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## Bringing Japan back in

### Opening Approaches

Shmuel Eisenstadt once described Japan as God's gift to comparative historical sociology (this was in a conference discussion; I do not recall whether this particular formulation has been printed). What he had in mind was primarily the intriguing combination of analogies and contrasts between Western and Japanese patterns of history, traditional as well as recent. Over-generalized concepts of feudalism have not withstood critical analysis, but if it is legitimate to look for specific non-European analogies to the feudal institutions of medieval Western Christendom, it is widely agreed that Japan is the most plausible case (although nothing is uncontested in regard to feudalism, not even in the Western context). However, comparative studies have also underlined differences between Western relations of lord and vassal and the Japanese version of higher and lower levels within the feudal hierarchy, as well as significantly dissimilar relations between feudal structures and the processes of state formation. The latter aspect was particularly important in the early modern phase. As in Europe, the feudal framework became both a basis for strategies of state formation and an obstacle to fundamental transformations on that level. But the Japanese response to that situation differed from the European one; the Tokugawa regime that lasted from 1600 to 1868 combined strong central power with extensive autonomy of the territories allotted to hereditary but subordinate rulers. This was a more stable arrangement than anything achieved by the absolutist monarchies in Europe, and it proved compatible with both internal development and extreme restrictions on contact with the outside world. The simultaneous pursuit of growth and isolation was another interesting contrast with Europe, where the transformations of early modernity went hand in hand with competitive expansion.

The changes to Japan's internal structures and to its relations with other parts of the world, during the second half of the nineteenth century, opened up new perspectives for comparative analysis. Japanese adaptation of European institutions, practices and ideas gave rise to parallel as well as contrasting developments. The new turn of state formation after 1868 relied on models of the modern bureaucratic state, but the institutional as well as ideological connection to a tradition of sacral monarchy gave a specific twist to Japanese political life, and so did the particularly pronounced factionalism of the power elite. The emergence of modern Japanese nationalism, for which the last decades of the nineteenth century were decisive, indisputably owed something to European sources, but took a distinctive path, convincingly analyzed by Maruyama Masao in his essays on ultra-nationalism [*Maruyama 1969*]. A characteristically Japanese version of capitalism developed more slowly, but took off in the postwar era and attracted notice and debate from the 1970s onwards.

Another topic for comparative inquiry is the international impact of the Japanese example after 1868. This was the first case of a non-Western state effectively responding to Western challenges by adopting Western techniques and institutions for its own purposes, within independently determined limits and in conjunction with a strategy of competition with great powers. The problematic and potentially self-defeating aspects of the model thus constructed did not become visible until much later, and its attraction could still work on the eve of disaster. The shattering blow that Japanese expansion dealt to Western colonialism in Southeast Asia was not only a matter of military force; nationalists in the region were inspired by the Japanese example, and some leading activists who opted for cooperation with the invading Japanese army later became protagonists of independence, as in Burma and Indonesia. A different scenario unfolded in Vietnam, where the Japanese occupation had disempowered the French authorities, but the subsequent defeat of the occupying power created a vacuum that enabled a Communist party with strong nationalist support to take over. At this stage, there could be no question of guidance by the Japanese model, which had earlier been a source of inspiration to the Vietnamese nationalist movement; but the Communist leader Ho Chi Minh's emphasis on ideological links to the American revolution, unusual at that moment for a politician of his type, may be seen as a response to the American destruction of imperial Japan.

Before these landmark events, more diffuse references to the Japanese model had been articulated across a wide range of more distant countries, from an early but not effective invocation in Ethiopia to a more significant one in post-imperial Turkey. To the best of my knowledge, a systematic account of such suggestions and developments has yet to be written.

All these aspects of the Japanese experience entered into the comparative agenda envisaged by Eisenstadt; but his own project went beyond them and attempted to situate Japan within a very broad context that would at the same time highlight its singularity. Japan appeared as a civilization *sui generis*, marked by the most general features that set civilizations apart from smaller-scale social-historical formations, but differing in crucial and unique ways from the patterns typical of larger and more widely influential civilizations, especially those previously central to Eisenstadt's research programme. This interpretation raises difficult questions and will be discussed in greater detail in one of the contributions to this issue.

## **Japan in Global Context**

In addition to these comparative perspectives, it can be argued that Japan's role in the global history of recent times merits closer attention than it has hitherto received. Apart from its general impact as an exemplary and pioneering non-Western power challenging the West on the latter's own ground, there are more direct and unique causal connections to be noted, not least in relation to the two great revolutions of the twentieth century, the Russian and the Chinese (the latter case will be discussed below). Historians agree that Russia was ripe for an upheaval at the beginning of the century, but if the Tsarist regime had not launched and lost a war against Japan, the crisis would have come later and no doubt taken a different turn. And although the revolution that broke out in 1905 was not the dress rehearsal for 1917 that was later claimed by official Soviet historiography, it did

to a significant degree shape the preconditions for the second round. In particular, the strategic disagreement between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks reached a new stage and was enhanced by the former's perception of the peasantry as a revolutionary force and the latter's contrasting emphasis on an alliance with liberal currents. This was a major factor in the alignment of forces after February 1917. However, the decisive difference between the two revolutions was that the first broke out after a lost limited war on a distant frontier, whereas the second unfolded in the middle of an all-out European conflict that overwhelmed the imperial order on a battlefield much closer to its centre. In this context, Japan played no role. But at a later stage, two Japanese decisions were important for the fortunes of post-revolutionary Russia. The first was the retreat from intervention in Eastern Siberia at the end of the civil war; we can only speculate about the chances of a more durable Japanese presence, but later events show that the putative Japanese threat was taken very seriously by the Soviet leadership. It was a significant factor in Stalin's views on foreign policy, and the particularly massive purge of army personnel in the Far East in the 1930s shows how nervous he and his associates were about that part of their realm. The second key event was the decision to abstain from involvement in Hitler's war against the Soviet Union and target Southeast Asia as the next arena of Japanese expansion. This move was obviously not unrelated to the setback suffered by the Japanese army in 1939, in a border conflict with the Soviet Union sparked by friction between the respective client states of Manchukuo and Mongolia; but the implications were not instantly clear, and the Soviet-Japanese neutrality treaty in April 1941 was not decisive (each of the two signatories knew that the other would be ready to break it). When the new Japanese strategy was finalized and became known to Soviet authorities, the relief came at a particularly crucial moment and facilitated the first counter-offensive against the German army.

The other main geopolitical effect of the Japanese bid for empire was the irreversible undermining of Western colonialism in Asia, noted above. As with the impact on China, this was a case of self-destructive hubris ending in utter defeat of the prime mover, but with vast unintended consequences, unwelcome to those who had first been on the receiving end. The two greatest setbacks of the Western allies during World War II were the fall of France in 1940 and the fall of Singapore in 1942. In terms of the influence on Asian observers and public opinion, the latter was at least comparable to Japan's victory over Russia in 1905, and its impact reached beyond the actual presence of the Japanese army. The case of India merits particular mention. The humiliation of the British empire at the hands of an Asian power was one of the discrediting factors that made British rule in India untenable at the end of the war; Subhas Chandra Bose, a prominent Indian politician who raised a volunteer army and joined the Japanese did not sway the mainstream of the independence movement, but his posthumous heroization reflects a deep-seated sympathy for any challenge to Western overlords.

Post-imperial Japan has not had a geopolitical weight comparable to the pre-1945 record, but there are some significant aspects to be noted. Since 1945 Japan has been the main anchor of American presence in East Asia, and as such inevitably affected by the vicissitudes of American foreign policy during and after the Cold War, from the Korean conflict to present rivalry with China. Japan's own contention with China is of older origin, but the intertwining with American concerns is one of the key links between the Cold War properly speaking and the more recent constellation that is sometimes – too

rashly – described in the same terms. The American connection has obviously been of major importance for domestic politics; most commonly cited is the adverse impact of the Cold War on the reforms set in motion during the first years of the American occupation, and the blocking or defusing of some intentions expressed in the postwar constitution. But there is another side to the story. The massive protest movement against the 1960 security treaty that redefined the alliance with the United States also became an incentive to upgrade and continue the strategy of high-speed economic growth as a road to political consolidation. Kishi Nobusuke, who had been a key link between prewar and postwar bureaucratic projects, had to step down as prime minister after the ratification of the treaty; the policies then put into effect by his successor, Ikeda Hayato, and the latter's most influential economic adviser, Shimomura Osamu, were crucial to the culminating phase of the Japanese "miracle". As Nick Kapur has shown in a recent study, "it is difficult to understand contemporary Japan, or Japan's current role in the international system, without understanding the momentous events of 1960" [Kapur 2018: 8]. The defeat of the protest movement weakened and divided the Japanese Left in decisive ways, but the experience of an unprecedented revolt against leaders and policies of the ruling party led to significant reorientation on the right. It also prompted a shift to more flexible and sensitive policies on the American side. Seen in a broader context, the events of 1960 thus redefined the agenda of the transformation launched by American commands and Japanese counter-manoeuvres from 1945 onwards.

The Japanese retreat from imperial ambitions and geopolitical entanglements, combined with the lasting acceptance of dependence on the United States, did not mean that the country ceased to influence the course of international affairs. Perceptions matter, in global politics no less than domestic ones, and perceptions of Japan were of some importance in the context of great power rivalry and attempted order-building. It seems clear that the 1960 settlement made Japan's pursuit of its own way in economic development less concerning to the United States. But this changed when the Japanese pattern of growth came to be seen as a model and an alternative version of capitalism, while the turn taken by the US under the Reagan presidency entailed a stronger emphasis on American practices (or ideologized versions of them) as prescriptions to be followed by others. There is no denying the ideological and political elements in American pressures for change in Japan in the 1980s, and the external inducements were reinforced by converts on the inside. Ronald Dore, a long-standing and authoritative analyst of Japanese society and politics, refers to an "indoctrinated generation" of Japanese economists trained at American universities [Dore 2011; see also his self-described "cantankerous essays of a disillusioned Japanophile", Dore 2015].

Less documented are the implications of Japanese success for the other Cold War superpower, but there are good reasons to take them seriously and place them in a broader context. The decades after 1960 have commonly been seen as a phase of expanding Soviet influence, often equated with imperial overstretch. There is some *prima facie* evidence for that view. But this was also a time of major setbacks to Soviet power and prestige in an eminently important part of the world, namely East Asia. The Sino-Soviet conflict split the Communist bloc and culminated in a rapprochement between China and the United States. Japan was a pillar of the Western bloc and became the world's second largest economy, thus underlining the Soviet failure to catch up with the largest one. This must have

been one of the several writings on the wall that prompted an unprecedented but in the event unsustainable attempts to reform the Soviet regime; and it seems a safe guess that some archival evidence of Soviet reactions to the Japanese challenge can be found. But to the best of my knowledge, no detailed research on this matter is available.

## The Shadow of China

Eisenstadt's work on Japanese civilization has not received the response that it merits; some of the reasons will be discussed below. But even the more straightforward issues of comparative and global history, noted above, now attract less interest than they once did. Japan is, across the board, not as topical as it was in the late twentieth century. Two obvious reasons, one internal and one external, deserve a brief comment. The internal factor (not unconnected to global processes, but widely perceived as primarily domestic) is the downturn of the Japanese economy. It is now clear that the wide interest in Japan was very dependent on the impressive performance of its economy, seen from afar by some as a model and by others as a threat. Regrettable as it is that this particular episode should overshadow other aspects of a very rich historical experience, we should add that the vicissitudes of Japanese capitalism constitute one more theme for comparative studies. The relative weight of structural crisis factors on the one hand, competing models and ideologies of capitalism on the other, is still a matter of debate; and whether the result amounts to a great transformation of Japanese capitalism, as some Western analysts have argued, remains to be clarified [see especially *Lechevalier 2011*, still the most systematic work on the subject, and translated into several languages]. Some thoughts on that issue will be found in contributions to this issue.

The external reason for declining interest in Japan is the rise of China. This process, fitfully and after 1978 more methodically initiated by the Communist regime but more and more visible after the turn of the century, has changed the geopolitical configuration of East Asia and redefined the main patterns of international relations. It has justly attracted a vast spectrum of variously oriented literature; but it should not lead us to overlook Japan. The Japanese economy is no longer the sensation that it once was, but it is still one of the world's largest; Japan is militarily much stronger than its official image would suggest, and further strengthening can be expected. It has no global ambitions comparable to those of China, but it is still very much a regional force to be reckoned with. Apart from that, the recent and radical change to the balance of power between China and Japan invites reflection on the long-term historical background. The Sino-Japanese relationship is in many ways – and on both sides – a singular one [for recent detailed discussions, see *Fogel 1993*; *Vogel 2019*; *Vogelsang 2020*]. As an American historian of Japan put it, the traditional significance of China seen from Japan may be grasped through an imagined European analogy: it is as if the Roman Empire, the medieval Catholic Church and eighteenth-century France were rolled into one [*Jansen 1981*]. China remained an unquestioned and incomparable cultural paradigm, even when political relations were reduced to insignificance. But a noteworthy part of the picture is the Japanese ability to vary responses to and understandings of Chinese traditions, at times when the geopolitical constellation was at a standstill. Innovative variations on inherited Chinese themes were an important aspect of intellectual development during the Tokugawa era, from the seventeenth century onwards.

Sun Yat-sen, the universally but somewhat dubiously acclaimed iconic figure of modern Chinese politics, is supposed to have said that without China there would be no Japan, and without Japan there would be no China. The latter part of the statement obviously refers to the new China that Sun and like-minded others expected to arise on the ruins of its old order. The traditional pattern of the Sino-Japanese relationship changed radically after 1868, but the new pattern was also different from any other case of interstate politics. Japan became a rival for the hegemonic position in the region, long claimed by China but in practice lost though in principle not abdicated under Western pressure; at the same time, the modernizing turn taken after the Meiji revolution/restoration in 1868 made the Japanese example attractive for Chinese advocates of radical change. The idea of learning from Japan was variously activated throughout Chinese upheavals of recent times, from reformist projects at the end of the imperial phase to the reorientation of Chinese Communism after its Maoist shipwreck. On the Japanese side, it soon became clear that the aspiration to great power status would inevitably entail conflict with China, and this led in the long run to a war of conquest. But the shift from limited aims to all-out assault was accompanied by ideological constructions of a Japanese mission to regenerate China, guide it towards modernity, or even – in the end – beyond the Western definition of the latter. These notions should not be dismissed on the grounds that later descent into violence put them out of play. Before that, they had for some time enabled Japanese sympathizers to take part in Chinese efforts of cultural and political renewal; in a more problematic vein, they were of some importance for recruiting allies within the Chinese geopolitical domain, especially when establishing the puppet state of Manchukuo, but also – more than Chinese historians, Nationalist or Communist, have tended to admit – during the destructive war from 1937 to 1945.

A closer look at the period between 1868 and 1945, from the emergence to the collapse of imperial Japan as an alternative centre of the East Asian region, reveals a strikingly mixed picture of Sino-Japanese relations. Conflicts initiated and won by Japan intertwined – often closely – with Chinese learning from the experience and achievements of the stronger neighbour. A particularly interesting episode, described by some historians as a “golden decade” [Reynolds 1987; Vogelsang 2020] unfolded between 1898 and 1907. Shortly before, China had for the first time lost a war against Japan, been forced to accept a humiliating peace treaty, and would have fared worse if Western powers had not intervened. That did not deter survivors of the violently terminated reformist interlude in 1898 from seeking asylum in Japan, nor did it prevent dissenting Chinese intellectuals from visiting Japan for purposes of study and to access a public sphere that was not yet tolerated in China. This undiminished attraction is all the more remarkable in light of Japanese involvement – alongside European powers – in the suppression of the Boxer rebellion against foreign presence in China in 1900. Even the Qing dynasty and its councillors, who shifted to a reformist strategy after the debacle of 1900, resigned themselves to learning from Japan. On the political level, the changes were less far-reaching than those implemented by the Meiji state-builders after 1868, but the overall impact of reforms during the first decade of the twentieth century may nevertheless – as recent scholarship tends to argue, to my mind convincingly – have been more important than the collapse of the dynasty in 1911–1912. The latter event has often been described by Western observers and historians as the first Chinese revolution (or the beginning of the one that culminated

in 1949). In fact, it was a series of local uprisings, with no unifying project and no sustainable outcome; neither the proclaimed republic nor the attempted imperial restoration lasted for long.

Twentieth-century China did not adopt a Japanese political model. But a vast spectrum of concepts essential to the articulation of modernity was translated from Japanese into Chinese; it is no exaggeration that the “whole social discourse of modernity” was brought to China in Japanese terms [*Vogelsang 2020: 318*; see also the long list of translated concepts on p. 319]. It was both a part of this process and a potential counter-trend that Chinese students and refugees in Japan were confronted with a more pronounced nationalism than they had known at home. This was perceived as an example to follow, but given the conflictual aspects of Sino-Japanese relations, it was bound to result in mutual antagonism. A strengthening of nationalism on both sides, together with a certain exhaustion of reformist efforts in China, seems to have marked the end of the “golden decade”. Not that the nationalist turn predetermined the whole subsequent course of interactions between Japan and China. There were mitigating factors as well as attempts to move beyond national rivalry. The reception of Japanese Marxism was an interesting sequel to the “golden decade”; among the protagonists of that ideological opening were key figures in the 1921 founding of the Chinese Communist party. Obviously, the Communist takeover of the Russian empire was the main practical inspiration for Chinese visions of similar goals. But the theoretical guidelines – including the Communist Manifesto – were translated from Japanese.

The slightly delayed final outcome of the last Sino-Japanese war, probably unexpected by all interested sides, was a victory of the weaker Chinese force resisting Japan: the fledgling Communist party-state. It seems universally acknowledged that this could only happen because of the shattering impact of the Japanese invasion on the Guomindang regime that ruled most of China. After the Russian revolution of 1917, this was the other epoch-making interconnection of war and revolution; nothing comparable happened anywhere during the second half of the century. Comparative perspectives on the two cases were for a long time overshadowed by the apparently derivative character of the Chinese one; the adoption of the Soviet model seemed to reduce the story unfolding after 1949 to an offshoot of the one that began in 1917. It is now more widely understood that the Chinese response to the Russian revolution was from the outset a doubly transformative process, involving significant changes to the adopted guidelines as well as the pursuit of radical – and to some extent self-defeating – changes to the domestic environment. This view strengthens the case for a comparative approach [for a major attempt in that vein, interesting but not unproblematic, see *Bianco 2014*].

Geopolitical shifts and realignments after World War II brought Sino-Japanese relations to a near-standstill. The alliance of Communist China with the Soviet Union and the integration of Japan into a US-dominated power bloc (including the Taiwan remnant of Nationalist China) made political settlement impossible. But even during the acute phase of the Cold War, noteworthy efforts were made to maintain an awareness of cultural and intellectual reciprocity. On the Japanese side, the Sinologist and cultural theorist Takeuchi Yoshimi (1910–1977), one of the most influential public intellectuals of the postwar period, deserves particular mention [for translated and commented selections from his writings, see *Takeuchi 2005* and *Calichman 2010*]. In 1948, Takeuchi published an essay

on Japan and China seen in a global context; although written before the victory of the Chinese Communists, this text sketches a picture that is still worth closer consideration. As the author saw it, Europe as a historical formation had created itself through expansion, but the same process gave rise to three constellations of “otherness”, characterized by different combinations of European influences and responses to them: America (in this case virtually synonymous with the United States), Russia and the East Asian region with the twin centres of China and Japan. He then contrasted Chinese and Japanese experience of change induced by contact with Europe and argued that the precocious success of the Meiji revolution had made the Japanese over-confident and insensitive to problems still unsolved, whereas the more ambiguous and inconclusive record of revolutionary efforts in China had – at least in some intellectual circles – led to keener awareness of an enduring crisis and an uncertain road ahead. Takeuchi singled out the writer Lu Xun (1881–1936) as most representative of a mindset that grasped both the necessity and the problematic character of a revolutionary break with tradition. Seven decades later, it is tempting to suggest that the Chinese Communist regime succumbed to delusions comparable to those emphasized in Takeuchi’s critique of imperial Japan; not that China’s new rulers engaged in imperial expansion, but they proposed to redefine the idea of revolution, for global purposes and with disastrous consequences at home. On the other hand, Lu Xun’s lastingly prominent but variously understood position in Chinese discourses on culture and modernity confirms Takeuchi’s opinion. Lu Xun was criticized by the Communists in the 1930s, posthumously and laboriously canonized after 1949, and later invoked by dissidents critical of the regime.

