concept of Asia centered on the notion of "Great Asian Sphere of Common Prosperity" and the socialist concept of Asia centered on Asian national liberation movement and socialist movement. In a global context of the collapse of socialist movement and reconstruction of Asian imaginations, how should we regard and handle the socialist legacy in Asia? Third, if it is a kind of imagination surpassing the social community of nation-states, the concept of Asia also signifies a historical reversal, that is to say, the substitution of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century supra-empire or anti-empire imagination centered on nation-state with the supranational state imagination.

The analysis that follows is a response to the on-going discussion of Asian intellectuals on the question of Asia. It does not present a construct of or plan for Asia but analyzes the

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<sup>3</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *Nations and Nationalism in a Global Era* (London: Routledge, 1998).

historical lineage and practical dilemmas related to such constructs and plans. I hope by exploring the interaction between the category of Asia and modern history, some analytical orientations in regard to the question of Asia can be found, so that new imaginations of Asia may benefit from the answers to the above-mentioned historical questions. Since after the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in East Asian countries such as Japan and Korea, a wealth of discussions on Asia has been produced. In contrast, there is a paucity of such discussion in China, which has profoundly influenced China's self-knowledge and produced partial views such as the Chinese narrative that is invariably confined in the framework of China vs. the West. My discussion focuses on fields related to China, because, besides the limitation of my knowledge, I also hope to develop historical understanding of China and its problems from the perspective of Asia. I believe new perspectives of Asia should be based on new self-knowledge of our own societies.

### **I. The Derivativeness of Asia: Empire and State; Agriculture and Market**

The idea of Asia is not an Asian but a European notion historically speaking. European Enlightenment and colonialism provided preconditions for the pursuit of knowledge in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The branches of learning—historical linguistics, modern geography, philosophy of rights, theories of state and race, historiography, and political economy—developed quickly along with natural sciences, and together they drew a new world map. The ideas of Europe and Asia were integrated into the notion of “world history” under such new knowledge conditions. Montesquieu, Adam Smith, Hegel, and Marx and others constructed the idea of Asia in contrast with Europe and incorporated Asia in a teleological vision of history.<sup>4</sup> The core elements of this European characterization of Asia could be summed up as follows:

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<sup>4</sup>I need to add a special note on Marx's argument. In the preface to “*A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*,” he regarded the history of Western Europe as “epochs marking progress in the economic development of society.” See Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Yuri Sdobnikov et al Victor Schittke, vol. 29, *The Collected Works of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1987), p. 263. After 1859, 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.” He stated that “[that view] does me at the same time too much honor and too much insult.” See Saul K. Pandover, ed., *The Letters of Karl Marx* (Englewoodcliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1979), p. 321.

multi-ethnic empire as opposed to European sovereign/monarchical state, political despotism as opposed to European legal and political system, the nomadic and agrarian mode of production completely different from European urban life and trade, etc. Since the European nation-state and the expansion of the capitalist market system were considered as the advanced stage and the end or telos of world history, Asia and its above-mentioned characteristics were consequently designated to a lower stage of history. In this context, Asia was not only a geographic category, but also a form of civilization: Asia is a political form in opposition to European state, a social form in opposition to European capitalism, and a transitional stage between an unhistorical stage and a historical stage. This derivative discourse on Asia provided a framework for European intellectuals, Asian revolutionaries and reformists, and historians to represent world history and Asian societies, to establish revolution and reform policies, and to describe the past and future of Asia. In most of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the idea of Asia was contained in a universal discourse of European modernity that provided a similar narrative framework for both colonists and revolutionaries, who produced two opposing blueprints of history. This narrative framework has three key concepts: empire, nation-state and capitalism (market economy).

In many 19<sup>th</sup>-century European works on history, philosophy, law, state, and religion, however, the very derivativeness of the idea of Asia was ironically conveyed in statements that presented Asia as the “center” of all nations in the world and the “starting point” of world history:

The History of the World travels from East to West, for Europe is absolutely the end of History, Asia is the beginning. ... The East knew and to the present day knows that *One* is free; the Greek and Roman world, that *some* are free; the German World knows that *All* are free. The first political form therefore which we observe in History, is *Despotism*, the second *Democracy* and *Aristocracy*, the third *Monarchy*.<sup>5</sup>

Such a universal history based on political form was able to come into existence because along with the expansion of European colonialism, European nationalist knowledge gained the

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<sup>5</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (New York: Colonial Press, 1899), p. 103-04.

objective conditions to develop a worldwide comparative methodology and outlook. For instance, Hegel was inspired by the connections between European languages and Sanskrit discovered by some European linguists, and he linked this historical linguistic connection with the other two discoveries of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Europe—the theory of race and historical geography. Hegel says:

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 [...]<sup>6</sup>

Accordingly, we can tell that there are two assumptions for Asia to become “the beginning of history.” First, Asia and Europe must be two correlated organic constituents of the same process of history; otherwise notions of the so-called “beginning” and “end” of history will not stand. Second, Asia and Europe are two drastically different stages of world history, and state is the highest standard to define and evaluate the stages: Because Asia had no state and was not yet a full subject of history, it was the beginning of history, or an unhistorical period. It can be inferred from this argument that when Asian regions become states, Asia will not be Asia anymore. The catchphrase “Departure from Asia and Joining Europe” advocated by Japanese intellectuals in the 19<sup>th</sup> century should also be analyzed in the context of this line of thought, i.e., that of how nation-states were formed.

According to Hegel’s framework of world history, civil society consisting of independent individuals and its legal system formed the internal structure of the political community (state). This political community was not an absolute human construction but the outcome of a

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

comprehensive process of evolution.<sup>7</sup> Hegel's idea of Asia is a philosophical summary of European discourses on Asia. Its essence is to contrast European and Asian state structures. Because his account on civil society, market, and commerce derives from the Scottish school of political economics, Hegel's notion of despotic Asia is linked to a certain economic system. In *The Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith analyzed the relationship between agriculture and irrigation in China and other Asian countries in order to contrast it with the professional characters of Western European cities, i.e., manufacturing and foreign trade. Smith's definition of four historical stages—hunting, nomadic, agriculture and commerce—coordinates with the definition of regions and races. For instance, he mentioned “native tribes of North America” as examples of “nations of hunters, the lowest and rudest state of society,” the Tartar and Arabs as examples of “nations of shepherds, a more advanced state of society,” and the ancient Greek and Roman people as examples of “[nations of husbandmen,] a yet more advanced state of society.”<sup>8</sup> In an earlier chapter, he also discussed agriculture in China.<sup>9</sup> From Hegel's perspective, all these issues belonged to the political sphere concerning state: hunting races were regarded as the lowest and crudest because hunting and gathering communities were of such a smaller size that the political specialization of labor of a state was impossible. In Gellner's words, “for them, the question of the state, of a stable specialized order-enforcing institution, does not really arise.”<sup>10</sup> Hence when he described world history, Hegel resolutely excluded North America (characterized by hunting and gathering) and placed the East at the beginning of history. Smith divided history according to different economic or productive pattern, while Hegel used region, civilization, and state structure to name different historical stages, but both linked productive or political forms with specific spaces such as Asia, America, Africa, or Europe, and arranged them into a relationship of temporal periodicity.