Moves to improve relations between China and Japan only began in earnest after the break-up of the Sino-Soviet bloc and the resultant thaw between China and the United States. However, the Chinese and Japanese initiatives that followed this global rebalancing were not simple by-products of the new constellation; both sides were taking advantage of it to embark on a new course of closer mutual engagement. The peace treaty of 1978 confirmed a return to conventional interstate relations, and this step was taken in direct connection with rapidly developing economic ties. For several reasons – technological transfer, direct investment, lessons in economic governance –, Japanese involvement was crucial to China’s post-Maoist developmental strategy. Kai Vogelsang [2020] relates a remarkable story about Deng Xiaoping’s 1978 visit to Japan; Deng reminded his hosts of a legendary Chinese traveller, sent by the first emperor to seek the secret of immortality in islands east of China, and added that he was now coming to discover the secret of modernization.

In retrospect, the great leap forward of Sino-Japanese relations in the late 1970s is a surprising background to present tensions and recriminations between the two states. The record of the three last decades seems a textbook illustration of the point that economic interconnections do not necessarily lead to political rapprochement. In current conditions, the problem may appear to stem from the explosion of great power rivalry between China and the United States, combined with Japan’s unalterable dependence on the latter. But the shift to an increasingly adversarial stance on both sides became evident at a time – in the 1990s – when US attitudes to China were still marked by expectations of convergence and lasting accommodation. Internal causes must have been at work, and although they are at first sight easy to identify, closer analysis of context and possible implications raises new

questions. Nationalist trends have gained ground in both China and Japan, among the broader public as well as on official levels, and this leads to open disagreement on issues that could be left unraised in the first phase of mutual contact; this applies to memories of World War II, but also to territorial disputes (concerning islands in the South China Sea), invested with somewhat overblown significance.

On both sides, the nationalist turn is part of a more complex picture, but in this regard, Chinese and Japanese perspectives are vastly different. In the Chinese case, resurgent nationalism – in ideological discourse, governmental rhetoric and popular culture – is one of several sources mobilized to lend meaning and legitimacy to post-Maoist policies, and it is not a foregone conclusion that it will retain its present weight or even prevail over others. The invocation of a downsized but not wholly disabled Marxist-Leninist tradition, the reference to China's civilizational legacy and more specifically to its Confucian component, the desire to present China as a model for developing countries in quest of modernity, and the ambition to take a major part in the ongoing construction of a global order are all potential counterweights to unilateral nationalist tendencies. By contrast, Japan is not a rising power with multiple and variable ideological orientations at its disposal. Its situation is best described by a term originally coined in relation to the United States [*Geuss 2005*] and now increasingly applicable to the broader Western world: the politics of managing decline. As noted above, Japan's decline is relative, and should not be mistaken for an exit from global relevance, but the problems posed by the loss of economic dynamism, compounded by demographic trends and a stagnant political culture are very real. Varying economic policies have been tried, with modest results; a brief episode of political innovation, breaking with the *de facto* monopoly of the Liberal Democratic Party, lasted from 2009 to 2012 and seems unlikely to be repeated soon [for an analysis of American involvement in the termination of this intermezzo, see *Taggart Murphy 2014: 315–354*]. Against this background, the growing influence of nationalism, noted by many observers (who also seem to agree on the difficulty of clarifying its political implications), looks more like a compensatory and defensive shift, rather than a foreshadowing of coming political change. Articulations of Japanese nationalism are, in any case, faced with three major constraints. The radical nationalism that inspired Japan's fatal bid for empire is obviously not a conceivable option, and would be incompatible with even minimally normal interstate relations within the region; the subdued but tenacious nationalism evident in Japan's economic policies during the period of high growth has lost its practical outlet, and no substitute is in sight; a higher national profile in the global arena (perhaps envisaged by the Democratic Party of Japan during its brief term in government, from 2009 to 2012) is not easily reconciled with the very asymmetric terms of the US-Japanese alliance. This does not rule out a significant presence of "everyday nationalism", as some observers have called it, but its ideological and strategic prospects remain highly uncertain.

The compounded historical legacy of all these developments burdens the Sino-Japanese relationship, untouched after 1990 by any changes comparable to the European exit from the Cold War. This problem is central to the geopolitics of the East Asian region, and to the argument of those who claim that the Cold War has not come to an end in that part of the world. It can rightly be objected that a new course had been charted in the 1970s and 1980s, and that if there has been a backlash, the regional regression has taken place within a transformed global constellation, and is therefore not intelligible in Cold War terms. But

even so, the unsettled relationship between China and Japan remains one of the obstacles to a sustainable world order.

### Summary of Contents

Yoshio Sugimoto, the author of the first contribution to this issue, has been a prominent figure in Japanese studies for several decades, and his *Introduction to Japanese Society*, recently published in a revised fifth edition, is a standard work. His present paper emphasizes the radical paradigm shift in Japanese studies between the 1990s and the 2010s. The image of Japan as a society characterized by a high degree of uniformity, consensus and capacity for collective action has gradually given way to very different perceptions, emphasizing divisions and inequalities. Obviously, this change reflects real transformations of Japanese society, such as the retreat of the developmental state, the decline of manufacture, and the growing importance of cultural capitalism; but it has also drawn attention to previously overlooked or neglected aspects. The whole process, involving domestic factors as well as a global context and a rethinking of old questions as well as a discovery of new ones, calls for a historical perspective. Jeremy Smith's paper discusses an important part of the broader picture. It is a commonplace that the American occupation of Japan had a decisive impact on postwar political and social development, but much less attention has been paid to the long-term record of relations between Japan and the United States, from the enforcing role of the latter in the mid-nineteenth century reorientation of Japanese foreign policy to the propagation of neo-liberal models made in America towards the end of the twentieth century. Smith links this long and eventful story to the problematic of intercivilizational encounters. The trans-Pacific dimension of Japan's modern entanglements with global history is thus given its due place alongside the East Asian one.

As noted above, Western reflections on the Japanese experience have been disproportionately focused on structural aspects, most consistently on those related to economic institutions and performance. However, there are good reasons to take a more active interest in Japanese self-reflection, including – most relevantly – attempts to comprehend and contextualize the country's distinctive engagement with modernity. This issue contains three papers dealing with such themes. Wolfgang Seifert discusses the most widely read work of Fukuzawa Yukichi, probably the most influential Japanese intellectual in the second half of the nineteenth century. Fukuzawa's *Outline of a Theory of Civilization*, first published in 1875 – in a very early stage of the Meiji transformation – is a remarkable interpretation of the twofold task facing Japanese political and cultural reformers: learning from the West while maintaining national independence. There seems to be no other case of a similarly balanced reflection on the situation and prospects of a country at the beginning of rapid Westernization; no less noteworthy is the idea of framing the agenda through a general conception of civilization. Mishima Kenichi's paper focuses on a later phase of Japanese intellectual history, marked by greater distance from the ultra-nationalism that had prevailed from the 1890s onwards and ended in disaster. As Mishima shows, certain figures of thought, affiliated with the nationalist imaginary, survived in attempts to chart an alternative course and develop different visions of the past. The idea of defending or reactivating a distinctive culture, compatible with lessons from other cultural worlds, is a recurrent theme in otherwise divergent ideological projects, and a more or less explicit link to

Japan's early reception of Chinese traditions serves to back it up. Finally, John Krummel's paper is a very detailed account of a key episode in the intellectual life of wartime Japan. In 1942, a symposium on "overcoming modernity" brought together thinkers of very different persuasions and disciplinary backgrounds; the result was a debate that has often been dismissed as no more than an exercise in nationalist rhetoric. But as Krummel convincingly argues, this was a multi-faceted and still in many ways thought-provoking discussion, even though inconclusive at the time. Wartime conditions were perhaps reflected in obstacles to full articulation, rather than in the very definition of the problems at issue. In any case, it seems clear that this kind of debate could not have taken place in any of the European totalitarian regimes.

Shmuel Eisenstadt's book on Japanese civilization is one of the major works of a sociologist now widely ranked among the foremost figures of the discipline, but has not received the response that it merits, and Japanologists have been reluctant to engage with it. This is no doubt partly due to the interdisciplinary scope and complex conceptual structure of the work; but its apparent affinity with particularistic conceptions of "Japaneseness" has also discouraged scholarly debate. Jóhann Árnason's paper stresses both the insightful and the problematic aspects of Eisenstadt's analysis. The idea of Japan as a separate civilization is not based on solid evidence; a closer look at traditional sources and recent scholarship suggests that the Japanese trajectory is better understood as a very distinctive part of the East Asian civilizational complex centred on China. With this proviso, and on the level of concrete historical developments, Eisenstadt's approach is nevertheless a good guide to specific dynamics of Japanese culture and society, not least to the processes revolving around the transformation of foreign models, Western as well as Chinese.

Jóhann Páll Árnason

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**Note on names**

The Japanese custom of listing family names first is followed throughout this issue; but it does not apply to scholars of Japanese origin who have spent their active life working and publishing in Western countries.

# Amorphization amid Fragmentation: Japanese Society 1990–2020

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Beztvarost a fragmentace: Japonská společnost, 1990–2020

**Abstract:** This paper sketches the major sociological transformations of Japanese society of the last three decades, 1990–2020, which can be regarded as a crucial turning point in Japan's history. It first examines the marked paradigm changes that have occurred in Japanese studies. The paper then endeavours to unravel how such alterations reflect the structural changes caused by the penetration of neoliberalism, the decline of the manufacturing industry, and the expansion of cultural capitalism. After illustrating how these forces have fragmented social relations, the paper ends with a description of how Japanese society is becoming increasingly amorphous in its social structures and value orientations. The paper attempts to cast the shifts of these three decades into relief against the background of the previous three decades, 1960–1989, when Japan enjoyed spectacular economic growth.

**Keywords:** Japanese society; third opening; neoliberalism; cultural capitalism; amorphization; fragmentation

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## Shifting Paradigm of Japanese Studies

A drastic shift occurred in the discourse on Japanese society around the turn of the twentieth century: what was previously imagined as a uniquely homogeneous group-oriented society is now understood as one rife with internal cultural diversity and class cleavage.

In the heyday of Japan's remarkable economic performance in the decades up to the 1980s, the nation used to be portrayed as a distinctively uniform society with low levels of domestic variation and high degrees of internal consensus, embracing collectivist values as opposed to Western individualism. The Japanese were described as being exceptionally loyal to the groups and organisations to which they belonged. At the societal level, Japan was thought to be highly integrated, consensual, and conflict-free, with a remarkable degree of homogeneity and a distinctive tone of harmony. Placing these propositions at the core of analysis, the so-called *Nihonjinron* (theories on the Japanese) proliferated, with its refined form termed the group model of Japan as a society [Befu 2001].

In the three decades from the 1990s to the 2010s, however, the tables turned abruptly, with a growing list of academic publications depicting a Japanese society abound with internal cultural variations and class rivalries, an illustration almost antithetical to the previous version. In stark opposition to the *Nihonjinron* argument, Japanese society is now

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labelled a divided society (*kakusa shakai*), a multi-class society in which class cleavages and social inequalities prevail [Chiavacci – Homerich 2017], with consolidated social stratification and a lack of intergenerational social mobility [Ishida – Slater 2011]. Challenging the notion that Japan is racially and culturally homogeneous, studies focusing upon multiple ethnic and quasi-ethnic groups mushroomed, pointing to the presence of many minorities around the country [Fukuoka 2000; Lie 2004; Weiner 2008]. Furthermore, research on gender diversity intensified across disciplines, and Japan's popular culture attracted global attention [Iwabuchi – Tsai – Berry 2020]. Thus, Japan is increasingly portrayed as a multicultural society [Denoon – Hudson – McCormack – Morris-Suzuki 1996] comprising a mosaic of numerous subcultures and countercultures.

The volte-face in Japanese studies' research paradigm is attributable to the dramatic visibility of fundamental divisions in a few particular areas. From political economy and sociology of knowledge perspectives, four structural conversions are of paramount significance: the advance of globalism, the rise of cultural capitalism, the fragmentation of social relations, and the amorphization of structures and values.

### **The Spread of Neoliberal Globalism**

In international comparison, the relative decline of Japan's economic position is undeniable. In 2010, China overtook Japan as the second-ranking superpower in terms of total gross domestic product. According to 2018 OECD data [OECD 2019], South Korea has almost caught up with Japan in terms of per capita GDP and labour productivity (GDP per person employed). It is obvious that Japan's economy has failed to deal with the advance of neoliberal globalisation around the world.

The three decades to 2020 were the third turning point in Japan's modern history to be propelled by external pressures (*gaiatsu*) [Mouer 2017]. The Meiji Restoration marked the first radical transformation that took place in reaction to the advancement of Western powers in Northeast Asia. In the second turn, the allied occupation after World War II, programs modelled on the United States proliferated across Japan. The third turn resembles the first two in terms of the strength of outside influences, although this time, it was the forces of neoliberal globalisation that landed in the country. Arguably, a "great transformation of Japanese capitalism" [Lechevalier 2014] and "Japan's quiet transformation" [Kingston 2004] took place at this point.

This third shift came at both state and business levels. Regarding the state, the "Japanese-style" development model had to be revised. It was once the case that the national bureaucratic ministries led the private sector by planning long-term programs and regulating it to defend what they regarded as national interests [Johnson 1982]. Proving to be inefficient and ineffective against the forces of globalisation, this developmental state model was undermined and partially abandoned, with the privatisation of key government corporations, which used to oversee the postal system, railway networks, highway routes, telegraph and telephone infrastructure, and so forth. A "regime shift" [Pempel 1998] was underway.

Most importantly, Japan's major banking institutions used to operate under the tight state controls on the financial sector. The practice referred to as the "convoy system" involved the national bureaucracy allowing all financial institutions to keep pace with weak

ones and instructing them to avoid inordinate competition. This maintained the stability of the sector, thereby increasing its profitability in general. Japan's "financial big bang", the large-scale reforms implemented in 1996–2001, attempted to abolish this system and to introduce a range of liberalisation programmes predicated upon the free-market principles of internationally prevailing neoliberalism [Vogel 2006].

In the corporate sphere, Japanese-style work practices were forced to give way to more performance-based arrangements in order to compete with the low costs of production abroad. The celebrated lifetime employment scheme, for example, turned out to be obsolete, with nearly half of Japan's labour force now non-regular workers – part-timers, casuals and temporaries – with little guarantee of job stability. In 2019, 38.3 percent of the nation's workers fell into this category [MIC 2019]. At the same time, seniority-based wage structures were increasingly replaced with output-oriented models. Though the "Japanese-style" management patterns used to prevail only among male regular workers mainly in large corporations in the manufacturing sector, they provided the normative framework for the entire labour force, and their weakening had profound effects on the rest of the working populace.

The spectacular success of Japan's economic performance in the 1970s and 1980s planted the seeds of the problem. The wage gap between the Japanese workforce and its counterparts in other Asian countries widened to the extent that it became rational for Japanese companies to produce their goods offshore. In pursuit of cheap labor, they established firms in Asia and shifted their production base to China and beyond. This was external pressure of another kind, though the process was founded not on political enforcement but on economic rationalism. The made-in-Japan brand was replaced by the designed-in-Japan and made-in-China trademark. Most notably, the domestic production base of Japanese automobiles and electrical appliances which once swept the world was eroded and gradually hollowed, with the number of workers in the manufacturing sector dwindling since the 1990s. Furthermore, the rapid development of information technology and assembly-line and office automation took over considerable parts of work performed by blue-collar workers and clerical employees and made them redundant, another process that contributed to the constriction of the manufacturing industry.

In contrast, the tertiary sector which consists of the production of services and other intangible goods has consistently expanded, with three quarters of the Japanese work force employed in this sector by the turn of the twentieth century. Considering that half the working population (46.9 percent) were engaged in agriculture in 1955 [Hashimoto 2018: 228], the shift to the production of chiefly non-physical commodities is significant.

### Rise of Cultural Capitalism

Born of the large tertiary service sector, the fourth sector grew rapidly, showing its competitive edge internationally. This is the quaternary sector that specialises in the production of knowledge, information, symbols, taste, preferences, comfort, finesse, and other intangible value-adding goods, which can be broadly called cultural goods.

The cultural industry is predicated on four pillars which overlap to some extent: the knowledge industry (including IT software programming, teaching and research, journalism, book publication); the entertainment industry (comprising TV programmes, movies,

manga, animation, music, performing arts, and fashion); the hospitality industry (made up of hotels, restaurants, tourism, sightseeing, and cuisine); and the health industry (composed of welfare, medicine, pharmacy, aged care, funerals, nursing, and fitness facilities). Most of these industries require labour-intensive work dependent upon human flexibility and adaptability.

The spread of the quaternary sector altered the demography of labour. Calculated from the Economic Census [*MIC 2016*], by 2016 the proportion of workers in this sector (38.7 percent), whom we might call cultural workers, far exceeded that of manufacturing workers (15.6 percent) [*Sugimoto 2021: 126*]. Evidently, Japan has been moving in the direction of cultural capitalism as distinguished from industrial capitalism. Stretching the reach of this domain both domestically and internationally, Japan's economy has found a way out of the post-industrial impasse.

Most noticeably, Japanese popular cultural goods produced in the quaternary sector gained an international fan base. Japanese manga, anime, sushi, Japanese cuisine, sudoku, J-pop, Hello Kitty, and Japanese fashion designs are global phenomena, attracting urban youth and others around the world. To characterise such trends, Douglas McGray [2002] coined the concept, Gross National Cool, arguing that while Japan is no longer a world superpower in terms of gross national product, it leads other nations in terms of GNC, a notion that captured an aspect of the emerging configuration. The idea propelled the Japanese establishment to organise the "Cool Japan" project in fresh pursuit of Japan's position as a soft power.

As Japan's popular culture attracted global attention, the serious, hardworking, perseverant representations of company employees were replaced with the funny, entertaining, and vivacious characters of manga and animation. Though the complete reverse of the old images, the new styles have been able to spread around the world with ease, benefitting from the long-standing, global reputation of Japanese industrial goods as high quality products. The international credibility of Japanese cars and electrical goods has lent legitimacy and desirability to its cultural products.

Though ostensibly glamorous and ahead of the times, the "Cool Japan" scheme has been compatible with the imperatives of the old-fashioned exploitation structure. For instance, the labour conditions of anime production are unstable, precarious, and harsh in contrast to the colourful and stylish images the industry promotes. A case in point is the animators who produce the hand-drawn frames that move the characters on screen. Though performing the most important work in the production process, most animators are freelance workers on low wages in an insecure work environment, hired by small companies on the bottom of the subcontracting ladder. At the top of the hierarchy of each anime production is the project committee comprising a publishing house, a TV station, and other media organisations. They usually outsource the material task to a subcontractor, who often subcontracts it on to a lower-tier firm. Thus, animators work at the lowest layer of the old-fashioned, multi-level, stratified structure.