When he expounded the evolution of social economic systems, Marx divided it into four stages—Asiatic, primitive, feudal, and capitalist, which shows that his unique notion of the

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<sup>7</sup> The debates over “the end of history” that started from the end of the twentieth century can be understood historically only when posited in such a line of thought on history: the idea of liberal democratic state represented by Europe and the relations of production represented by a civil society eventually return to themselves after various experimentation, tyranny, and nihilism. C.f. Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

<sup>8</sup> Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. A. S. Skinner R. H. Campbell, and W. B. Todd, vol. II: 2, *The Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith* (London: Oxford University, 1976), pp. 689-92.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 679-81.

<sup>10</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), p. 5.

Asiatic mode of production originated in a synthesis of Hegel's and Adam Smith's conceptions of history. According to Perry Anderson, a series of generalization in regard to the characteristic of Asia in European intellectual history since the 15<sup>th</sup> century is the general premise of Marx's notion of the Asiatic mode of production: the public or state ownership of land (Harrington, Francois Bernier, Montesquieu), lack of legal constraint (Jean Bodin, Montesquieu, Bernier), legal system substituted by religion (Montesquieu), lack of hereditary aristocracy (Niccolo Machiavelli, Bacon, Montesquieu), slavery like social equality (Montesquieu, Hegel), isolated village communal (Hegel), agriculture that overwhelmed industry (John Stuart Mill, Bernier), public water work (Smith, Mill), hot climate (Montesquieu, Mill) stagnant history (Montesquieu, Hegel, Mill)—All these characteristics assigned to Asia are summarized by these writers as the properties of Oriental despotism, and can be traced back to discussions of Asia in Greek thought.<sup>11</sup>

It is worth noting that to compare Europe and Asia with a focus on their state structures is an important tradition in European politic thinking that appeared during the historical conflicts of European countries with the Ottoman Empire. As the first theorist to treat the Ottoman Empire as “the antithesis of European monarchy,” Machiavelli treated Turkish sovereign bureaucratic system as different from all European state systems. While Bodin, who is regarded as the first European interpreter of the notion of sovereignty, established a contrast between European royal sovereignty and Ottoman's lordly power. These two started the tradition to contrast European and Asian state structures, and the concept of Oriental despotism flourished in this tradition.<sup>12</sup> The contrast between Western European feudal states and the Ottoman Empire was eventually transformed into the contrast between European nation-states and Asian empires. As a result, when we read the accounts on Asian empires in Montesquieu's *The Spirit of Laws*, it is difficult for us to recognize that despotism, which is regarded as the characteristic of Asian countries, was in fact derived from the European generalization of Ottoman culture.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolute State* (London: Verso, 1979), p. 472. Anderson's analysis of the Asiatic mode of production is authoritative, but for some reason he did not touch on the important influence of Smith and the Scottish School on Hegel's and Marx's ideas of Asia.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 397.

<sup>13</sup> Montesquieu described the distinctive properties of the republic, monarchy, and despotic government in *De l'Esprit des Loix*. He compared these different forms of government from the perspective of “natural property”: “If the natural property of small states is to be governed as republics, that of medium-sized ones, to be subject to a monarch, and that of large empires to be dominated by a despot, it follows that, in order to preserve the principles of the established government, the state must be maintained at the size it already has and that it will change its spirit to the degree to which its boundaries are narrowed or extended.” He regarded the Greek republics as the



It was in the Western European context, a transition period from feudal states to nation-states, that the notion of despotism became so closely associated with the notion of empire, whence the concept of state, as opposed to empire, acquired its superiority in value and history. In other words, Asia as multi-ethnic, despotic and agrarian empires is contrasted with the characteristics of European nation-state or proto-national state. This dichotomous framework says nothing concerning differences among China, Ottoman, Mogul and Russia.

## II. The Idea of Asia and Two Forms of Asian Nationalism

Asian ideas of Asia are the products of modern nationalism. In the Asian national liberation movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, new forms were acquired by the pattern of antithesis between empire and state that was closely associated with the idea of Asia in European political thought. For instance, in the discourses on “Departure from Asia and Joining” in Japan, “National Autonomy” by Russian revolutionaries, and “Pan-Asianism” by Chinese revolutionaries, the idea of Asia invariably had an internal connection with “ethnically complicated empire and its culture.” These notions, “Departure from Asia and Joining Europe,” “National Self-determination,” and “Pan-Asianism” can be regarded as emblems revealing that the different forms of Asian nationalism, although historically opposed in substance, all constructed visions of national imaginaries within the antithesis between nation-state and empire, variously integrating the appeal to establish nation-state with the appeal to transcend nation-state—the resulting forms were imperialism and internationalism.

The idea of Asia represented in the slogan “Departure from Asia and Joining Europe” was raised in a short essay by Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835-1901), which was published in 1885. “Departure from Asia” reveals a determination to get rid of the China-centered world and its politics and Confucian ideology, and “Joining Europe” means to establish Japan as a European-style national state. We could summarize Fukuzawa’s main idea of Asia as these: first, the idea of Asia is a culturally homogenous concept, which represents the idea of a Confucian Asia. Hence, the idea here is equal to the idea of China-centered East Asia; second, “departure from

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model of the republic, kingdoms divided from an empire as the model of monarchical states, and the Chinese empire, the model of despotic government: “China is a despotic state whose principle is fear. In the first dynasties, when the empire was not so extensive, perhaps the government deviated a little from that spirit. But that is not so today.” See Montesquieu, *The Spirit of Laws*, trans. Basia C. Miller Anne M. Cohler, and Harold S. Stone, *Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp.124-28.

Asia and joining Europe” could be interpreted as “departure from Confucianism by transforming Japan into a national state, which should orient toward freedom, human rights, sovereign state, civilization and so on. In this sense, the sharp confrontation between empire and nation-state, between the China-centered tributary system and state-based treaty system, have been used to re-define the relationship between Japan and Asia. Japan’s self-consciousness as a nation-state was achieved through the slogan “departure from Asia and joining Europe”, which reproduces the dichotomy of civilized and barbarian, Western and Eastern within Asia. Fukuzawa argued that Japan should not only depart from the old pattern of itself, but also re-shape an axes in the whole Asia—the key of it is “departure from Asia”. However, in reality, Japan’s route as a nation-state was not “departure from Asia and joining Europe” but rather “entering Asia and confronting Europe”. The notion of “great East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere” as a colonial slogan promoted in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century evinces the other side of the practice of “departure Asia and joining Europe”, which was a construction ex post facto for legitimizing the Japanese invasion in Asia. In the context that Japanese colonialism dominated the idea of Asia, it is understandable that most of Chinese intellectuals became reluctant to elaborate and even to use this concept in their discourse.