In the quaternary sector more broadly, the casualisation of labour has been the most discernible shift, a trend in part attributable to the ample supply of women prepared to work on a casual basis without job security. Many of them were freed to a certain extent from labour-intensive household chores like cooking, washing, and cleaning due to widely available electrical goods. At the same time, business owners and managers were in search of

low-cost labour, a requirement that women were able to satisfy. It goes without saying that the rise of feminist consciousness was also a significant contributing factor. By the middle of the 1990s, the number of “full-time housewives” who stayed home and did not engage in gainful work outside consistently declined and was overtaken by the number of two-income households where both husband and wife were in paid employment [JILPT 2019].

As a result, the quaternary sector is sharply stratified into two groups. At the top tier, a small number of professionals with highly specialised skills earn handsome salaries and enjoy luxurious lifestyles, while a large number of casualised workers on low wages operate below them. This dualised structure epitomises the broad class structure of Japanese society at large.

### Fragmentation of Social Relations

The casualisation of labour has made appreciable dents to civil organisations. Hired and fired easily, these temporary employees are internally heterogeneous, unorganised, and disconnected from each other. With very limited personal ties in workplaces, people have tended to be disinterested in actively engaging with others in community life in general. Specifically, voluntary associations, which sit between individuals and the state, have lost members in significant numbers. Those citizens with *no* affiliation to them constituted nearly half of the eligible voters in 2019 (44.4 percent), almost 2.5 times as many as three decades ago (18.3 percent in 1990), as Table 1 exhibits.

Table 1: Affiliation to voluntary associations (Percentage of voters)

	1990	2019	Change
<b>None</b>	<b>18.3</b>	<b>44.4</b>	<b>ΔUp</b>
Neighbourhood	67.6	23.9	∇Down
Hobby	17.1	13.6	∇Down
PTA	14.3	7.2	∇Down
Labour unions	8.2	6.1	∇Down
Religious	3.6	2.9	∇Down
Agricultural & fishery	19.6	3.0	∇Down
Commercial and industrial	6.9	1.6	∇Down
Senior citizens' groups*		5.1	
NPO and community building associations*		1.7	
Resident, consumer, or other civil groups*		0.6	

Adapted from [Akarui Senkyo Suishin Kyōkai 2020; Mori – Kubo 2014: 203; Nakakita 2017: 196]

Note: The groups marked with asterisks have only been included since 1993 and, therefore, 1990 figures are unavailable.

Notably, the neighbourhood associations – community-level voluntary organisations [Pekkanen – Tsujinaka 2014] which provide channels of communications and directions from local governments to households – that used to be the backbone of administrative

control from above, have lost their membership over time. Once virtually all Japanese households were organised into these networks across the country, with semi-mandatory membership imposed on each household. The structure had rapidly corroded and shrunk by the turn of the last century, with less than a quarter of the Japanese now participating in it. The membership of labor unions – the collective basis to unite workers – also experienced a rapid decline to half of its previous total. Agricultural cooperatives, industrial and commercial groups, and parent-teacher associations have all shown similar trends. So have religious groups and hobby groups. The “de-organisational slide” is underway on a massive scale, with the fragmentation of social relations in progress.

Transformative and reformist civil associations – such as volunteer groups and non-profit or non-governmental organisations – have emerged afresh in recent decades, showing more global and informational orientations. However, their numbers are still small and limited, following the overall pattern of de-organisation.

Individualisation is in motion in other areas, too. In terms of voting behaviour, more than half of the national electorate are the swing voters who do not have structured loyalty to political parties. In local elections for prefectural and municipal representatives, the voter turnout has declined to approximately 50 percent, with half of the electorate showing no interest in participating. In one extreme case, only 25 percent of eligible voters cast a ballot in the prefectural governorship election in Saitama prefecture in 2011.

Public survey data collection for statistical purposes has also become difficult. In the twentieth century, virtually all citizens filled out forms for the National Census conducted every five years. In the 2015 Census, however, some 13.1 percent of the population failed to submit their data. The figure in Tokyo amounted to 30.7 percent [*Kyoto 2020*], an indication that privacy concerns and general apathy towards institutions are on the rise in metropolitan areas in particular.

What we do know from census data is that the nation's family structure has undergone a dramatic transformation. The 2015 Census shows that single-person households comprise the largest share, accounting for approximately one third of the total, with nuclear families consisting of married couples with a few children forming only a quarter [*SBJ 2017*]. The idealised image of the Japanese family, a husband and wife raising their sons and daughters, does not depict the representative reality. Moreover, the divorce rate has been on the increase. For every three marriages that take place, one divorce comes through, a sign that gender relations have become uncertain. Even after marriage, many women are reluctant to have children, reducing the birth rate and lowering the population growth. Further, many either cannot or do not choose marriage as an option. According to the 2015 Census, 23 percent of men and 14 percent of women never get married throughout their lifetime. In 1985, the proportion was less than 5 percent for both.

The above snapshots simply constitute the visible tip of the iceberg. Simultaneous with the development of this fragmentation has been the increasing privatization of individuals in many parts of Japanese society. From voluntary organisations through political behaviour to family life, a rising number of Japanese are in pursuit of private interests rather than collective gains. Privacy and anonymity are extensively cherished as important social values.

At the psychological level, such transformation manifests itself in acute form in the growth in number of people called *hikikomori* (social recluse), youngsters who stay in

their room without leaving their house for many years, spending most of their time playing computer games, watching television, or just doing nothing [Zielenziger 2007]. With their numbers estimated to exceed one percent of the population, the trend represents the sharpest end of the disintegration of collective ties in Japanese society.

It is almost a cliché to suggest that the expansion of the internet has fundamentally changed the world. Virtual connectivity has made it possible for users to engage in instantaneous communications without tangible encounters. The users of social networking services (SNS) in particular have been able to interact with individuals without face-to-face meetings. In this environment, it is not imperative for them to have friends and acquaintances in the conventional sense, a condition which enables them to live in physical isolation while still maintaining virtual social connections.

The outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020 extended internet-dependent lifestyles further, facilitating “telework”, “teleconferences”, and many other forms of work able to be performed at home. The spread of the pandemic revealed that many jobs, particularly in the knowledge and information industry in the quaternary sector, can be conducted outside conventional workplaces, transcending geographical locations and boundaries. Squarely at odds with the *Nihonjinron* thesis of “Japanese groupism”, the new work practice has encouraged social distancing in more than one way.

During the three decades since the 1990s, social relations and close communities have dwindled significantly as a result of the infiltration of neoliberalism, the attenuation of the developmental state, the casualisation of labour, the rise of cultural capitalism and the information revolution. The confluence of these forces has disintegrated and disjointed Japanese society and made it more diverse, heterogenous, and even amorphous in its configuration.

### Amorphization of Society

While Japan is losing in global comparisons in many other respects, it proves “number one” internationally as an ageing society, with its rapidly rising life expectancy and declining birth rate. The rate of increase in longevity has been unprecedented in the world and caught most of the nation’s policy makers by surprise.

This has resulted in a shrinkage of the young labour force that supported the growth of the Japanese economy, while the proportion of post-retirement senior citizens has burgeoned. The ratio of those at and above the age of sixty-five in the total population was 28.4 percent in 2019 [SBJ 2019], the highest in the world, far ahead of Italy (23.0 percent) and Portugal (22.4 percent), respectively ranking second and third. Illustrating the dramatic rise, the Japanese figure jumped from just 12.1 percent in 1990. At the end of the 2010s, two persons between the ages of fifteen and sixty-four are supporting one senior citizen, and the situation is likely to worsen. To meet the relative labour shortage of the younger generations, the Japanese business world was forced to open up and expand the employment market to three demographic groups, a solution which has inevitably made Japan’s workforce much more diverse than before.

First, Japan’s job market requires women as a boundless and relatively flexible supply of labour. Their job participation rate has steadily increased, flattening the so-called M-curve. The female workforce is more diversified than its male counterpart. A majority of women

are employed as non-regular workers, variously classified into part-timers, casuals, temporaries and so on. Female regular employees are divided into two groups: career-track women who are required to perform the same duties as their male counterparts, and “ordinary” female employees who do clerical work and other less demanding jobs. As a result, the income differentials of women are much larger than those of men, and their values and lifestyles are much more manifold than males’ [Tachibanaki 2010].

Second, the country needs to inject foreign workers into the system. Initially, the intake was limited to the descendants of Japanese overseas, mainly in Brazil. This endeavour was in accordance with the nation’s controversial ideology that assumed the reliability of Japanese offspring. Facing a serious worker shortfall, however, the Japanese employment market had to broaden its overseas intake to recruit both highly skilled professionals and unskilled labourers working in the margin of the Japanese economy, most of whom are from Vietnam, Thailand, the Philippines, and Indonesia as well as China and South Korea. The number of foreign workers in Japan amounted to 1.66 million in 2018 [MHLW 2019], further diversifying the nation’s labour force.

The third group to be recruited has been senior citizens themselves. Most of them work as part-timers and casuals, constituting 13.8 percent of the entire workforce in 2018 [SBJ 2019]. This is an unprecedented proportion, likely to increase rapidly in future. The retirement age was conventionally fifty-five until the early 1990s when companies were encouraged to move it to sixty. In 2013, this shift was formalised when the revised Elderly Employment Stabilization Law mandated that the retirement age be at least sixty-five. The legal framework is lagging behind the reality, with the average life span at 87.5 years for women and 81.4 years for men in 2019 [MHLW 2020], with the number of centenarians exceeding eighty thousand in 2020. The greying of the workforce has allowed older generations to participate in and influence work culture, changing its shape and widening its scope.

As Japan’s workplaces turn demographically heterogeneous, it is inescapable that their work culture is becoming diversified, leaving behind the monocultural landscape of workplaces solely made up of male, Japanese, young and middle-aged workers. These structural transfigurations have given rise to changes in the social awareness, group classification, and self-identity of the populace. Specifically, social categories – such as consumers, workers, citizens, and nationals – with which people used to identify have lost stability. Far from “pure” and “crystalline” entities, it became obvious that these groups are not composed of monolithic individuals sharing the same attributes but are made up of a mixture of different sorts.

Consumers, for instance, are now less interested in purchasing goods standardised for mass consumption than in making personalised choices from among diversified products. Producers must target individualised and differentiated groups whose preferences are divided and selective. Consumer markets are neither uniform nor undifferentiated, with customers forming “segmented masses” [Hakuhōdō Institute of Life and Living 1985] that seek goods in tune with their personal tastes and preferences. Moreover, consumer choices are complicated because the subsistence needs of the Japanese have generally been satisfied. Most have a television set, rice cooker, phone, computer, washing machine, and other essential goods for the comfort of their daily life. In the contemporary post-subsistence phase, they prioritise different dimensions – such as asset accumulation, occupational

prestige, and quality of life – and attempt to acquire “upper goods” [Hara – Seiyama 2005: 164–167] like high-end housing, luxury holidays, living abroad, getting postgraduate education, adopting ecological lifestyles, and pursuing other cultural commodities.

While juxtaposed solidly against capitalists and employers during the Cold War era, workers in post-growth Japan ceased to be deemed a homogeneous category. Labour unions used to define themselves as representatives of workers and their families and call for worker solidarity and camaraderie, but with the increase of non-regular workers, this form of collectivisation no longer fits the reality. It is evident that regular workers’ advantaged positions derive from the low wages and job insecurity of non-regular workers. Indisputably, the interests of these two types of workers are in conflict. Organised labour, which is based in enterprise unions in the large-corporation sector, cannot claim to stand for the benefits of all workers. Many non-regular workers are female part-timers and casuals, circumstances that make it difficult and complex to identify who “we workers” are, and bringing gender into play in attempts to define them.

The same applies to the notion of citizens. For long, it represented the images of liberal, reformist, and well-informed individuals who were expected to form the engine of civil society in Japan. Urbane and transformative, they distinguished themselves from workers and class-based groupings. Citizens’ movements started in the 1960s, identifying themselves as “ordinary people” in pursuit of progressive changes. In post-growth Japan, however, reactionary groups have emerged [Higuchi 2016], also labelling themselves as citizens. Some demanded the revision of history textbooks to justify the Japanese military’s wartime activities, while others developed hate-speech campaigns to verbally attack minority groups, particularly resident Koreans. The category of citizens, thus, embraces competing components, making the term multi-shaded and indeterminate.

The concept of the Japanese national (*Nihonjin*), like that of citizens, does not turn out to be self-evident [Fukuoka 2000; Amino 2012; Oguma 2014]. The representation of racially and culturally uniform Japanese is increasingly problematic, and their diversity has come to light due to a complex set of factors. More than two million overseas migrants live in Japan, and as noted above, their presence is indispensable to the Japanese economy. The Ainu, most of whom live in Hokkaido, are recognised as the indigenous people of Japan. Many top players of popular spectator sports, including baseball, soccer, and tennis, are the sons and daughters of mixed marriages and these high-profile players hold Japanese passports. The highest-ranking sumo wrestlers, Japan’s national sport, have been from Mongolia, Hawaii, and other overseas countries.

These conditions raise the question of who “the Japanese” are [Endo 2019], and what criteria one should use to define “the Japanese” – citizenship, pedigree, language competence, place of residence, or some other dimension? In what sense, for instance, are zainichi Koreans Japanese and why? Are the children of a returnee businessman from overseas assignments more or less Japanese than the Ainu? These questions sensitise the populace to the possible diversity of the Japanese, with their contours obscured and blurred.

Meanwhile, the spread of information technology has enabled its users to observe what is happening not only in their country but also beyond national boundaries, with the consequence that they often realise that they hold analogous values and have similar lifestyles to those abroad. A multitude of virtual communities of urban youth exist across Asia. The same can be said for English-speaking educated people around the world, unifying their

culture across national borders. Generally speaking, the internet has homogenising functions among the holders of similar class positions in various countries.

With these forces in motion, the shape of Japanese society in the twenty-first century proves to be nebulous, equivocal, and ambiguous, losing previously clear-cut regulatory patterns. This new shape can be called an amorphous society.

### **Amorphous Dissent: A Reflection of Society at Large**

Political dissent often reflects the elements of the polity that it denounces, while heralding its future configuration. The social movements which erupted in the middle of the 2010s vividly reflected the amorphous quality of Japanese society at large in its post-growth phase [Horie – Tanaka – Tanno 2020]. They were initially triggered in 2011 by the meltdown of the nuclear power plant in Fukushima, and again by the introduction of the national security legislation in 2015. Paradoxically, these large-scale movements developed amid the growing fragmentation of social bonds.

As early as 1968, Tsurumi Shunsuke penned a book entitled *Futeikei no shisō* (Philosophy of amorphousness) [Tsurumi 1968] where he argued that while the everyday thinking of the masses may be neither articulate nor governed by conventional logic, it in fact forms the seeds of productive philosophy in contradicting the well-structured reasoning of the academic elite. He suggested that the very imprecision, ambiguity, and fuzziness of the worldviews of the masses provided the sources of unconventional alternative ideas. His thinking influenced the citizens' movements of the 1960s, especially *Koe Naki Koe no Kai* (Groups for Voiceless Voices) and *Beheiren* (The Japan "Peace for Vietnam!" Committee), neither of which had clear leadership structures. These movements were predicated on such principles as "the proposers of new ideas should put them into practice", "do not complain about what other people do", and "do whatever you like to do" [Matsui 2016], visions which were in opposition to the "iron rules" that tended to govern conventional workers' and students' movements at the time.

Similar in style to these citizens' movements, the post-Fukushima protests were indefinite, unstructured, and even amorphous. They can be most starkly contrasted with the so-called *Ampo* social movements that rose up in 1960 against the ratification of the security treaty between Japan and the United States, arguably the largest mass confrontation on the streets in post-war Japan. The *Ampo* demonstrations were led by organised student groups and labour unions, which were equipped with regimented internal organisation and solid leadership structures. Student protesters emerged from university student councils, representing their home universities. They banded together through their common university backgrounds as classmates and friends at the same institution. Labour unions also organised themselves, based on each existing union group with tight-knit structures.

Most participants in the post-Fukushima social movements were equipped with different kinds of political capital: Some were the "senior left" who retained their commitments to broadly progressive ideas and organizations since the *Ampo* years and thereafter. Others were involved in such voluntary associations as NPOs, NGOs and volunteer groups. Most of the protesters on the street were "time rich" and had some organisational footing prior to their participation [Higuchi et al. 2018]. Nonetheless, the post-Fukushima demonstrations differed from the earlier variants, with distinctly loose internal structure and ideology.

They often changed their leadership from one event to the next. Mobilised by internet communications, many protesters arrived on the street without prior connections with each other. Beyond their key demands concerning nuclear power policies and national security legislation, they called for a wide range of changes with respect to gender equality, sustainable development, and ethnic justice. At times, rallies took on a festive atmosphere, with participants singing, dancing, and using the symbols of popular culture [Brown 2018]. For some, participation itself was of great significance as it empowered them counter-culturally. Others found it important to maintain their private spheres of life, even while engaging in collective action. The twenty-first century protests reflected the amorphousness of Japanese society at large, proving to be increasingly unorganised, fluid, and multi-dimensional, a pattern at variance with the earlier *Ampo*-type protests.

### The Mainstreaming of “Diversity”

The idea of diversity itself has been diversified. In the Japanese context, it initially sprang up as countercultural vision in opposition to monotonous, establishmentarian, and exclusivist worldviews. The paradigm shift in Japanese studies mentioned at the beginning of the paper resonated with the rise of such forward-looking perspective. Some policy-makers and business leaders, however, have championed the notion of diversity, absorbing the transformative vocabulary into the mainstream in a piecemeal fashion – attempts that were conciliatory but often not inclusive of underrepresented groups. In some quarters of Japanese society, diversity without broad inclusiveness has been advanced in adaptation to an emerging amorphous environment.

In the world of gender relations, for example, the Japanese establishment does not hesitate to promote the term, *tayōsei* (diversity), and encourage companies to appoint women to their boards of directors and other high-ranking posts by head-hunting. The government used diversity as a buzzword in the 2010s, coining the slogan that it will “create a society in which all women shine” [Prime Minister’s Office of Japan 2020] and enacting a series of legislation supposed to endorse women’s employment. Nonetheless, seven out of ten part-time and casual workers are women. The relative poverty rate of single mothers in Japan exceeds 50 percent [MHLW 2016], the highest among OECD countries. According to the World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap index, Japan ranked 110th out of 149 countries [World Economic Forum 2018]. The Inter-Parliamentary Union ranked Japan 166th out of 187 nations in terms of the proportion of female parliamentarians in the lower house [Inter-Parliamentary Union 2020]. The reality is that women’s status remains very low even in international comparison despite the introduction of the diversity motto, which arguably remains only lip service to gender equality in the twenty-first century.

In an apparently diversified Japan, anti-diversification forces are also at work in many spheres, while the mainstreaming of “diversity” is ostensibly championed at the same time. Husband and wife still have to assume the same surname upon marriage, a civil law requirement that forces nearly all married women to change their surname to their husbands’. Marriage between same-sex couples continues to be illegal. It is also revealing that, while Japan competes with other advanced countries in bringing in skilled workers and professionals from abroad, it accepts a tiny number of refugees, only 42 in 2018, admitting just 0.4 percent of applicants [MOJ 2018], the lowest among advanced economies. In this

context, the reality behind the use of term “diversity” is not clear-cut. Tokenism, egalitarian symbolism, and public perception massaging often conceal restrictive and exclusive realities.