The national liberation movements in Asia created a new Asian imagination, which is a series of echo to the socialist idea of Asia in the Russian revolution. The key point of this new Asian imagination is to connect the issue of political/social reform in Asia and the right of nations to self-determination. As an anti-bourgeois nation-state and anti-capitalism social movement, the socialist movement from its very beginning showed its orientation toward internationalism and anti-imperialism. However, as same as the theory of “departure from Asia” in Japan, the theory of the right of nations to self-determination was elaborated on within the dichotomy of nation-state and empire. Twenty-seven years after Fukuzawa Yukichi brought out his *On Departure from Asia*, and soon after the Republican Revolution erupted and the Provisional Government of the Chinese Republic was established, Lenin published a series of articles—“Democracy and Narodism (from Russian: “populism”) in China” (1912), “The Awakening of Asia”(1913), and “Backward Europe and Advanced Asia” (1913). He applauded that “[today] China is a land of seething political activity, the scene of a virile social movement and of a democratic upsurge,”<sup>14</sup> and condemned the civilized and advanced Europe, “with its

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<sup>14</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Awakening of Asia," in vol. 19, *Collected Works*, ed. Robert Daglish (Moscow: Foreign

highly developed machine industry, its rich multiform culture and its constitutions,” came out to “support of everything backward, moribund, and medieval” under the command of the bourgeoisie.<sup>15</sup> Lenin’s judgment is a constituent and a starting point of his theories on imperialism and proletarian revolution. Several years later, he developed the theory of imperialism and argued that as capitalism entered the stage of imperialism, the social struggle of the oppressed races all over the world would be integrated into the category of world proletarian revolution. This method of connecting European and Asian revolutions in analysis can be traced back to Marx’s article “Revolution in China and in Europe” written for the *New York Daily Tribune* in 1853.<sup>16</sup> Lenin and Fukuzawa’s opposing views are based on a common basic understanding, i.e., 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 advanced Europe. Hence, the advanced position of Asia in Lenin’s theory is ambiguous. When he turned to the nature of revolutions in Russia, for instance, Lenin regarded Russia as an Asian country, but this orientation was not defined from the perspective of geography but based on the degree of capitalist development and the process of Russian history. In “Democracy and Narodism in China,” he says, “Russia is undoubtedly an Asian country and, what is more, one of the most benighted, medieval, and shamefully backward of Asian countries.”<sup>17</sup> 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 the Russian society. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Russian intellectuals regarded the spirit of Russia as the struggle and collision of two forces: the Slavic and the West European, the Eastern and the Western, the Asian and European. In the quotation above, Asia is a category connected with notions such as barbarity, the Medieval, and backwardness. It is for this reason that the Russian revolution had a prominent Asian character, i.e., this revolution was directed against the characteristic benighted, medieval, and shamefully backward social relations of Russia as an Asian country, and at the same time, the revolution has a global significance.

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Language Publishing House, 1963), p. 85.

<sup>15</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Backward Europe and Advanced Asia," in vol. 19, *Collected Works*, p.99.

<sup>16</sup> Karl Marx, "Revolution in China and in Europe," in vol. 12, *The Collected Works of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1980), pp. 93-99.

<sup>17</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Democracy and Narodism in Asia," in vol. 18, *Collected Works*, ed. Clemens Dutt (Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1963), pp.163-64.

The October Revolution in 1917 arose in the immediate background of European wars and influenced the Chinese Revolution profoundly. Yet two facts are seldom noticed. First, the October Revolution took place after the Chinese Republican Revolution of 1911. The method of socialism building after the October Revolution can to a great extent be regarded as a response to Asian revolution (i.e., the Chinese Revolution of 1911). Lenin's theory of national self-determination and his interpretation of the significance of revolution in backward countries in the imperialistic era were both introduced after the Chinese Revolution of 1911, and were theoretically connected with his analysis of the Chinese 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 substantial difference between Lenin's revolutionary judgment and Smith or Hegel's idea of Asia. All perceived the history of capitalism as an evolutionary process from the ancient Orient or Asia to modern Europe, from hunting, nomadism and agriculture to trade or industry.

For Lenin, however, this framework of world history had two meanings from the beginning. First, world capitalism and the Russian movements of 1905 stimulated by it was the fundamental momentum to awaken Asia—a country that had been “standing still for centuries” and had no history.<sup>18</sup> Second, since the Chinese Revolution represented the most advance power in world history, it clearly indicated the point to break through the imperialistic world system. The lasting debate between the Slavophiles and the Westernizers among Russian intellectuals and revolutionaries evinces from a special perspective the double historical momentum contained in the idea of Asia.<sup>19</sup>

The special position of Asia in the rhetoric of world history decided how the socialists understood the task and direction of modern revolution in Asia. When he reviewed the democratic and socialist programs proposed by Chinese revolutionaries that transcended capitalism, Lenin criticized that it had profound utopian characteristics, and that it rather should be regarded as 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.”<sup>20</sup> Therefore before the Asian bourgeoisie accomplished the revolutionary task that

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<sup>18</sup> Lenin, "The Awakening of Asia," p. 85.

<sup>19</sup> The Russian intelligentsia's ideas of Europe and Asia were apparently influenced by political developments of Western Europe and the Enlightenment conception of history.

<sup>20</sup> Lenin, "Democracy and Narodism in Asia," p. 165.

European bourgeoisie had accomplished, socialism was out of question. He used historical dialectics adeptly and asserted Sun Yat-sen's "Land Reform Outline" was "reactionary" because it went against or beyond the historical stage. He also pointed out that because of the "Asian" character of the 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 programme that, if fully carried out, would mean the *most* rapid development of capitalism in agriculture"<sup>21</sup> This is what he called "China's dialectic": the socialist and populist outline, of which anti-capitalism in agriculture is the main content, could carry out the outline in a manner of realizing agrarian capitalism in China.

Evidently, the understanding of Asia partly decided how they understood the task and direction of revolution. In addition to capitalism and revolutionary logic, Hegel's view of world history and the particular designation of Asia as medieval, barbarian, and non-historical was also a premise of Lenin's idea of Asia. This Hegel-plus-revolution idea of Asia embraced the pattern of historical development from the ancient (feudalism), to the medieval (capitalism), and to the modern (proletarian revolution or socialism). It provided a framework joined with temporality and temporal periodization for the capitalist era to comprehend the history of other regions.

Why did the revolution aiming at internationalism and socialism lead to the historical form of nation-state as well? Lenin argued in 1914:

The national state is *typical* and normal for the capitalist world. ... 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.<sup>22</sup>

Hence when he discussed the awakening of Asia, Lenin was not concerned with the issue

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p.168.

<sup>22</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Right of Nations to Self-Determination," in *Collected Works* (Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1963), pp.397 and 400.

of socialism, but how the political prerequisites of capitalist development could be created, that is, how to create the national state system. Here national states and “multi-national states”, or empires, are antithetical. The former is the normal condition of capitalism, and the latter the antithesis of nation-state. National self-determination is political self-determination. Yet this idea does not mean a simplistic identification of national self-determination with politics. Self-determination is exercised in political practice, and subsequently creates the political conditions for bourgeois economy, or the political structure of political nations or nation-states, to develop. Lenin plainly pointed out the inherent connection between nationalism and capitalism. “[Capitalism], 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.”<sup>23</sup> It was neither revolution nor Asia’s peculiar civilization but the development of capitalism that demanded a revolution.

Lenin’s arguments provide us with an outline to understand the relationship between modern Chinese nationalism and the idea of Asia. When he visited Kobe in 1924, Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925) made his famous speech entitled “Great Asianism.”<sup>24</sup> He generally distinguished two ideas of Asia: one had no independent states and was the origin of the most ancient civilization; the other was about to rejuvenate. The former has inherent connections with ethnically complex states in Lenin’s argument, but what does the starting point of Asian rejuvenation or rejuvenated Asia mean? Sun claimed that the starting point was Japan, since it abolished a number of unequal treaties and became the first independent state in Asia. In other words, we can say this starting point is nation-state rather than Japan. Sun applauded the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese war and subsequently the Japanese triumph:

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 399. Nowadays, leftist and rightist intellectuals tend to regard this view as the myopia of revolutionaries, and refuse to recognize nation-state as the best safeguard for the development of modern capitalism. Discussions concerning the ideas of Asia or Europe show such a tendency. For Lenin, the question of Asia was closely connected with nation-state. He said that “in Asia itself the conditions for the most complete development of commodity production and the freest, widest and speediest growth of capitalism have been created only in Japan, i.e., only in an independent national state. ... The latter is a bourgeois state, and for that reason has itself begun to oppress other nations and to enslave colonies.” See Lenin, “The Right of Nations to Self-Determination,” p. 399.