### In Short

The third opening of Japanese society commenced with two forms of *gaiatsu* (pressure from outside), one from Euro-American societies regarding trade liberalisation and the other from Asia for the relocation of production sites. These forces eventually led to the deterioration of the industrial sector and the expansion of cultural capitalism in Japan. They also challenged the conventional “Japanese-style” work practices and contributed to the casualisation of labour. Such disintegration attenuated voluntary associations, loosened social bonds between individuals, and gave rise to the diversification of values across social groups. This process coincided with the progress of the information revolution around the world which enabled most people to instantaneously see and appreciate what is happening in other countries, facilitating easy information sharing across national borders. The third turn, thus, made Japanese society more amorphous at multiple levels, while the notion of diversity is accepted variously with intricate nuances and caveats. Even social movements which challenge the existing system tend to be comprised of amorphous qualities, reflecting Japanese society at large. In complex ways, variegated groups are in competition in contemporary Japan over the extent to which diversity is implemented. These conditions that have developed during the last three decades differ sharply from those of the previous decades and mark the beginning of a new configuration of Japanese society.

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# Encounters and Engagement in the Civilizational Analysis of Japan

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Setkání a vzájemnosti v civilizační analýze Japonska

**Abstract:** As a field of significant activity for historical sociologists in recent decades, civilizational analysis has produced extensive and incisive works examining Japan as a historical formation of Eurasia. However, the same cannot be said of Japan's Pacific relationship with the United States, which is neglected in the major historical sociologies of Japanese modernity. This essay seeks to address that unnecessary oversight by putting that relationship into focus as an international dimension of the institution of both states. It would be tempting to elucidate the entanglement of the two as an encounter of civilizations, but the author instead casts it as intercivilizational engagement, that is a deeper set of connections generated by routine contacts and migratory movements, trade in commerce and culture, and selective appropriation of models of statehood. Delineating the lines of exchange in all four domains of connectivity between Japan and the US, the essay profiles the international and imperial extensions of both states. In altering the perspective on Japan's relations with the world, the author outlines a larger potential historical sociology of intercivilizational engagement between two Pacific-edge civilizational constellations.

**Keywords:** civilizational analysis; the Pacific; migration; international relations; capitalism; technoscience

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## Introduction

Civilizational analysis and historical sociology have rightly regarded Japan as a *sui generis* modernity, a case study in divergence from Western statehood, and a civilization with deep roots in East Asia. This essay addresses a gap in historical sociology and large-scale studies of civilizations, when it comes to Japan's relations with the Pacific world and particularly the United States. My direct claim relates to the relationship between the two nation-states and civilizational forces. I argue that from the mid-nineteenth century to the end of the twentieth century, what I term *intercivilizational engagement* entwined Japan and the US in rivalry, antagonism, strain, and collaboration. Following an outline of historical perspectives on Japan and my own work on "intercivilizational engagement", I treat this relationship of dense interaction and exchange in four stages. First, I examine trans-Pacific and circum-Asia migration. Then, I track inter-state relations between the US and Japan before the Pacific War. With a focus then on economic engagement, I highlight the competition of two interconnected models of capitalism in the postwar period.

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A final section explores technoscience considered here as a pronounced factor of cultural engagement. In short, this essay is an outline of a potential historical sociology of intercivilizational engagement across the Pacific between America and Japan.

### **Civilizational Analysis, Japan**

There are three major voices in civilizational analysis when it comes to comparative perspectives on Japan: S. N. Eisenstadt [1996], Robert Bellah [2003], and Jóhann P. Árnason [1997, 2002]. Each brings distinct propositions to common problematics of civilizational continuity and discontinuity, Japan's historic relationship to China, and questions of the ontological and non-axial character of this civilization. The last problematic has dominated debate. Eisenstadt contends that Japan's distinct ontological premises have shaped the de-Axialization of universalistic worldviews as the nation's historical experience [Eisenstadt 1996]. At the heart of this was the formative encounter with China in the seventh century, which endowed Japan with religious, linguistic, courtly, and intellectual traditions in a de-Axialized form. In social relations and state formation, Japan diverged from China. Segmented and relatively autonomous regionalism (under the symbolic umbrella of the emperorship) distinguished Japan from China. While protests and rebellions were common enough, utopian movements did not gain much traction due to the de-Axialization of universalist outside ideologies. Similarly, the ontological patterns of relativization of universalist ideologies and doctrines continued in modernity. Elements of the latter are often absorbed and transformed ("Japanized"), be it currents of Christianity or Marxism. Notwithstanding engagement with the outside world, Japanese civilization retains a situational orientation.

Like Eisenstadt, Bellah posits significant continuities in Japan's particularism [Bellah 2003]. Indeed, his emphasis on particularizing tendencies is even stronger, leading him to classify this civilization as "non-Axial". This is an ontological core with an orientation towards immanence more than towards external encounters, in Bellah's estimation. His specific interest is in durable religious traditions capable of muting conceptions of transcendence. In returning to themes of his earlier work on religion in Japan [Bellah 1985], he accentuates a finding that foreign master doctrines coexist with native cultures, but always in a subordinate state and unable to spark cultural transformation. On this point, his position is different to Eisenstadt's, yet also ambiguous. Mostly, he emphasizes Japan's non-Axial condition. Yet, in some respects, he perceives Japanese particularism as "pre-Axial", in other words archaic and not subject to any Axial effect [Bellah 2003: 7–8]. In his eyes, the potential for societal and political change is low, due to the fixed position of Japan's ontological premises. No phases of worldly encounter or degrees of intercivilizational engagement can shift this robust civilization from its fundaments.

Civilizational encounters find the greatest prominence in Árnason's civilizational sociology [Árnason 1997, 2002]. Japan's historical trajectory was punctuated by episodic hermeneutical reinterpretations of its imaginary significations of wealth, power, and meaning. This entailed phases of renegotiation with the regional environment, which was mostly, but not exhaustively, a China-centered East Asia. In Japan's long modernity, a growing awareness of an expanded world increasingly entered the thinking of political and religious elites and intellectuals as a second orientation. The multidimensional nature

of modernization processes added complexity and several twists to Japan's twentieth century fate. Readers new to Árnason will immediately notice the accent on discontinuities. Likewise, in his re-theorization of categories of core and periphery, he demarcates a flexibility in the shifting figuration of culture and power not present in Eisenstadt's magnum opus (and precluded from Bellah's account of a decentralized civilization) [Árnason 2002]. In other words, Árnason's civilizational analysis of Japan diverges more markedly from the others on factors such as the kinds of continuities in history and the transformative effects of world engagement.

None of these perspectives give sufficient concrete attention to the Pacific horizon of Japanese civilization or indeed the modern relationship with American civilization, although all three have openings to both problematics. From here, I therefore outline my particular framework of civilizational analysis in order to lay the theoretical groundwork for such an exploration of trans-Pacific relations in modernity.

### Civilizations in the World

In other work, I have examined the renaissance of civilizational analysis with a particular focus on Árnason and Eisenstadt's contributions [Smith 2017]. My approach seeks to emphasize "intercivilizational engagement" as differentiated from Nelson and Árnason's notion of intercivilizational encounters. In brief, I contend that the creation of civilizations in existing and emerging imaginaries becomes meaningful at the point of connection between constellations of societies. It is in the routine agency of mobile social actors that we find deep engagement composing connections and connectedness. The commerce in goods, ideas, scientific and theological doctrines, models of rulership and law, and practices of creativity add up to an interlinkage between the major civilizational regions of Eurasia, as well as other regions less examined in civilizational analysis. To be sure, there are barriers to relations and cases of detachment, most notably inter-state animosity, rivalry, and warfare. Yet, I estimate that it is quite valid to regard even the obstructions to deep engagement as relational orientations of a certain kind. One of the insights produced by global historians – which we historical sociologists can take careful note of – is that the manifold linkages of civilizations are evident further back in human history than previously surmised.

This conception of intercivilizational engagement is complementary to the analytic of intercivilizational encounters. Indeed, where the degree of engagement is at its densest and most regular, one can discern intercivilizational encounters. My focus is on the more pervasive forms of connection. Intercivilizational engagement can be mapped across four dimensions: migration; exchange in economic relations; cultural traffic; and political borrowing and transaction. While a detailed account of each is beyond the current essay, I can give an outline of trends. Migration has been a central impulse in species self-creation, not only in the form of expansion into new spaces (particularly in primary and Ancient movements), but also in, at times, fostering intercultural encounters. There is no evolutionary or linear pattern. However, the rate and volume certainly increased in the second millennium CE in all world regions. Modern migrations were religious or linked to imperial expansion, or could be part of settler-colonialism, or diasporic. Slavery and other modes of servile labor have defined a whole component of modern movement.

Like migration, archaeologists and historians have begun to attribute the commencement of long-distance trade to a much earlier period than previously. A map of major historical trade zones would have different cartographic emphasis to most maps. It would need to highlight the Indian Ocean's long-term trade, the so-called Silk Road, Southeast Asia as integrated by Chinese and Indian merchants with other trade, and the outgrowth of commerce following conquest of the Americas and the intrusion of Europe's colonial empires into Asia. With trade came networks, trust-based social capital, and more extensive use of money, all extending over greater distances and across more cultural areas. To these social historical constellations, modern capitalism brought an imaginary of markets, money, accumulation, and profit. Although the integration of civilizations into world capitalism has occurred within a singular imaginary, prevailing constellations perpetuate varieties of economic order. Far from being subsumed by capitalism, civilizations have contextualized processes of globalization differently.

Cultural traffic in intellectual, religious, and aesthetic goods has stimulated centers of intercivilizational engagement. Looking at the major world regions through a lens of cultural exchange, most civilizations encompass multiple centers of knowledge that rely on the creative contest of ideas and intermittent paradigmatic reinvigoration from outside influences. Temples, schools, academies, monasteries, and universities have been magnetic centers attracting, producing, and diffusing knowledge and creative practices [*Collins 2000*]. Sustained intercivilizational encounters are often visible in the cultural outcomes they produce. Such production is possible because of underlying patterns of cultural interaction.

The final dimension is political exchange of elements of civilizational models. Empires operative in regional worlds variously contextualize what might in some cases be an exchange of civilizational elements, in others an imposition, and in some instances, outright emulation. How engagement of this kind unfolds is context dependent and there is significant variation between different civilizations. A pertinent example is the first millennium CE outgrowth of Chinese influence. Incorporation of Korea, Vietnam, and Japan into a broad Sinosphere led to emulation of China's model of rulership and law, but also internal innovations and refinements to the Chinese polity. This would prove a crucial encounter for Japan resulting from the densification of engagement in this dimension.

While this is only a brief recounting of the framework, I have so far outlined my conception of intercivilizational engagement in order to pave the way for an evaluation of Japan's modern relationship with the US. In my research on Japan's intercivilizational engagement, I have examined encounters and engagements in the Meiji era [*Smith 2002; 2017: 169–172*] and in the imaginary institution of Japanese capitalism [*Smith 2014*]. I have also engaged in deeper analysis of Árnason's unique historical sociology of Japanese modernity, state formation, and capitalism [*Smith 2011*]. My point of departure with Eisenstadt, Bellah, and Árnason has to do with Japan's long encounter with the West. In the late nineteenth century, the intensity in this encounter not only brought about major internal transformation, it altered the magnitude of the known and engaged outside world. The intercivilizational encounters and engagement with the US was one specific side of this, one less explored in historical sociology.

In the remainder of the essay, I sketch the contours of intercivilizational engagement by, first, demarcating modern migration as a single dimension of the trans-Pacific relationship

and, second, briefly exploring aspects of the other three dimensions across three phases, namely the economic, cultural, and political. In a second section, I examine diplomatic relations from the 1890s to the invasion of Manchuria in 1937 as an example of political engagement. After short remarks on the creation of competing historical memories of the Pacific War, I explore the problematic of rival and entangled models of capitalism before, leaving for a final section, technoscience as cultural exchange. There is no claim here to a deep analysis. Rather, the essay is a probe into the major dimensions of the relationship of the US and Japan.

## Migration

Japan has never accepted immigration as a developmental force. That said, there are notable aspects of modern emigration and selective channels of immigration that have defined the margins of national identity and are not to be overlooked. Emigration began in the early Meiji era with *dekasega* sojourners settling in Hawaii and Korea. Through inter-governmental agreements, a strategy of emigration soon extended the network of migrant colonies to Peru and Brazil. Other agreements in the inter-war period created communities in Bolivia, Paraguay and around the Caribbean. Although not systematized through written agreement, considerable migration to the US occurred. Despite positive contributions to American society and economy from Japanese newcomers, the process of trans-Pacific immigration to California and Hawaii (where American emigrants were also heading in larger numbers at the same time) heightened diplomatic conflict. Hawaii became a flashpoint for both states since governments of both countries had geopolitical designs on the islands as a major outpost in the North Pacific. A first generation of emigrants (*issei*) responsible for creating a Japan-oriented community in Hawaii had an uneasy relationship with a second partly Americanized generation (*nisei*) [Masako 2008]. A complex cultural interaction between Japanese and American programs in education occurred in the 1920s, converging on common aims of Americanizing the émigré population [Monobe 2008]. With an eye on improved trade and diplomatic relations between the two Pacific powers, Japanese-Hawaiians tried to support assimilation and thereby solicit goodwill towards the community. Instead of consolidating the local community, this moved many *nisei* to join Japanese migrants in California by relocating to the West Coast. Such immigration shifts added to domestic tensions on the mainland. Flows from Canada and Hawaii to Washington, Oregon and Southern California in the 1890s invigorated anti-Asian racism and led to diplomatic spats between the Japanese government and Theodore Roosevelt's administration [LaFeber 1998: 87–90; Dower 1999: 54–57; Davidann 2007: 83–95]. Japanese immigration had gained momentum in the wake of the 1882 exclusion of the Chinese. However, port and border closures arising from the 1924 Exclusion Act then precluded the Japanese too and intensified Japan's doubts about America's stated commitment to principles of universalism [Dower 1999: 144–146; Davidann 2007: 95–104]. Two generations of Japanese remained, some fifty thousand, endogenously forming a bi-racial west coast community. In between, wartime was made a jarring experience by internment. American reaction to Hawaiian and Californian Japanese present on US territory was a deeply dehumanizing distrust of the latter's patriotism [Dower 1999: 219–222]. Despite this, the larger community reassembled in Hawaii and California after

the War. Japanese Americans in time became part of a larger Asian-American constellation concentrated in the western states.

The story of emigration is one thing; Japan's record on immigration, quite another. Despite deep historical experiences of formative migration, modern dynamics reveal, at most, highly selective intakes of migrants from delimited sources. For the first time since the 7th century, substantial Korean migration occurred during Japan's early twentieth century colonization of the Korean peninsula. Much occurred under compulsion. Migrant workers came in large numbers to Osaka, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki as low paid industrial workers [Komai 2001: 13–14; Weiner 1997: 84–91]. Although less connected to colonization, Chinese migration nourished communities with a discrete standing in society stemming from their business networks in Southeast Asia and Taiwan. Both foreigner communities consolidated an urban presence in the first five decades. They did not benefit proportionally from industrial re-development, yet they were variously reincorporated into the workforce and small business sector. Their urban and economic presence was constant, despite systematic political and cultural exclusion.

In response to economic growth, foreigner communities of Koreans (*zainichi*), “returnee” Japanese (*nikkeijin*), Chinese, and American-Japanese (to a far lesser degree) contributed to the institution and recreation of national identity, despite being peripheral to the monocultural mainstream and continually suffering from denial of citizenship and discrimination in employment, education and housing [Komai 2001; Murphy-Shigematsu 1993]. Far from vanishing, they are increasing in number. Non-Japanese communities doubled in size in the two decades after the wane of *nikkeijin* return migration in the 1980s. Although they remain small, the comparatively youthful demographic profile of *nikkeijin* communities is at odds with the ageing population. Movements of return-Japanese from Latin America stimulated a marginal diversification of culture and society in the 1980s and 1990s [Sellek 1997]. Drawn by higher incomes than in their countries of origin, migrants crossing the Pacific bring histories of emigration back to their ancestral home, adding to a greater heterogeneity than is often attributed to Japan. *Nikkeijin* still suffer discrimination. Although included in the legal definition of nationality as Japanese, many treat *nikkeijin* as Brazilians, Peruvians etc. Their presence unsettles Japanese notions of race [Sellek 1997: 201–204].

Disavowal of open migration has left Japan with demographic stagnation to match the languor of its economy since the early 1990s. Even so, the history of governmental policy in migration is more nuanced than the official position suggests. Illegal immigration has become a large-scale phenomenon since the late 1980s. Coupled with growing foreign student programs, it adds to the multi-ethnic diversity of the urban population in Osaka, Nagoya, and Tokyo. Research on minorities reveals that Japan's population is ethnically composed in ways comparable with industrial societies on a world scale [Murphy-Shigematsu 1993; Sugimoto 2014]. The flows of migration as part of intercivilizational engagement reveal a more nuanced picture of race and population than monocultural images of singular and dominant ethnicity would suggest. The growing multicultural paradigm of race, culture, and ethnicity seems to reflect more exactly the degree of diversity. For a more complex historical sociology of migration and cultural exchange and transfers, the contribution of the multicultural social sciences is an important counterweight to a modern history of monoculturalism.

## Entanglements in Asia and the Pacific: War, Diplomacy, Invasion

From the Pacific edge of the continent, Americans could picture themselves as a power in Asia. The Mexican War, subsequent settlements with Canada and Britain, and the discovery of gold in California marked a unification of continental territory for the US just prior to Commodore Perry's intrusion on Tokyo Bay. Reaching California, Americans looked poised to stretch much further into the Pacific. America had increased its presence in East Asia through the preceding decades with frequent ventures by whalers, missionaries, and unsuccessful diplomats [LaFeber 1998: 8–13; see also Sexton 2011: 114–115]. To the private presence of American adventurers, the US state would add its own interventions as a public power. With the newfound confidence of a continental nation, Atlantic America acquired a Pacific horizon in the 1850s and quickly mustered its maritime power in engagement and negotiations with Japan and China.

Up until the 1898 war with Spain, diplomatic affairs and economic and cultural transactions between Japan and the US relationship were competitive yet congenial. The two states became more deeply entangled. At home, the US was engaged in Reconstruction, enlarging its national economy, and building up its rapidly growing western population. On the other side, Japan was fast building its national base and expanding influence overseas. In the late 1890s, an empowered America became more actively involved in the Asia-Pacific in an urgent attempt to check the European powers in China, maintain practices of open trade, and build its naval power [LaFeber 1998: 57–62]. At this time, containing Japan was the only kind of diplomatic pressure that the McKinley Administration could apply, and it intentionally did so. Fortunately, for the United States, success in the war with Spain delivered a major foothold in the Pacific, considerably strengthening its diplomatic strategy of containment. Guam, American Samoa, the Philippines, Hawaii and, in the Americas, Cuba, the Panama Canal, and Puerto Rico all fell to the Americans in a six-year period. The US was suddenly in command of two major spheres of influence, in effect creating an interregional bridge between the Americas and the Pacific. The political orientation of the Republican government that defeated Spain was evidently expansionist. In discussions to move swiftly to annex the Philippines and Hawaii, McKinley spoke for this orientation, when he expressly invoked “Manifest Destiny” [LaFeber 1998: 60], as a reminder of the US' newfound expansive capacity and its goals.

Notwithstanding the ambitions of the US government, development of American interregional power ran into significant limits in the Pacific in the early twentieth century. Japan had become a fast-emerging rival, curtailing the enlargement of American influence. Public opinion was also a constraint on American action. Influential constituencies favored cooperation with Japan more than naked assertion in the region [Davidann 2007]. Diplomatic negotiations were, moreover, limited in their results. Other European powers advanced their own interests and shared little in common with the US. American diplomats in turn argued in favor of free trade in China and Japan and yet could make no ground. For their part, Japan's diplomats did not fail to remind their American counterparts of how possession of the Philippines was irreconcilable with the ideals of the Monroe Doctrine [Davidann 2003: 25]. Furthermore, formal American possession of overseas territories halted after seizure of the former colonies of Spain. Only in Hawaii's case was the US in such a position that it could turn the degree of asymmetrical connectedness into

a strategy of steady incorporation [Davidann 2008]. Overall, in the lead-up to World War 1, the operative obstacles to American penetration of the Asia-Pacific region proved to be insurmountable.