<sup>24</sup> On November 28, 1924, Sun attended the welcome party held under the auspice of five organizations including the Kobe Chamber of Commerce, and gave the speech. See Sun Yat-sen, “Dui Shenhu Shangye Huiyisuo Deng Tuanti De Yanshuo (Talk to Organizations Including the Kobe Chamber of Commerce),” in *Sun Zhongshan Quanji (Complete Works of Sun Zhongshan)* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), pp. 401-09.

The Japanese triumph over the Russian is the first triumph of Asian nations over the European in the past several hundred years. ... 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.<sup>25</sup>

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 multi-cultural Asia. The unity of Asia was based on the independence of sovereign states. “All Asian nations” are the outcome of national independence movement 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” as opposed to “the culture of the hegemonic way” of European nation-states. He entitled 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 the most clear that Sun’s notion of Asia is not Confucian Asia (or East Asia), whose core is 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 talked about China, Japan, India, Persia, Afghanistan, Arab, Turkey, Bhutan, and Nepal, and the tributary system of the Chinese empire. Cultural heterogeneity is 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 supplied the historical basis for nation-state’s internal unity and resistance against external interference.<sup>26</sup> He hoped that the multiplicity of

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp.402-02.

<sup>26</sup> Sun said in his conversation with news reporters 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, but if not, they will suffer. If the Japanese people will not be able to 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 decided by China domestic (internal) affairs. Since the outbreak of the Chinese revolution, violent upheavals have continued to arise for years. China can’t be unified not because of Chinese powers but completely because of foreign powers. Why can’t China unify? The foreigners solely cause it. The reason is that China and foreign countries signed unequal treaties, and every foreigner uses those treaties to enjoy special rights in China. Recent people from the West are not only using unequal treaties to enjoy special rights but also abuse those treaties in outrageous ways.” See Sun Yat-sen, “Zai Shenhu Yu Riben Jizhe De Tanhua (Conversation with Japanese News Reporters in Kobe),”

dynastic culture could be united with the new relations between nation-states so as to obviate the imperialist cultural colonization and the tendency of high-degree cultural homogenization in nation-states. His vision of Asia was: Japan in the east, Turkey in the west, and nations-states that have as their foundation 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 benevolence, righteousness and morality as the basis to unite all nations, all nations of Asia, [when united], will become powerful.”<sup>27</sup> According to Sun, the culture of the kingly way defended the oppressed nations, rebelled against the hegemonic way, and pursued the equality and liberation of all peoples.<sup>28</sup> Sun discerned the relationship between nationalism and the concept of race, and recognized that nationalism’s resistance logic contained the logic that would lead to its opposite side, i.e., 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,” is antithetical to the proposal of “Great East Asianism” in modern Japan. As a form of multiculturalism, it criticized the notion of “East Asia,” which was highly homogenized, and regarded Asian states’ national self-determination as the path to surpass colonialist logic. This notion contains a self-deconstructive mechanism and logic because its validity rests on the resistance to the colonial culture of the hegemonic way.

This self-deconstructive logic is the very basis of the close connection between “Great Asianism” and internationalism. Sun’s idea of Asia has ostensible racist marks, but it attempted to transcend the historical limits of racism by introducing a more basic standard: to surpass national oppression. For instance, he defined the Russian as European, but regarded the new liberation movement in Russia as allied with “Great Asianism.” He said:

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in *Sun Zhongshan Quanjī (Complete Works of Sun Zhongshan)*, pp.373-74. Because Asia had not undergone complete transition to nation-states, “Great Asianism” was not able to design a whole apparatus for such regional groups. But Sun’s idea of Asia is closely related to the thought that respects nation-state’s sovereignty. His “Great Asianism” is somewhat analogous to what Coudenhove-Kalergi put forward in *Pan-Europe*—the thesis of Pan-Europe based on the sovereignty of nation-states—and to the Pan-American organization that came into existence earlier. This type of regional construct can be regarded as a regional organization of the League of Nations, whose function was to adjudicate verdict over conflicts between regional groups such as “Pan-Europe,” “Pan-America,” North America, South America, the UK, the USSR, and the Far East. C.f. Pierre Gerbet, *La Construction De L'europe, Notre Siècle* (Paris: Impr. nationale, 1983), p. 34. and Richard N. Coudenhove-Kalergi, *Pan-Europe* (New York: Knopf, 1926).

<sup>27</sup> Sun, "Dui Shenhu Shangye Huiyisuo Deng Tuanti De Yanshuo (Talk to Organizations Including the Kobe Chamber of Commerce)," pp. 408-09.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 409.



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 breaking up with the white Europeans. Why does it do so? Because Russia advocates the kingly way and not the hegemonic way; it wants to insist on benevolence, righteousness, and morality and is not willing to talk 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 extremely compatible with the old culture of ours, the East. Russia will therefore come to befriend the East, and break up with the West.<sup>29</sup>

The new culture of Russian refers to its socialism after the October Revolution. Sun's idea of Asia contains a socialist dynamic that opposes capitalism and imperialism. Urged by this socialist dynamic, he attempted to interpret the essence of the kingly way embodied in the tributary practice as a new type of internationalism.

It is probably the connection of this socialist value with Chinese traditions that have inspired contemporary scholars to reconstruct the idea of Asia. Mizoguchi Yuzo argues that the categories such as “heavenly principles” (*tianli*), “public/private” (*gong/si*) ran through Chinese intellectual and social history from the Song to the Qing, and that therefore there is an inherent continuity between some themes of modern Chinese revolution—for instance, Sun's principle of people's livelihood and socialist land policy—and the ideas of land regulations, monarch and their values in the 16<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> century. As historical notions, the relationship between categories such as “public” (*gong*), “Heaven” (*tian*), “heavenly principles” and modern revolution and equalitarianism needs to be critiqued with care. But the attempt to use values such as “principles of Heaven,” “public principles” (*gongli*) or equality to define Asian culture indubitably contains a resistance and criticism of modern capitalism and colonialism.<sup>30</sup> In other words, in the waves of nationalism and colonialism, we can discover the sharp opposition between socialist and colonialist ideas of Asia.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> C.f. Yuzo Mizoguchi, *Chugoku No Shiso (Chinese Thinking)* (Tokyo: Hoso daigaku kyoiku shikokai, 1991), Yuzo Mizoguchi, *Chugoku Zen Kindai Shiso No Kussetsu to Tenkai (the Turns and Changes in Chinese Pre-Modern Thinking)* (Tokyo: Tokyo daigaku shuppankai, 1980).

### III. The Idea of Asia and Modernity in Historical Studies

Against the background of colonialism and imperialist wars, Asian intellectuals basically followed the East/West dichotomy to understand history. Nationalism and capitalism, two categories of knowledge that are different and yet closely affiliated, deeply affected their conception of Asia. The primacy of Euro-centrism in historical studies was based on the inherent relation of modernity with these two categories.