From this time through to the Pacific War, Japan intensified its observations of the strategies of state building undertaken by the leading imperial states. This proved valuable in its own project of building military-imperial power. In the early twentieth century, the Japanese benefitted from the demonstration effect of two kinds of empire. The colonialism of Europe's world empires defined the first type. The second example was the US – a power renouncing colonialism, if not the occupation of a few territories within its Atlantic and Pacific spheres. Both types of empire had a heavy presence in Asia and the Pacific. Western powers were themselves rivals as well as collaborators. Amongst them, the US stood out for its public renunciation of colonialism. Learning at a certain distance from the US as well as the colonial empires gave Japan another angle on international relations. The institutional composition of Western states and the universe of Western statehood were important objects of study in discerning strategy in foreign policy, and military development.

The relationship of Japan and the US shifted in the interwar period. Woodrow Wilson admonished the major powers to refrain from colonial possession in Asia [LaFeber 1998: 114–115]. Accordingly, the US diplomatically pursued multilateral agreement around “open door” principles of free trade in respect of China and Japan. To curb American efforts, Japan responded with a reassertion of the racial equality clause that it had sought at the Versailles negotiations. On the face of it, this was a symbolic principle that would improve its diplomatic position in Asia and the Pacific, and indeed with the imperial European powers. At a deeper non-epiphenomenal level, it was part of an emerging civilizational vision that would conflict with that of the US in the 1930s [Davidann 2003]. America's lack of headway in trade with China and Japan frustrated Washington's strategy and added to tensions with Japan. With the gap between the two powers growing, the Japanese, who for years had been better disposed to the distinctive American way, increasingly turned on the US, grouping it indiscriminately with the European powers [Davidann 2007: 81–82].

Tokyo's own strategy fixed firmly on development of an imperial-national state built on the back of a two-sided relationship with East Asia. On one side, its industrialization became more dependent on inputs from its colonies as the years progressed. On the other side, civil and military leaders sought to strengthen the nation-empire's strategic position *vis-à-vis* the US and, indeed, the faltering French and British Empires. Expanding the bureaucratic capacities of the state was both a nation and empire-building priority for Japan's elites. By extending additional capacity into the region, they risked opposition from the US, Britain, and France. Yet, none of the contending empires could mount a challenge for supremacy in Asia as Japan could. The Depression had severely weakened their rivals' domestic heartlands in Europe [Árnason 2002: 188]. Knowing this, Japanese officials even toyed with the idea of forging a Monroe Doctrine of their own [LaFeber 1998: 177–178, 92–93; see also Davidann 2007: 159–160]. They did not proceed; yet even entertaining the idea shows growth in their level of self-confidence. Their alternative, the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, reflected the empire's unusual coupling of the colonies' labor and raw resources to a logic of industrial-capitalist development in Honshu. Doubtless, this represented regionalization. Yet, it was a regionalizing logic of a kind quite distinct from the Monroe Doctrine. In the end, the military confrontation with the US in the Pacific

undercut its viability. The relationship of both countries, which had been competitive yet congenial before 1898, became increasingly adversarial after World War 1, and then conflictual in the 1930s, ended in war in 1941.

While the Pacific War as a conflagration in the US-Japan relationship is beyond the current essay, one brief observation on memory and commemoration of the conflict is in order, as the memory of war represents a very particular episode in ongoing cultural engagement between the two powers. In the postwar era, both sides constructed an inverse and adversarial historical memory [Dower 1999]. What one side remembered; the other side suppressed. By the 1990s, social memory of the war had also become a controversy of commemoration. To put this in terms consonant with Jan Assmann's theorization of memory, communicative memory (connected to the lived experience of events) had turned to cultural memory (captured in institutions of commemoration – museums, statuary, art, memorials) [Assmann 2011]. Far from fading, debates about the Pacific War became more animated as memory became memorialized. Ambiguity about the memory of the atomic bombing at Hiroshima and Nagasaki troubled Americans and plagued shrill-pitched debates about the commemoration of the end of the war. In one controversy, it became evident that what lingers low-key in Japan's historical memory is prominent in the US [Hein 1995; Neiman 2015]. That controversy concerns a 1995 exhibition at the Smithsonian Institute. The Institute and its curators had to back down from depiction of the horror of the bombing following congressional pressure. They agreed instead to a fuller portrayal of Japan's barbarities in Asia. This is the inverse of Japan's commemorative representations, as exemplified at the Peace Park museum in Hiroshima, which revolves around the atomic bombing while muting collective memory of the record in Asia. Japanese commemoration places a stress on the momentous and unparalleled experience of the country's defeat and desolation, leaving it the victim – an experience which belongs to Japan only [Dower 1999].

While there was a great deal of noise and heat in the 1990s shrill culture wars in the US about the memory of the war, governments of both sides also adhered to selective silences about the past. America's postwar recovery of the imperial institution, the suffering of wartime internees of both sides, and the war's disproportionate impact on Japan's minority communities were not up for debate. Despite Japan's relative economic decline in the 1990s and into the new century, there is little sign that this has abated. Divergent historical memories of the Pacific War remain, despite an alliance that strategically serves both countries in the face of China's ascendancy.

### **Cooperative, Interlaced, and Competing Capitalisms**

If one wishes to posit a "clash" of the two states, as LaFeber does [LaFeber 1998], then there can be little quarrel with the proposition that economic relations between the two are both adversarial and cooperative. Both kinds of relationship are evidence of the entanglement of rival national economies. Capitalism has produced in each national economy, and each economic sphere of influence, different and competing models of industrial and post-industrial development with diverging cultural traditions [Arnason 2002: 185–199; Lipset 1993]. Both have spheres of influence entailing Asia. As we see in the previous section, Asia was central to Japan's trajectory in the 1930s and 1940s. Asia became special again for Japan after the war in a way unmatched for the US.

American policy makers may have repeatedly made designs on an “open trade” Asia in the first half of the century. But these finally petered out in the new geopolitical environment of the Cold War, especially after the occupiers turned towards economic policies promoting renewal in order to bolster Japan’s role as a bulwark against Communism in Asia. Wartime universalist visions of the American Century and the Atlantic Charter faded as Cold War imperatives made a prosperous and stable ally in East Asia a priority for the Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson Administrations. Free trade was certainly not the result. By favoring Japan with a huge procurements program during the Korean War, access to licenses for patents on new technology, training in labor management and quality control, and special terms of trade, industrialized America offered support to its new ally that it chose to offer to no others [Morris-Suzuki 1994: 166–169]. When it came to reconstruction of a conservative bloc of peak business bodies, a political party, and the public bureaucracy, the American position varied from overt support to timely acquiescence. With stability assured (so it seemed), rapid economic growth became possible. Indeed, this arrangement had been the hope of Japanese politicians and administrators from as early as 1946 [Dower 1999: 536–540; see also Eisenstadt 1996: 54–64; Arnason 1997: 492–502].

Conflict ensued, especially around the alliance with the US and the continued military presence in Okinawa. Yet, after the heady days of clashes between students, politicians, and the police in 1960, internal conflict suddenly abated. From that point, growth suddenly became staggering. The components of the “developmentalist state” were ready for continuous expansion and creative scientific and technological renewal [Johnson 1982; see also Morris-Suzuki 1994]. Japan’s elites were enchanted with growth and managed to legitimize the objectives of periodic Economic Plans as a source of motivation for the population at large. If growth was an overarching aim and planning a mode of long term thinking and goal setting, then the necessary institutional components of the developmentalist state certainly existed. MITI and all the major ministries harnessed the financial power of the banks to selectively support export industries and develop strategies for the key groups of companies (*keiretsu*) to compete on foreign markets, especially in the US. A situation of industrial peace coupled with a management focus on worker motivation and loyalty also facilitated coordination. For more than ten years, American governments supported the relationship, bringing international validation to Japan’s course.

American politicians and policy advisors had not asked too many questions about the economic benefits until the imbalance in trade, finance, and investment became too great to ignore. During the Nixon years, relations between the two countries increasingly became tense and protracted as differences over trade and foreign policy surfaced [LaFeber 1998: 327–395]. Disagreements over the Vietnam War and trade with the Soviet Union and China were no longer quietly set aside. When it became evident that Japan had weathered the 1973 oil crisis through large-scale public spending and increased *keiretsu* investment in China and Southeast Asia, it became too much for Americans to bear as they watched their own domestic economy slump. This phase of mild antagonism was further compounded by ascendancy of Korean, Taiwanese, and Singaporean versions of capitalism in the wake of Japan’s success. With other models of capitalism emerging, the relationship of the two trans-Pacific allies got on to a more competitive footing [Katzenstein – Shiraiishi 1997]. In this period, Japan launched a sustained effort to regionalize the

major components of its production and service chains, a strategy that served to prolong rapid economic growth for another decade and a half. Although this provided the impetus for regional integration, the co-existence of competing national economies meant that open multilateralism was the order of the day. APEC was the result. Importantly, however, Japan's own regional production networks triangulated trade between South-East Asia, Northern Asia, and the United States, enhancing the interregional connection of the Americas to the Asia-Pacific.

By the time America's domestic economy had begun to rebound in the mid-1980s, the balance of economic engagement had altered. Public debt, a strong greenback, and an unprecedented imbalance in trade and investment with Japan and Asia prompted policy responses that worsened America's position [Dower 1999: 375]. The 1985 Plaza Accords, intended by the Americans to re-train Japanese decision-making and re-balance two national economies, failed spectacularly. Instead, Japanese companies held firm and absorbed the losses. Foreign investment in China, Southeast Asia, the US, and Australia increased dramatically on the strength of the yen. In support of the growing presence, Japanese governments promoted a strategy of re-Asianization of the region under the umbrella of a still problematic and contested Japanese identity as a counterweight to US interests and influence. From this time through to the 1993 crisis, American public opinion diverged over Japan. Widely – and prematurely – perceived as the future giant of the world economy, Japanese capitalism appeared to be either a driving cause of American decline or the key to its renewal. At times, the American literature on the political economy of the relationship reflected hyperbole and dramatic oversimplification of a complicated historical entanglement (particularly when formulated by politicians or the media commentariat). More serious long-term observers and participants in trade negotiations and diplomacy, able to avoid the tense atmosphere advised successive administrations from Reagan to Bush to learn from Japan [Uriu 2009]. Major trade and policy experts and scholars such as Chalmers Johnson, Clyde Prestowitz, and James Fallows argued in the media for corporate and political reform. At the same time, more assertive trade negotiators from the American side didactically instructed the Japanese on the apparent benefits of neo-liberal reform of financial institutions and trade policy and practice. In a war of words, they assaulted the non-conformity of the developmental state, while their counterparts treated their advice with benign neglect. Economic rivalry threatened to undermine the political and military alliance with the US. That threat would fade at a new juncture for Japan in the 1990s.

The consistent economic growth Japan had enjoyed since 1960 became elusive in the new decade. In its place, Japan settled into the recognizable “peaks and troughs” of capitalist cycles. The fracturing of the LDP in the 1993 election disrupted the developmental state's architecture of bureaucracy, party, and business for a few short years. After that, the parts of the developmental state were still in place but the whole no longer acted as the center of gravity it once had. The LDP returned to government with no certainty that its monopoly would hold in the subsequent years. In this new environment, it looked like Japan would not commit to the neoliberal program variously preoccupying the political agenda of many governments in the 1990s. While there was no wholesale adoption of the project, important policies and measures of a neoliberal character did bring about a limited range of changes in the composition of Japanese capitalism [Lechevalier 2014]. Beginning with Hashimoto's

administration in 1996, a series of reforms responding to shifts in the international and internal environment began to concentrate the attention of governments. We can name three here. First, the relationship with the US brought with it pressure around trade and security issues of the kind described above in the section on the late 1980s. That pressure continued during the Clinton and Bush years. In the international arena more generally, the demonstration effect of NAFTA and the EU had an indirect impact on Japanese deliberation, as did meetings and debates in APEC. The institutionalization of trade rules in the WTO was both an ideological and operational confirmation of the powerful position market economics held in the international arena. Finally, structural and policy reforms were intended to address the flat rates of growth, which emerged as a continuing crisis as the 1990s turned into the new millennium. Evidently, no return to the dizzy heights of 1960s growth was possible using old measures. Growth acts as both signification and index of the crisis – just as it had been the signification and index of postwar success. Through a pattern of small rises and two sharp contractions, Japan's average growth rates have remained stagnant. LDP governments attempted to address structural problems with financial deregulation, reform to corporate law, and labor market restructuring. The initiatives of the LDP in power since the end of the growth boom have undermined the traditional operational patterns of the developmental state without dislodging it altogether. However, continuity in the formulation and implementation of a consistent reform program has been hard to find. Arguably, Koizumi's administration has represented the most sustained effort. Even here, the LDP faced institutional blockages and public opposition around specific proposals. In the meantime, growing organizational diversity in business and finance sectors, along with segmentation of the labor market, have been important secular shifts, but far from the wholesale transformation that would suggest a trajectory of convergence with other models of capitalism, including that of Japan's trans-Pacific partner.

Overall, Japan still sustains a variety of capitalism that leads most national economies. With its national focus on Asia growing and economic rivalry with the US tapering off from its peak levels, Japan has enjoyed a less combative trade and strategic trans-Pacific relationship. An increase in shared security interests in the new century has brought both powers closer together. Both countries – one embodying the largest and the other the third largest national economy in the world – have oriented steadily to an Asian capitalism outgrowing Japan and extending its global economic reach to all continents and major zones of the world: China. The story from there is well known.

### **Technoscience, Creativity, and Cultural Interchange**

A component of the model continuing through the crisis and into the present is technoscientific creativity and innovation. In this concise section, I explore technoscience as a pronounced factor of cultural engagement between Japan and the US. The larger-scale transfer of American technology in the 1950s and 1960s was possible because of two factors. The first is Japan's geostrategic importance in the Cold War, as discussed above. Second, an established orientation to scientific endeavor across business, industry, and government revived during the Occupation. High levels of literacy and education and a diverse skills base in the blue-collar and professional workforce enhanced the orientation to science.

The orientation to science has a pre-history. Meiji era Japan had itself been a beneficiary of Tokugawa-era learning. Beginning in that time with a creative adaptation of Western technologies, industrial techniques, and engineering expertise, Japan has enchanted technoscience and privileged pure research [Morris-Suzuki 1994]. This imaginary orientation had an operational life in networks of major universities, scientific institutes and laboratories, and in small firms and *zaibatsu* groupings linked to foreign companies and international science. Up until the 1930s, an innovation-based process of industrialization advanced rapidly, in part due to connection with the technological breakthroughs made by Western companies (including American ones). In the hands of Japanese industrialists, Western technologies would be dramatically re-purposed. In addition, scientists and *zaibatsu* companies invented original technologies and new approaches to technical education, the organization of production and the labor process, particularly when supported by government planners [Morris-Suzuki 1994: 116–141]. Some of the most important developments had dual use. In the environment of military rule, combat use often prevailed. Although pre-war developments were crucial, the zenith of invention would await the postwar takeoff. War and defeat had led many to the conclusion that Japan lost to the West due to a deficit of scientific rationality [Dower 1999: 494–496]. Japan in “the postwar” would be a country oriented to the “rational” use of science, which in turn would immunize the nation against an irrational return to militarism. With the Occupation over, Japan could set about assiduously learning from America after, just as some in the US could absorb aspects of Japanese production techniques and quality control and management regimes in the 1970s and 1980s. Investment from philanthropic foundations in Japanese university education and large-scale provision of places for exchange students in American universities set up an interchange of knowledge across the Pacific that would last decades [LaFeber 1998: 300]. Japan’s scientific development was a national priority. Investment in research and development dwarfed the funds spent on license purchases in the 1950s and 1960s, revealing that MITI and the major industrial groups privileged the development of technological and scientific networks [Morris-Suzuki 1994: 170–187]. New networks shared the results of research and development with groups of companies, setting the industry and service sectors on a different footing to their pre-war counterparts. In doing so, they modeled a new nexus of science and industry. In the postwar paradigm of re-industrialization, cooperation brokered by MITI and other ministries underpinned advancement. Science had an especial role in this figuration.

This public/private partnership interwoven over a sustained period has few parallels [Low – Nakayama – Yoshioka 1999]. Yet, the pattern was not even across the postwar decades. It was mainly after the 1973 oil crisis that investment in general science and applied research and development intensified, as the country oriented to greater technological self-reliance [Morris-Suzuki 1994: 210–212]. To some extent, the mantra of growth then had a companion in the privilege accorded to the re-enchanted sphere of science. The partnerships linking science, bureaucracy, and industry had already established a supportive ecology for technoscientific invention. At times, unusual alliances of industries found commercial applications for the findings of pure research, where government-led initiatives could not. Altogether, the creative dynamism of the research and development environment helped to foster debate about scientific logic itself, as well as generating invention and inventiveness. In this sense, Japanese ingenuity could contribute to global science, as well as domestic development.

From the 1980s onwards, emerging industries in biotechnology, robotics and environmental technologies turned to exports [Morris-Suzuki 1994: 239–244]. Through exports of electronics, Japanese industry had already revealed its capabilities. New inventions from emerging industries washed through the economy, even as the leading corporate groupings shipped their inventions around the world. The direct impact that diffusion of technologies had was limited, yet the intangible contributions in digitalization cannot be underestimated [Morris-Suzuki 1994: 213–224]. The power of Japanese microelectronics added significantly to the exponential growth of digital memory, which has continued in the 21st century on the back of increased expenditure in research and development (in both absolute and relative terms) Partnerships with universities augmented the commitment of large corporations to research. However, they did so without detracting from endeavors in pure science emphasizing a curiosity-driven research and not only instrumental outcomes. At the same time, the spread of Japanese mass culture was another domain of digitalization. Through export of digital products (games, *anime*, *manga*), the new culture industry disseminated trans-cultural Asian identity, even as the products acted subtly as carriers of Japanese values.

Aside from Asia, North America is the main destination for the goods and by-products of Japanese science. Companies in the US absorbed aspects of Japanese production techniques and quality control and management regimes, sometimes wholesale, yet often piecemeal. American manufacturers that adopted lean production technologies and organizational systems in the 1980s and 1990s are a significant case in point. Overall, technology transfer in the US has been more extensive than in Southeast Asia. However, there was also a more diffuse immaterial impact. The intangible spread of the example of scientific advancement set industrial-capitalist nations in a condition of invention, learning, absorption, and emulation of scientific and industrial research. Japan touched a competitive nerve in other industrial economies, in turn stimulating competitive innovation. This is especially so for the US, which has been a recipient of the indirect benefits of Japanese technology.

Not all has been success. Some of Japan's technoscientific utopianism has not produced the results it seems to promise (many plans for utopian cities were shelved decades ago, for instance). Nevertheless, science in the sphere of cultural engagement has undoubtedly been one of the keys to the accomplishments of post-Occupation ascendancy. Science has been central to the developmental state and the creation of a distinct variety of capitalism. The relationship with the US – rival and ally both at once – has contributed to this area of cultural engagement.

## Conclusion

Japan is a civilization of the East Asian constellation. At the same time, Japanese modernity incorporates relationships with modern states of the Pacific and the Americas. Being instituted with these relationships, modern Japan has Pacific horizons demarcated largely by intercivilizational engagement with the United States. American civilization – a force of Atlantic modernity – was born a continental nation also with Pacific horizons. Its intercivilizational engagement with the Pacific deepened after the war with Spain in which it obtained former Spanish possessions in the Western hemisphere and the Asia-Pacific region. If the possibility of an American colonial empire passed quickly, the presence of

the new world power in the region did not. In the twentieth century, the relationship of rivalry, antagonism, strain, and collaboration with Japan has been crucial for America's position in the region. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that the relationship has been mutually transformative for both sides. As presented in the current essay, my outline of how this relationship runs through the four dimensions of intercivilizational engagement is suggestive and not comprehensive. A more detailed account of emigration and selective immigration, economic connections, cultural exchange, and transfers of techniques and ideologies of rulership and statehood is a larger project. Nevertheless, one conclusion can withstand scrutiny. In Japan's interface with the Pacific, engagement with the US has been definitive, while for the US, long-term interaction with Japan has been a focal point of its orientation to the Pacific. A history of modern intercivilizational connectivity between the two Pacific edge worlds awaits a deeper reconstruction.