“The East Asian world” as a relatively self-contained “cultural sphere” was a modern construct based on intra-regional historical connections. Nishijima Sadao described “the East Asian world” as a self-completing cultural sphere: it centered on China geographically, surrounded by Korea, Japan, Vietnam, and the area between the Mongolian and the Tibetan plateaus; its cultural characteristics were Chinese characters, Confucianism, system of laws and decrees, and Buddhism.<sup>31</sup> The effort to establish the connection between geographic regions and culture aimed to construct East Asia as an organic unity, but this argument did not come by itself. It was instead the production of specific historical conditions. According to Maeda Naonori, the traditional view of Japanese scholars did not include Japan in the East Asian world:

It is generally believed that before modernity, before 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 including Manchuria, Korea, Annam, and etc. This is what people used to believe. Although we considered the possibility, we were hesitant to include Japan in this world. However, 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, the growth of the British society, for instance, was parallel to and inter-related with that of the European continent. But whether a similar phenomenon existed in East Asia, especially between Japan and China, was still not clear except for the period of modern history. Moreover, the question itself

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<sup>31</sup> Sadao Nishijima, "Toyo Seikai No Seitei (the Formation of the East Asian World)," in *Chugoku Kodai Kokka to Higashi Ajia Sekai (the Ancient State of China and the East Asian World)* (Tokyo: Tokyo daikaku shuppansha, 1983).

has not yet been taken seriously. The accepted idea has been that Japan's development in social structures since the ancient times to the medieval and the modern period has been completely unrelated to those of the continent.<sup>32</sup>

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, departure from Asia and joining Asia, these antitheses formed the opposing and coordinated characters of the narrative of Asia in modern Japanese nationalism.

The driving force to construct the organicity or self-containment of the East Asian world has always been the idea of the nationalistic, industrial, and capitalistic West. The notion "East Asian civilization sphere" was an organic constituent of modern Asian nationalistic knowledge, and people were seeking behind it not only cultural particularity but also the "inherent" and "universal" dynamic of nationalism, industrialism, and capitalism that coordinated with this cultural particularity. Hence the effort to search for modernity in Asia destructed the Hegelian framework of world history, but the inherent standards of the Hegelian world order were not abolished but reconstructed: nationalism, capitalism, and theories of state set up a meta-history of the narrative of East Asian history. Miyazaki asserted "one could perceive in the Song society obvious capitalist tendencies and phenomena that differed drastically from those of the medieval society."<sup>33</sup> He also said:

The political unification of the Song after the Five Dynasties, was at the same time economic reunification of the domestic market. ... The capitals of the kingdoms of the Five Dynasties lost their significance as political centers, but they continued to exist as commercial centers. Especially, the commercial cities that appeared along the Grand Canal since the Tang grew gradually and accumulated wealth, and in addition secured the prosperity of modern culture. Such a circumstance inevitably led to the gradual acceptance of the tendency to place the Song society under the control of a sort of

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<sup>32</sup> Naonori Maeda, "To Ajia No Okeru Kodai No Shumatu (the End of Antiquity in East Asia)." in Shun Suzuki and Sadao Nishijima, *Chugoku Shi No Jidai Kubun (the Periodization of Chinese History)* (Tokyo: Tokyo daigaku shuppansha, 1957).

<sup>33</sup> Ichisada Miyazaki, "Toyo Teki Kinsei (East Asia's Modern Age)," in *Miyazaki Ichisada Zenshu* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1992), p.157.

capitalism.”<sup>34</sup>

Miyazaki connected the history of different regions together through the notion of “transportation,” and elaborated on “capitalism in the Song,” “the modernity of East Asia,” and “nationalism” from this perspective. This method evinces the possibility of transcending the disputes between universalism and particularism in historical study. In the section on “The nationalism of modern East Asia,” he analyzed the ethnic relations from the Qin till the Qing. He believed that during the Song dynasties, “nationalist upsurges” appeared, national contacts went beyond tributary relations, and the Yue Kingdom and the Dali Kingdom were nominally China’s tributary states but actually “independent and unrestrained nation-states.”<sup>35</sup> In this sense, the development of nationalism in Asia is treated as parallel to that in the West. Although the Yuan interrupted this process, it later stimulated the “Han-Chinese-centered nationalism.” According to this line of thought, the rise of the Qing Dynasty was also regarded as resulting from the upsurges of Manchu nationalism, which first urged the Manchurians to establish equal diplomatic relations with the Ming and afterwards to conquer the Han Chinese. The notion of periphery in this argument reminds us of later accounts of Sino-Japanese relations by later scholars. According to Miyazaki, nationalism led to the great unification of modern East Asia.<sup>36</sup> Miyazaki used various European concepts daringly. His understanding of the Tang-Song transition and particularly the Song dynasty were based on the notions of capitalism and nation-state. Such an effort to search for history/modernity in Asia was inevitably affected by teleology.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p.156.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., pp. 195-211.

<sup>36</sup> 195-211. Miyazaki’s view is echoed in contemporary historical studies too. James Hevia, for instance, shunned the standard division of tradition and modernity under the influence of western imperial and colonial studies. He advocated treating the conflicts between Britain and the Qing Empire since 1793 as that between two expanding empires, each with its own strategies and concerns, and constructing sovereignty in drastically different ways. Hevia’s description of the conflicts between Britain and the Qing shows that he regarded the Qing as an empire that came into existence in conquering and national conflicts. In his words, “The 17th- and 18<sup>th</sup>-century foreign policies of the Qing were not drawn up by Han-Chinese Confucian officials but Manchu rulers. The Manchus were not satisfied with conquering China, but continued to conquer non-Chinese populations, and extended its borders to far more beyond the historical borders of the Chinese Empire. . . . Therefore when we discuss the Qing diplomacy, we confront a basic question, that is, there were no such people as ‘the Chinese’ concerning the issues of diplomacy. It is more complex when we look at these issues from the perspective of Qing monarchy: the issue of ‘China,’ like Inner Asian and Central Asia, should be regarded as an issue of diplomacy for the Manchus.” See James Hevia, “Cong Chaogong Tizhi Dao Zhiming Yanjiu (from the Tributary System to Colonial Studies ),” *Dushu* 8 (1998): p.65. However, if we regard the Qing simply as an expanding empire and neglect its self-transformation during the process of inheriting the historical heritages of the Ming, it will be difficult to state the characteristics of the Qing clearly. A more complex account of the instability and stability of the notion of China seems to be in need.

We can see the presence of the dualism of empire/state in European ideas of Asia by examining the inherent connections between East Asian modernity and theories of nation-state.