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# A Perspective for Japan: Fukuzawa Yukichi's "Theory of Civilization", 1875

WOLFGANG SEIFERT\*

Fukuzawa Yukichi a jeho „Teorie civilizace“ z roku 1875: Perspektiva pro Japonsko

**Abstract:** This paper discusses the thought of Fukuzawa Yukichi, probably the most influential Japanese intellectual of the late nineteenth century, with particular reference to his attempt to develop a theory of civilization. For him, the civilizational approach was a framework for reflection on Japan's situation in the world after the great changes of the 1850s and 1860s. He saw the preservation of national independence and the reform of Japanese society as primary goals, but they necessitated extensive learning from the experience and achievements of more advanced societies, especially those of Western Europe and the United States. However, he did not advocate a purely imitative Westernization. Japan's distinctive identity and autonomous international stance were to be maintained. To clarify the reasons for transforming Japan in light of Western models without capitulating to them, he outlined an evolutionary conception of social change, understood in terms of an advance towards civilization. That kind of progress was not only a matter of technical and organizational development; it also involved the mobilization of whole peoples. On this basis, Fukuzawa articulated a more democratic vision of Japan's future than the road subsequently taken by the Meiji government.

**Keywords:** Fukuzawa Yukichi; Japan; civilization; nationalism; Meiji renovation; Westernization

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## Preliminary Remarks

If Japan is to be brought back into the international discussion about earlier and contemporary transformations of societies, we must also pay attention to Japanese analyses and diagnoses of the times. In the context of international cultural and intellectual exchange, the Japanese experience of a specific road to modernity, together with its indignant interpretations, is particularly relevant – not least since influential Western theorists, such as F. Fukuyama, have been proved wrong about the global, democratic and market-oriented convergence of societies moving in that direction. Chinese modernization is currently perceived as the main counter-example, but often discussed without proper awareness of the historical background. Adding Japan to the picture helps to contextualize the Chinese transformation that began much later. And reflections on the Japanese case should take note of arguments and programmes that throw light on the whole trajectory, even if they were not – or only in part – confirmed by later developments. A classic example of that kind is Fukuzawa Yukichi's (1835–1901) *An Outline of a Theory of Civilization*, published in 1875.

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The following discussion will distinguish between the concepts of transformation and social change. The latter refers to ongoing alterations, more or less significant, but not affecting fundamental economic and social structures, whereas the concept of transformation denotes relatively rapid and thoroughgoing change of such structures. That leaves open the question whether the transformation is triggered by internal processes or by “blows” coming from outside, e.g. natural disasters or wars. Concrete analyses of transformative changes will also raise the issue of radical discontinuity or underlying continuity across a concatenation of events. This is often controversial, and calls for sociological as well as historical approaches.

Notwithstanding the varying interpretations of modern Japanese history (since 1850 or thereabouts), there can be no doubt that developments during the decades before and after 1868, as well as those beginning in 1945, constitute transformations in the sense defined above. Here I will deal with an interpretation of the upheaval preceding and following the *events* of 1868. The work in question articulated a comparative perspective on Japan and the West (primarily Western Europe, but with some references to the United States), as well as a long-term historical analysis of his compatriots’ understanding of their own society and some suggestions for a better grasp; it was, to put it another way, both a diagnosis of the times and a programme for Japan’s future course. Fukuzawa also had something to say on China and Korea.

As Jóhann Árnason observes in the editorial of this issue, “the changes to Japan’s internal structures and to its relations with foreign countries opened up new perspectives for comparative analysis. Japanese adaptation of European institutions, practices and ideas gave rise to parallel as well as contrasting developments.” Eisenstadt’s impressive exploration of such adaptive processes has shown that this approach is fruitful. We should, however, not draw only on subsequent historical and sociological research, foreign and domestic, but also on accompanying analyses and policy proposals by actors and observers of the transformative process.

The present sketch is based on the methodological premise that concepts and paradigms of political thought and social philosophy are important for the understanding of the two transitional phases (1853–1890 and 1945–1952) in the almost 170-year long modern history of Japan.<sup>1</sup> It is also assumed that within the dynamics of social change, social conditions do not only give rise to specific ideas; such ideas can also, especially when they develop into ideologies, shape the course of social change. Such an impact of new thought is undoubtedly exemplified by the work of Fukuzawa Yukichi, however diverse later opinions on his ideas may be. He was neither a social scientist nor a historian, but a journalist who developed his own social philosophy, and he was influential not only through his books and newspaper articles, but also as the founder of a private educational institution. If we take with Mitani for granted that the political tradition of a country is shaped on one hand by professional politicians and on the other by political amateurs, the “active *demós*” that also becomes a political subject, Fukuzawa’s role consisted in enabling and guiding the amateurs. He saw himself as an intellectual leader of efforts to solve Japan’s most urgent problems and to safeguard the independence of the nation [*kokuminteki dokuritsu*; see *Mitani 2016: 85–86*].

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<sup>1</sup> Historians and historical sociologists disagree on the exact dating of modern Japanese history.

Many later commentators have described Fukuzawa as the thinker and activist who most consistently advocated the "Westernization of Japan" and tried to further it. But in Fukuzawa's own opinion, "Westernization" (or "Europeanization") did not mean a blind acceptance of models, with the aim of becoming "like the West". For him, the whole set of institutions, practices and ideas prevailing in Western Europe (often with the addition of the United States) represented "Western civilization". When he spoke of "elevating the level of civilization" in Japan, he meant that Japan should adopt and develop a modified version of this set. His motivating concrete goal was that Japan should become an independent, sovereign, modern national state, with a population conscious of itself as a nation. That could only be achieved if several conditions were fulfilled. They concerned institutions, practices and ideas in political and economic life, and not least changes in public consciousness. Only in that way could "civilization" in Fukuzawa's sense make progress. To put it another way, the adaptation of Western models has a specific role to play in the modernizing process. Fukuzawa is concerned with the survival of Japan as a politically independent unit while entering the "modern world of states", then shaped by the West.

In this paper I would like to show how the – probably – most influential Japanese intellectual in the second half of the nineteenth century described his society, which social and political structures he criticized and what kind of social consciousness he criticized, and how he tried to show his compatriots out of the apparently insoluble dilemma of constrained collective modernization and autonomous action of individuals. The most systematic expression of Fukuzawa's ideas and arguments is to be found in his two main works, *An Encouragement of Learning* (*Gakumon no susume*, 1872) and *An Outline of a Theory of Civilization* (*Bunmeiron no gairyaku*, 1875). Here I will limit my discussion to key statements of the second work, and thus not trace Fukuzawa's thought beyond 1875. I will try to stay close to the text and therefore quote lengthy passages. The intention is to outline a distinctive view of "civilization" and to clarify the ideas meant to explain the ongoing social transformation and Japan's situation in the world to Fukuzawa's contemporaries. As will be seen, the concept of "civilization" plays a double role: it is an instrument to be used to gain knowledge of society and to indicate a perspective for a "modern" Japan.

Fukuzawa's 1875 book – published a few years after the restoration of the *Tennō* as a political ruler and at the same time the highest religious authority – was unusually widely read. This was due to its rich content and its principled reflection on Japan's problems and perspectives, in the middle of the far-reaching reform process initiated by the new government.<sup>2</sup> The book continued to attract interest during the first half of the Meiji period (1868–1912), and some of the problems identified by Fukuzawa are still relevant for non-Western societies. They can also serve to stimulate comparative political thought. As for the solutions that Fukuzawa proposed and submitted to public discussion, opinions are very divided, and sometimes linked to particularly polarizing controversies among Japanese scholars.<sup>3</sup> That also applies to the historian of ideas and political scientist

<sup>2</sup> Among the reforms before 1875, the most significant step was probably the centralization of control over the roughly 300 domains (*han*), previously ruled by hereditary lords (*daimyō*), by conversion into prefectures (*ken*) and at the same time reducing them to a much smaller number.

<sup>3</sup> Here I cannot discuss the reasons why Fukuzawa's thought and political role have again become controversial in contemporary Japanese debates. In recent publications, the connection to Maruyama Masao's thought and

Maruyama Masao (1914–1996), who was one of the most important interpreters of Fukuzawa's thought.

Fukuzawa began to learn English in 1858, after mastering Dutch.<sup>4</sup> In 1860 he was a member of the first Japanese mission to the United States, and in 1862 he functioned as official translator for Japanese delegations visiting France, Britain, the Netherlands, Prussia, Russia and Portugal. In 1867 he visited the United States for a second time, again as a member of an official delegation. In 1868 he renamed a private school which he had founded ten years before; he now called it “Keiō gijuku”, and it became in due course one of the oldest and most prestigious private universities in Japan. His observations in Western countries were first recorded in *Seiyō jijō* (*Conditions in the West*), published in 1866–1867; some 250,000 copies were sold, including illegal reprints. In 1872 he began to publish his *Encouragement of Learning*, at first as a series of seventeen brochures; each of them was sold in roughly 200,000 copies. There was a great demand for informations about the West; Fukuzawa's books satisfied this curiosity, and to a significant extent, they shaped the Japanese image of the West. Among intellectuals, that image had already begun to change, not least as a result of political discourses guided by an immanent critique of Confucianism. During the second half of the nineteenth century, Japan was – through both trade and diplomacy – much more directly confronted with the West than it had been through dealings with Portuguese missionaries after 1542 and Dutch traders after 1636; consequently, the wish to become a “civilized” country in the Western sense was of growing importance.

### Civilization and Its Stages

Fukuzawa was the foremost interpreter of the Western concept of “civilization” in Japan. He translated the English term *civilization* as *bunmei* 文明, and this solution was soon widely accepted. The word already existed as a concept of Confucian thought and referred to “a state in which the Way is properly practised and culture flourishes” [Watanabe 2012: 327]. From the late Tokugawa period until the 1890s, the translation *kaika* 開化 and the composite expression *bunmei kaika* 文明開化 were also used [Watanabe 2012: xiv]. But in the English edition of Fukuzawa's work, as in most of English and German literature, Chinese concepts such as Way and its Confucian origins are unfortunately left unexplained.

Fukuzawa's work is directed against a widespread but superficial understanding of “civilization”, adaptable to both positive and negative judgments. “Civilization” was made responsible for new phenomena and sometimes rejected for that reason; for example, Torio Koyata, a high-ranking military officer, saw it as follows: “I devoted myself single-mindedly to the reform of the military. I thought that once we had a unified imperial army, we could educate the people in the military arts ... and by so doing maintain the independence of our nation in the face of foreign threats. Yet quite beyond any expectation of mine, the winds of what is called ‘civilization’ (*bunmei kaika*) began to blow, creating a great uproar throughout the land. Suddenly everything had to be in the Western manner. All at once

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his positions, partly taken before 1945, is also subjected to critical examination. I will only mention two such works: Yasukawa Junnosuke [2003] and Koyasu Nobukuni [2005].

<sup>4</sup> Dutch was, due to the presence of a Dutch trade mission in Nagasaki, the language of most European books known in Japan during the period of isolation.

customs were broken and manners changed, and people's hearts and minds ran ever more frivolous and shallow" [quoted from *Watanabe 2012: 373*]. On the other side, a whole wave of books and brochures portrayed the positive achievements of "civilization" [*Watanabe 2012: 380*]. Against both approaches, Fukuzawa stresses his own concern at the very beginning of the book: "A theory of civilization concerns the development of the human spirit. Its import does not lie in discussing the spiritual development of the individual, but the spiritual development of the people of the nation as a whole" [*Fukuzawa transl. 2008: 1*]. He declares that the sole purpose and goal of humanity is civilization: "Hence, in evaluating our criteria must be the level of civilization. In other words, outwardly adaptation of the Western way of life alone should not be the aim of the Japanese in the beginning time of transformation" [*Fukuzawa transl. 2008: 1*]. Furthermore, and notwithstanding the primary emphasis on a spiritual dimension, Fukuzawa also sees civilization as the key to the prosperity of the West. It follows that the level of civilization realized in the West should also be achieved in Japan [see *Watanabe 2012: 378*].

It is important to understand that in Fukuzawa's work, civilization is conceived as a process, not as a state. As Maruyama notes, this interpretation is linked to the double meaning of the word in Western languages. Fukuzawa mostly uses it in the processual sense, corresponding to *Zivilisierung* in German (*bunmei-ka* 文明化) [see *Maruyama 1986, v. 1: 93–94*]. The emphasis is thus on historical dynamics, and that makes the concept historically relative, as can be seen from Fukuzawa's comparisons of Japan with various world regions.<sup>5</sup> In his three-stage evolutionary model, countries and societies are classified in terms of their level of civilization, without implying that this level is fixed or unchanging: "When we are talking about civilization in the world today, the nations of Europe and the United States are the most civilized, while the Asian countries, such as Turkey, China and Japan, may be called semi-developed countries, and Africa and Australia are to be counted as still primitive lands ... While the citizens of the nations of the West are the only ones to boast of civilization, the citizens of the semi-developed and primitive lands submit to being designated as such. They rest content with being branded semi-developed or primitive, and there is not one who would take pride in his own country or consider it on par with nations of the West. This attitude is bad enough" [*Fukuzawa transl. 2008: 17*].

At any rate, the designations "civilized", "semi-developed" and "primitive" have been universally accepted by people all over the globe. Why does everybody accept them? Clearly because the facts are demonstrable and irrefutable" [*Fukuzawa transl. 2008: 17–18*].

The three developmental stages of civilization can now be described in greater detail: "First, there is the stage in which neither dwellings nor supplies of food are sustainable ... At this stage man is still unable to be master of his own situation; he cowers before the forces of nature and is dependent on the favors of others or on the chance vagaries of nature. This is called the stage of primitive man. It is still far from civilization. – Secondly, there is the stage of civilization wherein daily necessities are not lacking, since agriculture has been started on a large scale. Men build houses, form communities, and create outward

<sup>5</sup> The Sino-Japanese expression consists of the two terms *bunmei* 文明 and *kaika* 開化, often translated as "civilization and enlightenment". But Watanabe Hiroshi has convincingly shown that Japanese writings on the subject contain no example of *kaika* used separately in the sense of "enlightenment". He therefore proposes, and I follow his statement, that the expression as a whole, written with four Chinese characters, should be translated as "civilization".

semblance of a state. But within this façade there remain very many defects. Though book learning flourishes, there are few who devote themselves to practical learning (*jitsugaku* 実学). They know how to cultivate the old but not how to improve it. There are accepted rules governing society (*jinkan* [no] *kōsai* 人間[の]交際), but slaves of custom that they are, they could never form rules in the true sense. This is called the semi-developed stage. It is not yet civilization in the full sense. – Thirdly, there is the stage in which men subsume the things of the universe within a general structure, but the structure does not bind them ... This is what is meant by modern civilization” [emphasis WS].

Fukuzawa further clarifies the differences between these three stages. However, a warning immediately follows: “Since these designations are essentially relative, there is nothing to prevent someone who has not seen civilization (*bunmei*) from thinking that semi-civilization is the summit of man’s development. And, while civilization is civilization relative to the semi-development stage (*hankai* 半開), the latter, in its turn, can be called civilization relative to the primitive stage (*yaban* 野蠻, *mikai* 未開). Thus, for example, present-day China (the China of 1875, WS) has to be called semi-developed in comparison with Western countries. But if we compare China with countries of South Africa, or, to take an example more at hand, if we compare the people of mainland Japan with the Ainu, then both China and Japan can be called civilized. Moreover, although we call the nations of the West civilized, they can correctly be honored with this designation *only in modern history*” [Fukuzawa transl. 2008: 18–19; emphasis WS].

This means that only in this period of history can the nations of the West be regarded as the highest stage of civilization. But they might attain an even higher position, because the West itself is constantly changing. And “we [the Japanese] cannot be satisfied with the present level of attainment of the West ... But shall we therefore conclude that Japan should reject it? If we did, what other criterion would we have? ... Those who are to give thought to their countries’ progress in civilization must necessarily take European civilization as the criterion in making arguments ... My own criterion throughout this book will be that of Western civilization, and it will be in terms of it that I describe something as good or bad, in terms of it that I find things beneficial or harmful [for Japan]” [Fukuzawa transl. 2008: 20].

In this way, “European civilization”, meaning Western Europe, becomes not only the unit of reference for empirical comparison, but also a criterion of value orientation. Consequently, the title of the second chapter – “Western civilization is our goal” – expresses the thrust of the whole work. In the context of the times, this means that civilization is associated with progress, and conversely, progress can only be achieved by raising the level of civilization.

Fukuzawa has to face the objection that the world is divided into separate countries whose populations differ in regard to mentalities and customs, as well as national politics and forms of government, and that therefore European civilization cannot become a model for the modernization of Japan. He answers that half-civilized countries like Japan are surely capable of learning lessons from more advanced ones. The approach will of course have to be selective, and the ability to distinguish between the visible exterior and the inner spirit of a civilization will be decisive. It is also important to follow the right sequence when adopting elements of Western civilization. There is no uniformity of customs among Western nations, and even less so among Asian ones. The externalities of civilization include

all empirical details, from food, clothing and shelter to government, decrees and laws. The imitation of Western ways of life in their entirety should not be called civilization. Examples are given: "Can we call those [Japanese] men with Western haircuts whom we meet on the street civilized? Shall we call a person enlightened just because he eats meat?" [Fukuzawa transl. 2008: 21–22]. In Fukuzawa's time, it was of course not customary to eat meat dishes.

At this point Fukuzawa goes on to clarify what he means by "spirit of civilization". Even after the observation of all specific differences between the two regions, Asia and Europe, there would still be a less tangible differentiating factor to be defined. It may be called "spiritual entity", and it is an almost invisible background to the obvious contrasts. That is difficult to describe, "but if we look at its real manifestations within present-day Asia and Europe, we can clearly see it is not illusory. Let us now call this the 'spirit of a people'.<sup>6</sup> In respect to time, it may be called 'the trend of the times'. In reference to persons, it may be called 'human sentiments'. In regard to a nation as a whole, it may be called 'a nation's ways' or 'national opinion' ... What I mean when I say that we should take European civilization as our goal is that we should turn to Europe in order to make the spirit of civilization ours" [Fukuzawa transl. 2008: 22–23].

Contrary to what many Japanese thought, Fukuzawa's thesis is that the first adaptive step should be the appropriation of a "spirit of civilization", and then it would be possible to assimilate the external achievements.

### Obstacles to Further Development of Japanese Society

What conclusions did Fukuzawa draw from his direct observation of Western conditions? In the first place, this experience opened up to him comparative perspectives on his own society. The impressions collected during his official travels obviously made him more aware of contrasts than he had previously been. On the social level, he came to stress several structural obstacles to further advance of civilization in Japan; this was most obviously the case with the emphasis on lineage and the hereditary stipends of the samurai class [Watanabe 2012: 397]. These institutionalized dividing lines affected the whole society, and they were only beginning to be questioned, even though the stagnating structures which they had helped to maintain were crumbling.

"The Japanese people suffered for many years under the yoke of despotism. Lineage was the basis of power. Even intelligent men were entirely dependent upon houses of high lineage. The whole age was, as it were, under the thumb of lineage. Throughout the land there was no room for human initiative; everything was in a condition of stagnation. But the creative powers of the human mind are irrepressible. *Even in all that stagnation, there was some progress,* and by the end of the Tokugawa period antipathy to lineage started fermenting" [Fukuzawa transl. 2008: 84, emphasis WS].