Hence Hamashita's discussion of Asian tributary system is a criticism of both "Departing from Asia" and peculiarism. He reconstructed in the field of economic history an Asian world order that centered on China and was connected through the tributary system, and thereon recognized the historical connection within Asia (including that between Japan and China). Although Hamashita similarly emphasized the modernizing dynamic coming from within Asia, unlike Mayazaki, whose notion of East Asian modernity was based on the European idea of nationalism, he based the inner unity of Asia on the network of the tributary system.<sup>37</sup> Sun Ge argued that Hamashita described an Asian trade system centering on economic activities, which differed from the European world system. She wrote:

Hamashita revealed an important fact, that is, in modern Asia during its transitional period, there was no nation-state in the western sense. Its regional history consisted of tributary networks that transcend nation. Its inner dynamic was stirred up by such a tributary system, under the historical restraint of which Japan's departure from Asia and modernization took place, which were not the goal but rather means to break free from Japan's status as a tributary state. [Therefore,] Asia was described as an organic unity with its own inner mechanism for the first time. East Asia, South-east Asia, South Asia, and West Asia formed an orderly region through tribute or trade in a tributary network that centered on the Chinese civilization. The inner logic thereof—the regional relation between center and periphery that was in agreement with state and a compatible tribute-investiture system—was different from European modernity.<sup>38</sup>

For instance, after the Opium War, the tributary system centering on China was not immediately destroyed by the capitalist world order. This fact was enlisted to prove that in modern times Asia as a world order still existed.

Hamashita's account was inspiring. He discovered an inner theme to connect Asian states

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<sup>37</sup> See Takeshi Hamashita, *Kindai Chugoku No Kokusaiteki Keiki: Chokoboeki Shisutemu to Kindai Ajia (the International Opportunity of Modern China: The Tributary Trade System and Modern Asia)* (Tokyo: Tokyo daigaku, 1990).

<sup>38</sup> Ge Sun, *Yazhou Yiwei Zhe Shenme--Wenhua Jian De Riben (What Is Asia? --Japan between Cultures)* (Taipei: Juliu tushu, 2001), p. 71.

and used it as a clue to envision the contemporary world. He also used the perspective of the periphery to expose the continent-centrism and the principle of dynastic orthodoxy in official Chinese historiography. This is a forceful criticism of advocates of particularism who refuse to recognize the historical communications between Japan and Asia. For Chinese scholars who are used to look at China from within, this theory provides them with a perspective to look at China from the periphery. This effort to search for East Asian modernity based on tributary system (system of the empire) also overthrew the Euro-centric views based on the dichotomy of empire/state and tribute/trade.

The assumption of Asia's organic unity was based on the category of East Asia, and Hamashita's study stressed the aspect of trade in the tributary system, especially the marine trade relations which overlapped with internal relations of Asia. If we join Hamashita's inspiring and innovative study with studies of the interaction between Asia and Europe, we will be able to better understand Asia's "modern opportunity" centered on the tributary system when examining Chinese history from the 17<sup>th</sup> century on.

First, to use the tributary trade network to define the unity of Asia provided a historical account of regional economic interactions and criticized the Euro-centric account of modernity.<sup>39</sup> The so-called tributary system, however, was in fact the result of the interaction between the subjects that participated in this system. The practice of tribute was therefore a historical product and not a self-contained or complete structure. In this sense, the tribute practice was a continuously changing relationship between multiple power centers. Whenever a new power joined in, the internal power relationship would change. An overly steady framework of center/periphery will not be able to reveal how the tribute practice changed continuously in history. As early as in the 1930's, Miyazaki divided Chinese history into three periods according to economic development: from the ancient times to the medieval period was the inland-centered period, from the Song to the modern period, the Grand-Canal-centered period, and after the Qing, coast-centered period—a new circumstance that took place under European influence.<sup>40</sup> If the center-periphery relation within China was continuously shifting, so should be the case of the tributary system.

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<sup>39</sup> Hamashita defined six types of suzerain-vassal relationships. See Hamashita, *Kindai Chugoku No Kokuzaiteki Keiki: Chokoboeki Shisutemu to Kindai Ajia (the International Opportunity of Modern China: The Tributary Trade System and Modern Asia)*, p. 32.

<sup>40</sup> Miyazaki, "Toyo Teki Kinsei (East Asia's Modern Age)," p. 159.

The continuous shift of the center-margin relation is one of the most important characteristics that distinguish the modern capitalist world from conventional empires. Hence the construct of center-periphery relationship with China as the center cannot reveal the transformations of power relations within Asia since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Because of the European Industrial Revolution, rapid progress in naval technology, and the formation of nation-states, the traditional continental-marine relationship underwent tremendous structural changes. European colonialism forcefully transformed the traditional historical relations through navy, long-distance trade, and international labor division. Continental historical connections and social relations were devaluated and subjected to marine hegemony and economic relations connected by marine passages. As Hamashita pointed out in an essay written in his early career, how the financial permeation of capitalist powers into Asia and especially China intensified was closely related to the process of the expansion of international financial market due to the discovery of gold in the US and in Australia. Financially speaking, the history of modern Chinese finance can be regarded as the process that Chinese finance was woven into the fabric of a unified international accounting structure that centered on London. In this sense, the modern age of Asia was the process that Asia was gradually incorporated into modern world history economically, and its characteristic was financial dominance-subordination relationship.<sup>41</sup> The semi-colonial system of China should also be analyzed in the context of this process. For instance, because of the growth in commerce, commodity taxes (salt tax had always been an important item) were collected in addition to land taxes, and the portion of taxes collected from merchants took up an increasingly large ratio in state tax income. Yet since after the Late Qing, because international trade developed, customs income increased considerably. According to the statistics of the end of the Qing, 72% of the annual income of the central Board of Revenue and Population came from customs tariff, and salt tax yielded only 13%.<sup>42</sup> If we apply the framework of center-periphery to 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-century power relations within Asia, it will inevitably conceal the actual central status of some traditionally peripheral categories in the new world system. This framework cannot explain the role of Japan in modern Asia, or explain why exactly the periphery (Japan, Korea, Hongkong, Taiwan, Singapore and etc.) became the center or sub-center of 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-century Asian capitalism,

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 168.

while continental areas such as mainland China, India, and inner Asia declined and became the real “margins” (After all the great growth of Chinese economy is a recent and open-ended event). It also cannot explain great differentiation between coastal regions and inland, especially the north-west, and the dominance of coastal economy over inland economy.

We need to pay close attention to the limits and changes of the category “tributary system.” At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the private trade network of overseas Chinese successfully transformed the official tribute system into a private trade system. This was the result of long-term historical interaction. Xu Baoqing argues:

When the European arrived at East Asia at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, they tried to connect with the official tribute system so as to promote trade development. But they realized that they increasingly relied on the extensive Chinese overseas trade network. Especially since after the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the official tribute system that centered on China was merely a fantasy of the government concerning control that had never been realized because China was confronted with the growing hegemony and invasion of imperial powers. Therefore, to a large degree, it was not the official tribute system but private Chinese overseas trade network that integrated the East Asian regions into an inherently related history system.<sup>43</sup>

According to Xu, it was not tribute trade but private overseas trade, including smuggling, that constructed a more important connection between the East Asian and the Southeast Asian trade network.

Second, in the vision of “maritime East Asia” brought together by the tributary network, historical communications within the Asian continent and their changes were reduced to a subordinate and marginal status. Hamashita’s idea of Asia came into existence in opposition with Euro-centrism. His description focused on aspects such as trade and the circulation of silver and stressed the historical communication between China and East Asia and Southeast Asia, i.e. the trading exchanges enabled mainly through marine communication. Therefore this narrative responded to the economicism logic and the framework of maritime theory in

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<sup>43</sup> The quote is from Mr. Xu Baoqiang’s Ph.D. dissertation. I appreciate Mr. Xu’s kindness for letting me read his manuscript.



European capitalist narrative. For the same reason, this “historical world that had its own inner unity’ centered on East Asia and Southeast Asia and stressed the importance of culture, ocean, and political structure for the formation of regional relations, especially regional trade relations. But this idea of Asia that emphasizes unity lacks a thorough analysis of continental communications—between China and Inner Asia, West Asia, South Asia, and Russia—that dominated the tribute system for a long period, and seldom touches the relation between the formation of the maritime trade sphere and the dynamic from within the continent. It did not provide either a more detailed account of the prominent presence of the West that permeated Asia since long ago.

In the Chinese history, the relation between the Northwest, the Northeast, and the Central Plain was the more fundamental driving force that brought about the changes in Chinese social system, population structure, and mode of production. Even in the so-called maritime age, intra-continental relations still played a vital role. Chen Yinke traced the origins of Sui and Tang policies and regulations to first, the Northern Wei, second, the Northern Qi, the Liang, and the Chen, and third, the Western Wei and the Northern Zhou. He also pointed out:

Sui and Tang cultural objects and systems spread widely to the dissent in the north, Hanoi (*jiaozhi*) in the south, Japan in the east, and the Inner Asia in the west, but monographs on their origins and transformations are rare; it is a regrettable lacuna in Chinese historiography.<sup>44</sup>

His studies “The Political History of the Tang” and “On Tang Military Governors (*fanjiang*) and Prefectural Military System (*fubing*)” argue that Chinese policies, population, and culture since the Sui and the Tang were already the product of the multi-culture and policies and regulations of Eurasia. Lattimore described an “Asian continent” with the Great Wall as its center, which transcended political and national borders. This idea of so-called “center” meant that on both sides of the Great Wall were two parallel social entities, agricultural and nomadic pastoral. These two social entities kept long-lasting contacts along the Great Wall, and their interaction deeply affected both societies. Lattimore’s idea of center remedies the previous

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<sup>44</sup> Yinke Chen, *Chen Yinke Shixue Lunwen Xuanji (Selected Historical Papers by Chen Yinke)* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1992), p. 515.

insistence on the central status of the agricultural society in the South and draws our attention to how the frontiers and frontier tribes were formed. He believed that China expelled some “backward tribes” that were ethnically of the same general ancestry as the Chinese from the area suitable for intensive agriculture, and it helped to bring the steppe society into existence. The steppe society and the southern agricultural society developed at the same time, and the area in between was in a “frontier condition.”<sup>45</sup> The Great-Wall centered, the Yellow-River centered and the Grand-Canal-and-Jiangnan centered Chinese historical narratives contrast with each other sharply. The shifting of the center of historical narratives was related to the shifting of the “kernel-region” in different dynasties. Moreover, it was also related to how one observes historical changes, especially the dynamism of historical changes. According to Lattimore, the internal route of expansion in Chinese history was originally from the North to the South. The pressure of European colonialism and industrialization forced the expansion to move from the South to the North. Therefore he used the terms pre-West and post-West to describe the transformation of the internal relations in the Asian continent. Chen and Lattimore’s different historical narratives show that a simple Confucian narrative cannot even deal with the complexity of Chinese history.

The differentiation of Pre-West and post-West is over-simplified too when we study the internal movement in the continent. In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, this south-to-north movement originated mainly in the internal movements in the Qing Empire, and had little to do with the West. Even after the Opium War, the inland relationships still played a very significant role in modern history. In 1857, when he was discussing the Chinese attitude to maritime hegemonies, Marx noticed that while Western nations used military force to expand their trade with China, Russia did not spend much but gained much more than any of the belligerent nations, because Russia had no maritime trade with China, but enjoyed an inland and overland trade that centered on Kiakhta: the value of goods bought and sold amounted to 150 millions of American dollars in 1852, and since the goods were relatively inexpensive, the quantity of goods involved was striking. Because of the increase of this trade, Kiakhta grew up from a common fort and market-ground into a considerable city, and direct and regular postal communication was established between it and Beijing, which is about 900 miles away from it.<sup>46</sup> Marx and Engels

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<sup>45</sup> Owen Lattimore, *Inner Asian Frontiers of China*, 1962 ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1940), p. 55.

<sup>46</sup> Karl Marx, "Russian Trade with China," in *The Collected Works of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels* (Moscow:

dwelled on how the Sino-British and Sino-French coastal conflicts created the possibility for Russia to obtain in the inland Amur River (*Heilong jiang*) basin vast territory and great profit.<sup>47</sup> Engels predicted that Russia was “fast coming to be the first Asiatic Power, and putting England into the shade very rapidly on that continent.”<sup>48</sup> They also criticized British media and the British Ministry for suppressing information on how Russia gained a greater profit in China, Afghanistan, and other Inner Asian regions when they publicized the Anglo-Chinese treaty. Therefore, how to understand the relations between the continental period and the maritime period in Asia, and how to understand the inner unity of Asia and the diversity of culture and historical communications in Asia are projects awaiting further exploration. The two overlapping ideas—the Asia-centric idea of Asia and the Confucian idea of Asia—can hardly explain the diversity of religions, races, cultures, and systems in the Asian continent or even in China. The tributary relationship was not simply an economic relation, but contained the ritual and political relations between social communities that had different cultures and beliefs. It is therefore necessary to examine further the multiple connotations of the tribute relationship, and to search in this multiplicity for the aspects overlapping with or opposed to modern capitalism.

Third, the theory of the tributary system was created by opposition with that of European nation-states and their treaty system. It overthrew the earlier idea that regarded nation-state as the only driving force for modernity, but the dichotomy of the tributary system and the treaty system is also derived from that of empire and state. Yet in as early as the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Qing state was already using the form of treaty to define borders in certain frontier regions (e.g., the Sino-Russian border), create regular frontier patrols, determine custom-duty rates and trade mechanism, exert sovereign rights over residents in its administrative sphere, and establish tributary/treaty relationship with European countries. Hence the Qing was not only an empire of mixed national composition, but a political entity with advanced state systems as well. Its well-developed tributary network included treaty relations. If we interpret the 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 two over-lapping

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Progress Publishers, 1986), pp.224-25.

<sup>47</sup> Frederick Engels, "Russia's Successes in the Far East," in vol.16, *The Collected Works of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels*, pp. 82-86; Karl Marx, "The British and Chinese Treaty," in vol. 16, *The Collected Works of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels*, pp. 46-50; Karl Marx, "The New Chinese War," in vol. 16, *The Collected Works of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels*, pp.508-521.

<sup>48</sup> Engels, "Russia's Successes in the Far East," p.86.

processes, and we will not be able to understand the basic characteristics of modern Chinese nationalism. It is because of the composite relationship between the tributary system and the state system that we cannot describe the tributary system simply as a ranked center/periphery relationship.

Just as the tributary system and the treaty system were not two opposing categories in Chinese history, so could the tributary system be a form of state relations since the European countries established different forms of relations between states when they were setting up bilateral trade, political, and military relations. Hamashita defined an “interchange of trade (*hushi*)” type of tributary relations, which was more similar than other types to the so-called “diplomatic relations” and “international trade relations.” Within the tributary sphere, there existed the relationship of tribute and bestowment of return gift. The two were sometimes of equal value, and sometime the return gift valued more than the tribute. Therefore the tributary relationship contained a duality: it was both an economic and a ritual system. Accordingly, the ritualistic inequality and the actual reciprocity, the ritual character of the tributary relationship and the actual substance of tributary trade overlapped with each other. If it is an inherent characteristic of the tributary practice that the relationship between states and the tributary relationship overlapped, shall we not observe European states’ domestic and international relations from another perspective, i.e., regard the treaty system not as a structural form but a result of the historical interactions between different powers and forms? The formal equality of the European treaty system cannot conceal its actual inequality. After the Opium War, western powers had to recognize China as an equal and legitimate subject as a matter of formality so as to force China to sign unequal treaties. This is a common strategy when the European international law system or treaty system expanded worldwide. Therefore, if one bases ones argument on the dichotomy of tribute and treaty, empire and state, and attacks such Euro-centric ideas by inverting the relations between the two, the complexity of historical relations within Asia are simplified. We need to consider carefully how to define the relationship between the center/periphery mechanism of Asia and the state mechanism of Europe, which were overlapping and yet differentiated from each other.