Fukuzawa knew from his own experience the estate system and its barriers against social mobility. They not only made the advancement of individuals from certain social strata almost impossible; they also blocked the energies of individuals at all social levels.

<sup>6</sup> It hardly needs to be noted that this "spirit of a people" has nothing to do with the Hegelian notion of a *Volksgeist*, as Maruyama writes, and of course all the less with "Volksgeist" in the National Socialist sense.

“I was born into a family of minor retainers in the service of a weak *fudai* daimyo during the time of the Tokugawa shogunate. When within the *han* (藩) I met some illustrious high retainer or vassal, I was always treated with contempt; even as a child I could not help but feel resentment. However, unless one also were of the same status one could not understand how I felt. The high retainers and vassals would, even today, be unable to imagine how I felt” [*Fukuzawa transl. 2008: 243–244*].

Due to the social power of lineage, the lower samurai found it especially difficult to improve their social position on the basis of their abilities.

### The Imbalance of Power

For Fukuzawa, the imbalance of power (*kenryoku no henjū* (権力の偏重) that had been characteristic of Japanese society for many centuries was another fatal problem. As he saw it, an unequal distribution of power had been a recurrent feature of Japanese history and resulted in lastingly one-sided power balances. This affected all social relations, even in the private sphere. People at lower levels of the hierarchy transmitted the oppression from above to those of even lowlier status. “If this ubiquitous cycle of dominance and submission could be broken and each individual established in his independence, prosperity and progress would follow” [*Watanabe 2012: 397*]. This is Watanabe’s reformulation of Fukuzawa’s ideas. “The Japanese warriors were raised amidst this kind of imbalance of power, the definitive rule of social relations right from the dawn of our history. They did not consider it shameful to be constantly subservient to someone else. We can see a marked difference between these men and the peoples of the West, who valued their own positions and status and who proclaimed their individual rights ... Every man submitted to overbearance from those above and demanded subservience from those below. Every man was both unreasonably oppressed and unreasonably oppressive. While bowing before one man, he was lording it over another man” [*Fukuzawa transl. 2008: 202*]. The inhibiting force of this imbalance of power in Japanese society exists since ancient times and exhibits this division between rulers and ruled. “Needless to say, the common people never asserted their own rights. Both religion and learning were under the control of the ruling class and never succeeded in becoming independent ... Whether in war or in peace, the whole fabric of social relationships, from the highest to the lowest, exhibited this imbalance of power” [*Fukuzawa transl. 2008: 206–207*]. Even a society striving to overcome this situation would still need a central government, but the participation of the people, including all social strata, would be essential. Fukuzawa indicates doubts about the role of the imperial family, whose position reflects the traditional imbalance: “Because warrior relationships were organized in this way, the maintenance of the system required that there be some kind of supreme authority. This authority supposedly rested in the imperial family” [*Fukuzawa transl. 2008: 203*].

When Fukuzawa raises the question why this imbalance of power was never seriously challenged, he notes – first and foremost – the lack of communication among the broader population; themes like social and political contradictions or divergent interests cutting across regional boundaries did not reach the level of public awareness and conversation. “Let us look at Tokugawa rule to see how the people who lived under this state of imbalance of power viewed the affairs of society, and how they conducted themselves. The

millions of Japanese at that time were closed up inside millions of individual boxes. They were separated from another by walls with little room to move around. The four-level class structure of samurai, farmers, artisans, and merchants froze human relationships along prescribed lines. Even within the samurai class there were distinctions in terms of stipends and offices" [*Fukuzawa transl. 2008: 209*]. This societal framework obstructed discussions about fundamental political and social questions.

### Horizons of Knowledge and Learning

On the individual level, Fukuzawa wants to change modes of thought and behaviour. Several chapters of his book are devoted to the clarification and critique of Neo-Confucian ideas about knowledge [*chi* 智] and virtue [*toku* 徳], compared to the western notions of "intellect" and "morals". Fukuzawa's extremely sharp criticism of Neo-Confucian foundations of ethics and morals was not only relevant to the interpretation of political domination; it also related to the private sphere. He defended the thesis that "the progress of civilization refers to both the intellectual and moral development of a people as a whole" [*Fukuzawa transl. 2008: 99*]. Here I cannot enter into the details of these themes, but I will at least note how strongly Fukuzawa exhorted every single Japanese to broaden their horizons and acquire knowledge of the world. This advocacy is linked to the development of a national consciousness, not yet victorious over the dominant particularist mentality that tended to focus on territory of a *daimyo* [see *Maruyama 1952 (1974): 323–368*]. A good example of the gradual extension of geographic-political consciousness is the following statement by Sakuma Shōzan (1811–1864), a politician and thinker of the late Tokugawa period: "From the age of twenty I understood that the common man is connected to a country (*kuni* 国, in the then dominant sense of a feudal domain, WS); from the age of thirty I understood that he is connected to the realm; from the age of forty I understood that he is connected to the five continents" [quoted from *Maruyama German transl. 2020: 56*].

The intellectual opening towards the West had already been prepared during the phase of seclusion, and the turn towards a learning attitude towards the West had begun some decades before the publication of Fukuzawa's book. Together with a radical shift in perceptions of the West, the Japanese image of the Chinese world order changed dramatically, especially in the decades before and after the Sino-Japanese war of 1894–1895 [for a detailed discussion, see *Watanabe 2012, chs 17 and 18: 315–352; and Zachmann 2009*].

### Communication and the Public Sphere

A modern national state necessarily needs a political public sphere. But before such a sphere can take shape and find expression in institutions like – e.g. – newspapers, communication must in principle be possible. Fukuzawa was quick to grasp the importance of a public sphere where the problems of internal reforms and of Japan's situation in the world could be exposed to discussion and controversy. In this regard, too, the Western European countries with their functioning public spheres were for him models to be followed. On the other hand, his call for the creation of a political public sphere was not without historical presuppositions. Even the Tokugawa shogunal government had, before

its fall in 1868, made some attempts to initiate free discussions. Recent historical scholarship, especially works dealing with political and intellectual history, has thrown light on some developments during the late Tokugawa period, and drawn on Habermas's work on the public sphere to analyze them. For example, Mitani Taichirō [2017: 50–52] speaks of a “network of political communication”, already emerging under the *bakuhau* 幕藩 system (the combination of shogunal government and autonomous feudal domains). A political community, such as the national state, cannot emerge without political communication, and the latter must in turn draw on certain preconditions. Mitani asks whether a literary public sphere existed in Japan before the beginning of the Meiji renovation in 1868; his positive answer is based on the claim that graduates of the *Shōheikō*, the schools for classical Chinese education founded in the domains, pioneered such an innovation. This was a horizontally integrated stratum of intellectuals, in control of a network of communication, and an intellectual community does seem to have been taking shape.

The tendency to discuss political questions in a countrywide context was also, even if in a very restricted social framework, evident in the principles of the so-called Charter Oath, published in April 1868. This document consisted of five articles, nominally formulated by the fifteen years old Emperor Mutsuhito (later known as Meiji Tennō), but in fact written by the small group of court nobles and samurai that had engineered the restoration of imperial rule. Article 1 read: “Deliberative assemblies shall be established and all matters decided by public discussion.” But Watanabe Hiroshi [2012: 413] comments, in a critical vein: “At the time, the Meiji government, which had purportedly been founded on the concept of ‘public deliberation’, was still neglecting to create a national assembly, suppressing criticism, and labelling those who rose up against such oppressions as traitors.” Fukuzawa himself stressed the extraordinarily narrow social basis of “intellectual forces” involved in the process, when he discussed “the causes of the successful revolution of 1868” [Fukuzawa transl. 2008: 88]. The driving forces of the innovative movement that led to the renovation (*Meiji ishin* 明治維新) were, statistically speaking, a very small minority: only some five million people, out of a population of about thirty millions, were in one way or another involved. Fukuzawa continues: By contrast, the weight of public opinion in the West is something greater than the talent and knowledge of each individual in that country. The explanation of this discrepancy lies in Japanese custom. By “long-ingrained custom” in England or France people are used to taking part in national affairs, whereas in Japan common people are indifferent to national affairs, “they do not have even enough spirit to argue about the difference between political factions and public discussions” [Fukuzawa transl. 2008: 94]. For that very reason, it was necessary to “change our habits” (those of each individual as a member of the population, WS).

### Government, Political Form and Nation

The limited horizon of the government was not least due to the state of the national polity (*kokutai* 国体). The latter was not a free or democratic one; it was embedded in a specific system of power, backed up by the Japanese tradition. How did Fukuzawa see these limitations?

Apart from his own direct observations, his interpretation of European civilization drew on various major works by Western authors, such as the American edition of

François Guizot's *General History of Civilization in Europe* (9th American edition, 1870; French original, 1828) and John Stuart Mill's books *Considerations on Representative Government* (1861) and *Principles of Political Economy* (1848). As a participant observer of the transformation of Japanese society, he carefully weighed the arguments for and against specific political forms; he reconstructed Guizot's ideas about monarchy and republic, and then moved on to a comparison of Japan and China. He strove to clarify implications for the relationship between ruler and subject. Consequently, he raised the question of the real meaning corresponding to the Japanese concept of national polity (*kokutai* 国体) and discussed the problem of an adequate political form in that context. If the social fabric was breaking down, the political system had to face that test. What did this mean for the national polity? [See *Fukuzawa transl. 2008*: 25–30.] It is crucial to the understanding of Fukuzawa's thought that he did not regard the national polity as unchanging or essential for the existence of the country; this is particularly important because of the later canonization of *kokutai*, however, without a clear definition in constitutional terms until 1925. For Fukuzawa, the development of civilization was a higher priority than the preservation of an existing political system or form. Long before the crisis-ridden developments in the first half of the twentieth century, he paved the way for a relativization of the political regime: "In view of the above, monarchy is not necessarily good, but neither is a democratic government necessarily good. The political form (*seiji* 政治; this refers here to the political system in a broad sense, and could therefore also be translated as "national polity", WS) is only one element in society (*jinkan kōsai* 人間交際).<sup>7</sup> It should not be taken as the criterion of an entire civilization. If that form proves inconvenient, it should be changed; if it does not, it can be kept. Civilization is the only purpose of mankind, but there are many roads to it. Reasonable progress will come only through a long process of trial and error ... "Hence, in evaluating forms of government, our criterion must be the level of civilization to which a people has attained. There never has been a perfect civilization, and there never has been a perfect form of government" [*Fukuzawa transl. 2008*: 57].

But above all else, it must be remembered that if a higher level of civilization is to be reached, it is not enough for the country to have a government; it needs a nation. "Therefore, we might even say that Japan has never been a single country. If today an incident should break out which pitted the whole of the Japanese nation against a foreign country ... we could calculate in advance how many would actually be interested in fighting and how many would be spectators. This is precisely what I meant when I once took the position that in Japan there is a government but no nation" [*Fukuzawa transl. 2008*: 187].<sup>8</sup>

### Preconditions of National Independence: Foreign Relations in the National Consciousness

At the beginning of his book, Fukuzawa had presented a model of civilizational development where Western European societies exemplified the highest stage; in the tenth and last chapter, titled "A discussion of our national independence", he turns somewhat

<sup>7</sup> At this time, there was no accepted Japanese translation of the concept of society. The expression used by Fukuzawa means literally "the way humans behave to each other".

<sup>8</sup> This formulation is first found in Fukuzawa's 1874 book, *An Encouragement of Learning*, ch. 4.

unexpectedly to other aspects of the West, so emphatically that it results in a contradictory picture. He takes a look at the *reality* of international relations and describes Japan's subordinate position in the "Western European state system" that has now been extended to Asian countries. Even so, the perspective that he thinks is opening up for Japan can only be understood in light of the preceding analyses of society, economy and politics. The raising of Japan's civilizational level remains Fukuzawa's main concern, but now it is to be discussed in the framework of international relations. The explicit theme is "national independence", but it presupposes the comprehensive theory of civilization. Fukuzawa distinguishes three positions in the Japanese debate on the opening of the country in 1853, its consequences and the possible reactions to them; all three try to respond to the main challenge of the times: how to maintain and consolidate national independence. But all three lack understanding of the need to extend this debate to the broader population.

The first position was defended by scholars who invoked so-called "Imperial way Learning" (*kōgakusha* 皇学者). These people, whom Fukuzawa describes as "superficial", maintained that the absence of well-founded political decisions was due to the neglect of "tradition". Consequently, they demanded a return to the past. This meant that the long-forgotten "true relations between sovereign and subjects should be revived. But now the notion of subject referred not only to vassals obeying a lord, but to the whole population. The 'doctrines' of national polity (*kokutai ron* 国体論), supposedly contained in old Japanese mythology, would strengthen public sentiments. However, when it came to the crunch, these scholars argued that it did not really matter whether their ideas were old or new. Then they were not demanding a genuine return to the past; the important thing was to develop public sentiments loyal to the imperial family. Against this view, Fukuzawa emphasized that for the last seven centuries or so, since the beginning of shogunal rule in 1192, Japanese people had not had any personal experience of the imperial family. It was not true that the restoration of imperial rule (*ōsei fukko* 王政復古) in 1868 had been based on such experiences; rather, the restoration was entirely due to the people's desire to reform the shogunal government of their time, and there was no way of recreating close ties overnight" [*Fukuzawa transl.* 2008: 231–232].

A second group, namely Christian intellectuals criticized the superficiality of contemporary sentiments; being "aware that even use of the national polity theory" cannot avail the situation, they preached "a theory of spiritual renovation through Christianity, so as to rectify men's errors, bestow spiritual peace and enlightenment, convert and thereby unify the masses, and establish a single great purpose at which mankind can aim" [*Fukuzawa transl.* 2008: 232]. After a careful examination of Christian principles Fukuzawa objects to this line of argumentation: "The Christian religion should not be spread about, extended to the political sphere, and be set up as the foundation for the nation's independence ... The theory that we can establish the basis of national independence by propagating a religion and extending it to the political sphere should be branded as a mistake" [*Fukuzawa transl.* 2008: 235]. As he saw it, what was needed was – in the last instance – to develop a patriotic attitude to the questions of international trade, war and peace [*Fukuzawa transl.* 2008: 234].

The third alternative, proposed by some scholars versed in classical Chinese learning (*kangakusha* 漢学者) was to rely not only on nostalgia and feelings inherited from the good old times, but to make the most of the knowledge possessed by state officials.

Fukuzawa was explicitly opposed to this approach. For "in the final analysis, this is the school of thought which would control the lower classes with the old Confucian ideas of ritual, music, and chastisement, and would attempt to bolster people's hearts by a combination of paternalism and law. It therefore cannot at all be made to suit the present social conditions" [*Fukuzawa transl. 2008: 236*]. If this school of thought, based on classical Chinese education, were to be followed, the knowledge needed for political decisions would be sought exclusively among government personnel and state officials, while the people would be barred from participation. Instead of basing the judgment of situations on the knowledge acquired by individuals, a narrow stratum of officials would claim a cognitive monopoly.

Fukuzawa thought that Japan found itself in a dangerous situation: "Our nation is facing a critical period at the present time, but the people do not realize it. They seem to be happily relaxed after having, as it were, thrown off the yoke of the past." Everywhere one heard the comment: "Men say our country is in trouble, but exactly what trouble are they talking about?" In many respects the general conditions of life had improved since the administrative unification of the state in 1872. But the present condition, comparable to illness (*yamai* 病), was beginning to cause concern. The first step would be to find a name for this illness, then it would be necessary to clarify its character. Fukuzawa calls the illness "foreign relations" (*gaikoku kōsai* 外国交際) [*Fukuzawa transl. 2008: 236–237*].<sup>9</sup> But this expression had to be clarified. If trade was the reason why foreigners arrived in Japan, then an economic understanding of Japan's relationship and attitude to the Western nations was needed. What kind of knowledge was needed for the people to wake up to this problem?

How the Western nations grew rich would be better understood if international trade was taken into consideration. In Fukuzawa's terms, these were (in his times) "manufacturer nations", while Japan was a "producer nation", and as long as it remained in that condition, it would – contrary to the West – be disadvantaged in trade. Moreover, the Japanese samurai were an unproductive social stratum, incapable of accumulating wealth. "Again, the Western nations have grown rich through manufacture. Their populations increase year by year because of the ever new achievements of civilization. England, for instance, is outstanding in this regard." The Englishmen scattered all over the world contribute to the successes of the English economy. From this Fukuzawa concludes that "when civilization progressively moves forward and human affairs go well, population increases" [*Fukuzawa transl. 2008: 239–240*]. But how can a country control such an increase, which leads to scarcity of space and foodstuff etc.?

In view of the unproductive character of the samurai, Japanese economists of the times, learning from Western economists who were confronted with similar problems before, were experimenting with various plans for the strengthening of the economy. One proposal was to "export goods manufactured domestically and to import foodstuffs and clothing from more naturally blessed nations". A second proposal was to send Japanese citizens abroad, where they would become active "colonists" (*shokumin* 植民 / 殖民). But that would in Fukuzawa's opinion be expensive and might not be effective. He adds that "it is not easy to step in from an alien land, mingle with them [the foreigners], and hope to gain

<sup>9</sup> This expression means literally "interaction with foreign countries". The translation "foreign relations" suggests a reference to diplomacy as an activity of the state; but what Fukuzawa has in mind is a broader field.

some benefit ... Therefore, a third plan would be to make profits by lending capital abroad and putting the interest into domestic circulation” [Fukuzawa transl. 2008: 238–240]. Finally, a fourth plan was to be based on a strong military. There could be no doubt about the need to build up a unified imperial army and thus to defend the independence of the nation against threats from abroad. Fukuzawa concludes his excursus into economics with the recommendation that Japan might compete with the Western powers in international finance. He asks where the funds for rising expenses due to the living standards rising with the advances of civilization come from, and finds the answer – to a significant extent – in less advantaged parts of the world: “In the underdeveloped countries, where the poverty of the whole world tends to become concentrated. To borrow the capital of civilized countries and pay them interest makes the rich richer and the poor poorer” [Fukuzawa transl. 2008: 240]. Lending to poorer countries and using the interest to finance a part of rising expenses at home might be of some use. Nevertheless, lurking in the background is the concern that Japan could slip into a similar situation as the poorer countries. But in the final instance, Fukuzawa takes the view that a purely economic approach provides no satisfactory solutions.

### **Equal Rights for Everybody in Japan?**

After 1853, two aspects of the Japanese situation were decisive for foreign relations: In the first place, knowledge about foreign and more specifically Western powers was insufficient. Secondly, real contacts between Japanese and Westerners were still rare, even if increasing with the arrival of traders and diplomats from abroad, and practical dealings with them could result in conflicts. Fukuzawa therefore finds it necessary to deal with the influence of relations with foreigners on the behaviour of “our people”. In that context, the legal status of foreigners in Japan, defined in the first treaties about trade and friendship, becomes relevant.

Independently of this, a debate on theories of equal rights had begun among intellectuals, and Fukuzawa responds to it in a chapter on equality in interpersonal relations. He does not accept the commonly advanced arguments for equal rights; he describes them as “not elaborate enough, for they are not arguments based on personal experience but arguments set down for the benefit of other people. Hence, when people discuss the harm of an imbalance of power [in Japan], their arguments cannot avoid being superficial.” From this scepticism about the theory of equal rights in interpersonal relations among Japanese – because of the lasting imbalance of power – he moves on to discuss applications of the same theory in the area of foreign relations and in the context of power struggles with foreigners. A comparison based on facts in both fields shows that there is no abstract equality between nations, even less than between individuals from different social strata in the same society [Fukuzawa transl. 2008: 244–245].