The question of Asia’s modernity must eventually deal with the relationship between Asia and European colonialism and modern capitalism. In as early as the 1940s’, Miyazaki started to explore the “beginning of Song capitalism” by studying the history of wide-ranging

communications of different regions. He argued “[those] who regard the history since the Song as the growth of modernity have arrived at the time to reflect on western modern history in the light of the developments in modern East Asian history.”<sup>49</sup> That his theory of East Asian modernity overlapped with the Japanese idea of “Great East Asian Sphere” does not obscure Miyazaki’s insightful observations. He observed that in a kind of world-history framework, how the digging of the Grand Canal, the migrating of metropolises, and commodities such as spice and tea connected the European and the Asian trade network, and how the expansion of the Mongolian Empire promoted the artistic and cultural exchanges between Europe and Asia not only changed the internal relations in China and Asian societies, but also connected Europe and Asia internally by land and by sea.<sup>50</sup> If the political, economic, and cultural features of “the Asian Modernity” appeared in as early as the 10<sup>th</sup> or the 11<sup>th</sup> century—three or four centuries earlier than the appearance of comparable features in Europe, were the historical development of these two worlds parallel or associated? Miyazaki propounded that East Asia, especially China, not only provided the necessary market and material for the Industrial revolution, but also nurtured the growth of humanism in the French Revolution.<sup>51</sup>

Discussions on the changes of the Chinese society, forced or voluntary, and its communications with surrounding regions enrich our understanding of the modern world. The movement of the world does not simply operate around the capitalist system that centers on Europe; its operation is the process in which multiply worlds of history communicate and fight with each other, permeate into each other, and mould each other. When historians located Asia in global relations, they realized first that the issue of modernity was not an issue of a certain society, but the result of interaction between different regions and civilizations. Hence the validity of the idea of Asia diminishes, since it is neither a self-contained entity nor a set of 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 subordinating object, provides an opportunity to reconstruct “world history.” When we correct the errors in the idea

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<sup>49</sup> Miyazaki, "Toyo Teki Kinsei (East Asia's Modern Age)," p.240.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., pp.151-54.

<sup>51</sup> Miyazaki concluded logically: “The European Industrial Revolution was definitely not an independent history of Europe, because it was not only a problem of machinery but also an issue of the whole social structure. To make the Industrial Revolution take place, the prosperity of the bourgeois was necessary, and moreover, the capital accumulation from trading with East Asia was also indispensable. To make the machines work not only required power but also cotton as raw material. In fact, East Asia provided raw material and market. If there had not been communications with East Asia, the Industrial Revolution might not have taken place.” Ibid., p. 238.

of Asia, we must also reexamine the idea of Europe. If the account of Asia continues to be based on the self-explanatory notion of Europe, and the dynamism that produced the idea of Europe is not thoroughly reexamined in the context of European historical development, the ambiguity of the idea of Asia will be hard to eliminate.

#### **IV. The Problem of “World History”: Asia, Empire, and Nation-state**

The accounts of Asia that we have discussed above reveal less the autonomy of Asia than 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, originated in Europe and shaping the self-interpretation of Europe, closely related to the issue of national state and overlapping with the vision of empire, a concept of civilization as opposed to that of Europe and a geographic category established in geo-political 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 specific historical relations that gave rise to them.

First, the idea of Asia was created in close relation to the issue of modernity or capitalism, and the core of the modernity issue was the development of the relationship between nation-state and market. The tension between nationalism and super-nationalism is closely related to the dual reliance of capitalist market on state and cross-state relations. Discussions on the early modernity of Asia and Asian capitalism strongly impacted the use of the notion of Asia today. Since 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 were suppressed and marginalized. One goal of my analysis has been to redefine these suppressed historical heritages and examine whether some of them—values, policies, rituals, and economic relations, etc.—can be utilized under new historical circumstances.

Second, the dominance of nation-state in Asian imaginations arose from the dichotomy of empire and nation-state created in modern Europe. The historical implication of this

dichotomy was: nation-state was the single modern political form and the principal precondition for the development of Capitalism. This dichotomy, however, underestimated 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. Nowadays national states remain the main driving force of regional communications in Asia. Therefore regional problems often take the form of the extension of national relations. Because new ideas of Asia aim to create a protective and constructive regional network to counter-balance the mono-dominance and upheavals resulting from the process of globalization, the issue of state still occupies a central position of the issue of Asia. The question is: as nation-state has become a dominant political structure, will the traditional experiences of communication, co-existence, and policies and regulations of Asia provide ways and opportunities to overcome the internal and external dilemmas brought about by the nation-state system?

Third, the unity of Asia as a category was established as opposed to Europe. It encompasses various heterogeneous cultures, religions, and other social elements. Whether we base our judgment on historical traditions or current circumstances, one does not see the possibility or conditions in Asia to create 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 lie 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 even fully represent the characteristics of China. Even if the idea of Asia is reduced to the idea of East Asia, the cultural multiplicity in Asia still cannot be avoided. At the same time, the religious, commercial, cultural, military and political relations between Asia and Europe, Africa and America, have long-lasting and inseparable historical connections. It is not adequate to describe Asia with the inner/outer mode of nation-state, nor to envision Asia as an enlarged nation-state. The idea of Asia has never been a self-definition. It is rather the result of the interaction between this region and other regions. The criticism of Euro-centrism does not seek to confirm Asia-centrism but to eliminate the self-centered, exclusivist, and expansionist logic of dominance. In this sense, to discern the internal disorder and diversity of "new empires" and to reject the self-explanatory idea of Europe is not only the premise to reconstruct the idea of Asia and of Europe, but the inevitable route to break through the "logic of new empires."

Fourth, the commonality of Asian imaginaries partly came from the imaginers' common subordinating status in colonialism, the Cold War period, and the global order, and the trends of national self-determination movement, socialist movement, decolonialization movement, and democratization. We will not be able to understand the modern significance of Asia or the origin of disunion and war crisis in Asia if we forget these historical conditions and movements. In this sense, new Asian imaginations need to surpass the goals and projects of 20<sup>th</sup>-century national liberation and socialist movements. Under the new historical circumstances, they must explore and reflect on these unaccomplished historical projects of these movements. It is not to create a new Cold War but to abolish the old Cold War and its derivative forms; it is not to reconstruct the colonial relationship but to eliminate the remnant and new-born colonizing possibilities. I emphasize again what I have conveyed: the issue of Asia is not simply an issue in Asia; it is an issue of "world history." To reconsider the "Asian history" is a reconstruction of 19<sup>th</sup>-century European "world history" and an attempt to break through 21<sup>st</sup>-century "new empire" order and its logic.

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