Because of the presence of foreigners in Japan, Fukuzawa must now briefly deal with problems concerning them. What happens to the theory of equal rights when it is not a matter of interpersonal relations between Japanese, but between individuals of different nations? In such cases, too, practice reveals a *de facto* inequality. “However, while there have been, ever since the foreigners came to our country and began trading, clear provisions in their treaty documents for equality between them and us, in actual practice things

have been different" [*Fukuzawa transl. 2008: 240*]. It should be noted that like other intellectuals of the times, Fukuzawa saw the opening of the country as a positive development: "If the ports had not been opened, not even a learned man could have predicted when the power of human intelligence would have tipped the scales in its favor. Fortunately, Commodore Perry's arrival in the 1850s provided the favorable opportunity for reform" [*Fukuzawa transl. 2008: 86*]. To illustrate the negative consequences, Fukuzawa quotes from a report by his disciple Obata Tokujirō: "How beautiful [Commodore] Perry's words, and how unseemly his deeds! His speech and conduct were diametrically opposed." After the Japanese had experienced the behaviour of Perry and his people, as well as the effects of the 1858 treaty about trade and friendship with the US, the situation in Tokyo appeared as follows: "When they [the foreigners] get into an argument with anyone, be he a patrolman, a passerby, or a carrier-bearer, the Westerners behave insolently, they punch and kick at will, and the cowardly, weak common people lack the courage to pay them back in kind because they say [with resignation], 'they are foreigners' ... It is disgusting just to look at this" [*Fukuzawa transl. 2008: 241*].

Fukuzawa argues that the Japanese are not yet prepared for interaction with Western foreigners. In actual fact, no equal rights prevail in this context; despite "lip service to equality of rights, in reality the idea of equality and equal rights is unrealized. Because we have already lost our equal rights with foreign countries, and yet nobody pays any attention to this, the conduct of our citizens cannot help but deteriorate day by day" [*Fukuzawa transl. 2008: 241–242*]. But why is it, he asks himself, that his compatriots – the higher nobility and the samurai as well as the commoners – are incapable of adequate behaviour towards diplomats and traders visiting their country? He notes two reasons. In the first place, the defenders of the equal rights theory, originally related to native Japanese but now supposed to be applied to foreign visitors, are mostly intellectuals of samurai origin, who did not have personal experience of oppression, but were rather on the side of the oppressors. Secondly, the Japanese were only at the very beginning of personal contacts with foreigners from the West. In 1875, this was a new theme in Fukuzawa's thought; he knew the internal Japanese aspects of the problem from his own experience, but encounters with people of foreign origin and nationality made him more and more aware of tensions between real life and the abstract theories of equality developed in the 1860s and 1870s. It should be noted that this criticism also affected his view of the emerging oppositional Freedom and Popular Rights Movement (*Jiyū minken undō*). Some of its supporters were, as he thought, making premature demands.

After this intermezzo, Fukuzawa returns to the question of equal rights in international relations and reiterates his findings about the gap between theory and practice. His first example concerns the relationship between England and India. Needless to say, he knew that India was an English colony, but he thought that this condition could nevertheless be seen as a mirror "which can reflect the situation of Japan" [*Fukuzawa transl. 2008: 244–245*]. As he saw it, the methods of British colonial administration in India were cruel and heartless. He comments on the ways of excluding Indians despite their abilities and achievements: "As regards employment of men of talent in the Indian government, Englishmen and natives have equal rights, and there are laws providing for examinations that test both ability and learning. However, the testing of native Indians is confined to those under eighteen years of age; the examination material is, of course, in English, and

if one is not conversant with things in England he is unable to answer the questions. As a result, by the age of eighteen the native Indians have to finish both native subjects and in addition English subjects, then compete with Englishmen on the basis of English studies. If they are not better than the Englishmen they cannot pass the examinations. If one completes his studies at the age of nineteen, because of the age limit he is disqualified regardless of his talent, learning, or personal qualities, and is not permitted to take part in any local government affairs. The English are not content with these heartlessly severe laws; they even enact laws by which the examinations are always to be held in London ... Such a disadvantageous position defies comparison. The English tyranny is truly clever" [*Fukuzawa transl. 2008: 245–246*].<sup>10</sup> This is in fact the obverse of the quintessentially civilized England to which Fukuzawa so frequently referred elsewhere.

Another example, more important for Fukuzawa, is Japan's involvement in international trade. Fukuzawa does not only note the given unfavourable conditions in this field; he also condemns the attitude of his compatriots, and that applies to the government as well as ordinary people, to intellectuals and state officials. "And so we look on in indifference at matters connected with foreign countries. This is one reason we Japanese people have not *contended for power with foreign countries*. Those who know nothing of a situation cannot be expected to be concerned about it" [*Fukuzawa transl. 2008: 247–248, emphasis WS*]. To put it another way, the Japanese should study what they are in for when they establish relations with Western powers.

The passionate tone of these statements, different from the preceding chapters, continues when Fukuzawa takes a look at the United States, its history and the record of its behaviour towards Japan: "Whose country was present-day America originally? Is it not true that the Indians who owned the land were driven away by the white men and now the roles of master and guest were switched around? Hence the civilization of present-day America is really the civilization of the white man and cannot be called the civilization of America. What about the countries of the East and the islands in Oceania? In all places touched by the Europeans are there any which have developed their power, attained benefits, and preserved their independence?" Fukuzawa asks what had been the outcome of Western domination in Persia, India, Siam, Luzon and Java, and – more generally: "What does this so-called development mean?" [*Fukuzawa transl. 2008: 249*]. He also finds developments in China after the Opium War disturbing. In this vast country the Westerners had so far only settled on the coasts, but the probable outcome was that China too would become nothing but a garden for Europeans. To sum up, Fukuzawa casts serious doubt on the idea that colonial domination (a term he did not use) has benefited the oppressed peoples by initiating economic and social development. The Japanese could only find this misconception plausible because they knew so little about the world. He exhorts every single Japanese to seek and use antidotes to this ignorance.

To conclude, Fukuzawa's view on international relations and Japanese ways of shaping them may be summed up in three points. First, he criticizes the intellectuals who think only in short-term perspectives and rejoice in the new opening to the world, "seeing that social conditions have changed in recent times, and call this civilization. They think that

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<sup>10</sup> Fukuzawa drew on a report by his disciple Baba Tatsui (1850–1888), who studied in London from 1870 to 1878.

our civilization is a gift bestowed on us by foreign relations; the more foreign relations flourish the more our civilization can advance apace. But what they call civilization is merely its outward appearance, in which I have no interest. Even if such civilization were refined to very high degree, if our people had not even a shred of independent spirit, civilization would be of no use for us. We could not call that Japanese civilization" [*Fukuzawa transl.* 2008: 249].

A second point is formulated as follows: "Certain scholars hold that, since foreign relations are based on universal justice and men are not necessary intent on exploiting others, nations should trade freely, ply back and forth freely, and merely let nature take its course. If we were to lose our rights and our benefits, we would have only ourselves to blame. It is a poor principle not to cultivate oneself and yet seek much from others. And there is truth in what they say. Yet, though in private relationships between individuals there must indeed be this kind of trust, relations between countries and private relationships are completely different things." It should be remembered how until recently in Japan the interests of the individual feudal domains were precisely not regulated on a basis that followed principles of Japanese justice. "If this was the relation with regard to the various *han* within Japan itself, what is the likelihood that we can rely on universal justice when it comes to relations with foreigners who have come from different areas from opposite directions of the globe? This is unbelievably loose thinking ... As long as there are countries which set up national governments, there can be no way to eliminate self-interests. If there is no way to eliminate their self-interests, then we too must have our self-interests in any contact with them" [*Fukuzawa transl.* 2008: 251]. In addition, it should be taken into account that images of defeat survive in the memory of nations, and may even be consciously kept alive, in order to stimulate the desire for revenge. Fukuzawa cites examples from conflicts within Japan during the middle ages as well as the wars between Prussia and France. "Both sets of behavior stemmed from a wicked spirit of revenge, so they cannot be termed praiseworthy. However, from them it is possible to know how people suffer when they cannot defend their nation" [*Fukuzawa transl.* 2008: 251].

A third group of patriots, "somewhat more far-seeing than the *jōi* 攘夷 (expel the barbarians) advocates, has no wish indiscriminately to expel all foreigners, but sees the problem of our relations with foreign powers as basically a matter of simple military weakness ... For instance, there is no lack of men in society who hate foreigners, but their hatred of them is misplaced. They do not hate what should be hated, and hate what should not be hated. Harboring jealousy and envy, they are angered by trivial matters they see in front of their noses. They bring harm to Japan by their assassinations and their advocacy of the expulsion of foreigners ... As I stated above, proposals to assassinate and expel foreigners are not worth discussing; even efforts to expand military preparedness are of no practical avail" [*Fukuzawa transl.* 2008: 252–253]. The goal must be the preservation of the independence of the country, and the means to that end is the civilizing of the nation. Fukuzawa accordingly calls for "national independence through personal independence". But in pursuing this path, one should not expect every single citizen to become actively involved. "Moreover, although I make independence the goal, I am not trying to turn all men in society into political debaters, nor do I wish people to be engaged in such debates from morning to night. Every man fulfils a different function. I only wish that their intense preoccupation with their own endeavours would increase their sensitivity to what bears

on the country's independence ... National independence is the goal, and Japan's present civilization is the means of attaining that goal" [*Fukuzawa transl.* 2008: 255–256].

### Concluding Remarks

Nationalism, in 1875 still of a defensive kind, was one side of Fukuzawa Yukichi's thought. Another side was his effort to achieve – through his writings – an “internal spiritual change” among his compatriots. The Chinese scholar Ou Jianying, who teaches in Japan and has also translated Maruyama Masao's texts on Fukuzawa into Chinese, summarizes this aspect of Fukuzawa's work as follows: For him, the progress of material civilization, supported by the policies of the Meiji government – the growth of industry and trade, the increase in national wealth, and the military buildup – was of course important, but non-material civilizing was more fundamental. On that level, the main task was to “change the mentality of people in this country” and inculcate “the spirit of independence and self-respect” (*dokuritsu jison* 独立自主). It was not enough to establish a constitutional form of government; a free and autonomous spirit of citizenship was also needed, and only on that basis could the essence of constitutionalism be realized [*Ou Jianying* 2016: 67].

Fukuzawa's consistent and influential orientation towards “developed” Western European societies should not be taken to mean that he saw them as having already reached the highest possible level of civilization. Whatever his most emphatic formulations may sometimes suggest, he did not regard them as a model to be unconditionally imitated by Japan on its way to modernity. His main concern was to raise the level of Japanese civilization, so as to guarantee political independence and qualify for a prominent role in world affairs. That would only be possible if people were not blinded by the material and technical achievements of Western societies, and if they all – and the nation as a whole – strove for autonomy and self-respect in thought and behaviour. In the field of international relations, readiness for conflict and ability to cooperate were equally necessary. But he also stressed that decisions about these alternatives should not be left to the government alone; they should involve the whole population.

That was Fukuzawa's position in 1875, when he published the work most lastingly associated with his name. The story of his attitudes and contributions to later political decisions will not be discussed here. The whole trajectory of the Meiji era (1868–1912) was conditioned by the international situation in Asia and by pressures of Western powers; no self-contained pursuit of Japanese projects was possible.

After Japan's defeat in the Asian-Pacific war (1931–1945), Maruyama Masao wrote: “Among the nations of the East, Japan is the only one to have lost her virginity so far as nationalism is concerned. In contrast to other Far Eastern areas, where nationalism brims with youthful energy and is charged with adolescent exuberance, Japan alone has completed one full cycle of nationalism: birth, maturity, decline” [*Maruyama (1951)1969: 137*]. Japan's road from 1875 had had its ups and downs, but it ended in disaster. In his concluding remarks on the three-volume publication of lectures explaining Fukuzawa's book, Maruyama mentions an interesting encounter. An Iranian female student had asked for permission to sit in on the course (it was optional, and there were no marks). He was surprised at the request, because of the very limited number of female students at his

faculty of Tokyo University, and all the more so because this was a foreign woman, "dressed in black from top to toe". During consultation, he asked the student why she was interested in this course. "Her answer was: 'My country, Iran, was once a uniquely powerful empire, proud of the excellence of its culture. With the advent of modernity, it sank to the level of a colony, and only now [at the beginning of the 1980s, WS] is it beginning to overcome this condition. By contrast, Japan did not become a victim of Western imperialist aggression; in the nineteenth century, it was the only East Asian country that managed to build an independent state. Because I want to know more about the Meiji renovation, I would like to study Fukuzawa, its leading thinker.' I remember responding by stating an opinion which I had often expressed before: if she saw modern Japan as a model, she should not study the Meiji renovation only as a success story, but also as a lesson showing how *not* to realize reforms" [*Maruyama* 1986, v. 3: 328–329].

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# Modern Japan and Multiple Modernities: A Case Study

MISHIMA KENICHI\*

Moderní Japonsko a různorodé modernity: Případová studie

**Abstract:** Transformation studies should be a key topic for the comparative analysis of civilizations. Their most important task is to deal with the changes to world-views and cultural semantics inherited from axial traditions, changes resulting from the emergence of modern society and its radically innovative normative turn. To put it another way, the question relates to modern discursive reworkings of path-dependent figures of thought. In the context of such processes, discourses on identity intertwine with more or less critically oriented discourses on culture and society. For non-European countries, and very emphatically for Japan, Northwestern Europe is an almost exclusive domain of reference, notwithstanding eventual condemnations of European “decadence” or – as the case may be – capitalist contradictions. But when some critical distance from Europe is achieved, it combines easily with returns to a supposedly primordial native legacy, even with the illusory belief that this legacy can inspire a transformative creation of something new in human history. Such intellectual phenomena occur, with significant variations, across a broad political spectrum. This essay discusses a few exemplary Japanese cases.

**Keywords:** identity discourses; modernity; Japanese tradition; Nanbara Shigeru; Uchimura Kanzō; Katō Shūichi; *ie* society

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## Introductory Remarks

The highly ramified debate on the idea of multiple modernities involves not only themes from the comparative history of civilizations, but also diverse intertwinings of discourses on identity and on questions of orientation, resulting from cultural contacts and frictions in the modern world. The comparative history of civilizations is most relevant when we are dealing with the different origins of modern societies and the corresponding transformative processes. Path-dependent changes of premodern societies into radically new formations with new normative claims – in other words: the normative turn to modernity – raise particularly provocative questions when the civilizational horizon expands beyond the Occidental line of development; this applies to the level of historical inquiry as well as that of philosophical reconstruction.<sup>1</sup> The way of reflecting on the transformation of a premodern civilization varies from case to case, and these variations are an integral part of multiple modernities.

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<sup>1</sup> I understand this novelty – provisionally – in the sense of Augustine’s formulation, quoted by Hannah Arendt: “initium ut esse creatus homo” (man was created in order to make beginning possible); but also with reference to Walter Benjamin’s interpretation of a short story included in Goethe’s *Elective Affinities*, where he speaks of “the youth’s saving decision”, and of a “courageous resolution”, sufficient to interrupt fate [Benjamin 1974: 170].

As for the study of the abovementioned interferences, it is tempting to focus on the field where discourses on identity meet the problems of orientation arising from perceived deformations of modernity, social or cultural. This is where “cultural encounters”, as they are called in festive speeches relying on popularized science, take place.<sup>2</sup> Here we would need a vast spectrum of case studies, ranging from the debates among Russian intellectuals on westernizing or nativist orientations, through the ongoing Chinese discussion on the challenged self-understanding of the Middle Kingdom in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, to the postcolonial controversies in previously colonized countries, where European cultural hegemony is no longer self-evident, but consensual solutions on domestic grounds are hardly on offer.

The following analysis will deal with four examples of such interference in Japanese discussions, and try to show that ethnocentric aspects appear even in the structure of arguments developed by the intellectual opposition.

### **A Rector’s Speech on the Day of the Foundation of the Realm: Calling for the Awakening of a New Japan**

On 11 February 1946, i.e. on the day when the so-called foundation of the realm was celebrated, the newly appointed rector of the Imperial Tokyo University (as it was still called), Nanbara Shigeru (1889–1974) gave a speech in the main aula of the university.<sup>3</sup> Its title was “On the creation of a new Japanese culture” (or, as we can also translate the Japanese original, “On the creation of culture for a new Japan”). Every member of the audience – which included many students who had with great difficulties returned from the battlefield – could understand the word *new* as a decisive rejection by the rector and his university of the old political system responsible for the lost war. The speech was meant to be an appeal for a new beginning in Japan. But the day on which it was delivered had, alongside the Emperor’s birthday, been one of the most important symbolic dates of the defeated regime. Ever since the Meiji restoration in 1868, the whole nation had celebrated the act of foundation, supposedly accomplished by the imaginary emperor Jimmu – a central figure in Japanese myths of origin – some 2600 years ago. These ceremonies linked national pride to the prestige of uninterrupted dynastic rule.

It is striking that a respected and influential professor of political science, actively involved in postwar public debates, should have chosen this symbolic date of the prewar *Tennō* system to call – in very emphatic terms – for the creation of a new culture. Was this a case of performative contradiction? Can we, despite the obvious political break, detect a connotation of continuity and integrity? In the ruins of Germany, nobody would have wanted to be reminded that 20 April was Hitler’s birthday. Just imagine the wave of indignation if Karl Jaspers had given his speech at the reopening of Heidelberg University on that day.<sup>4</sup>

During the fifteen years’ war that had begun with the Japanese invasion of continental China, Nanbara had always maintained a well-balanced distance from the militaristic

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. the description of encounters by Löwith [1990: 65]; but I would add the aspect of emerging novelty.

<sup>3</sup> In the course of postwar democratization, the name was shortened to Tokyo University.

<sup>4</sup> See Jaspers [1951].

political regime, without risking censorship or arrest, at a time when almost all well-known leftists or even Marxist sympathizers among his colleagues at the Imperial University lost their positions. His conviction about Japan's significance as a "world-historical nation", as expressed in the preface to his major work on *State and Religion*, published in 1942, made him immune to suspicion by the authoritarian state [Nanbara 2014: 11].

Nanbara's historical reputation rests not only on his leading role in postwar intellectual life, but also on the fact that he was the teacher of the famous scholar Maruyama Masao. He was an evangelical Christian and had been involved in the Free Church movement.<sup>5</sup> But he also shared the typical modern Japanese admiration for Kant's philosophy of enlightenment and the tradition of German idealism that followed in its wake. Nevertheless, his whole political thought reflects an underlying patriotism that is not easy to define. The following discussion will seek to clarify this point.

The message of the abovementioned speech can be summed up in three points.<sup>6</sup> *First*, prewar Japan was characterized by a self-destructive chauvinism, rooted – as Nanbara saw it – in a state theology. This professor of political science, who during the first postwar decade became a kind of public conscience, argued that the official thinking on affairs of state had lacked a minimum of rationality. But this lack of rationality is, in the last instance, due to the Japanese tradition. Nanbara adds the somewhat surprising comment that Japanese history has not known anything comparable to the Renaissance and the Reformation in Europe. *Second*, the Japanese are now facing a new challenge, and must respond to it by inventing a new culture that would empower them to become a sovereign political subject. For Nanbara, who was familiar with German intellectual history and a specialist on Fichte's thought, National Socialism was a disastrous but temporary deviation from the authentic tradition represented by Kant and Luther, to which the Germans could and should now return. Japan had no such background, and therefore it was necessary to create something new, or as Nanbara also said, a "new national spirit". *Third*, the Japanese tradition nevertheless contains some potentials that can help to overcome the present misery. For the Japanese have a long record of receiving stimuli from foreign cultures and transforming them in specific and distinctive ways. If they continue this tradition and retain the ideals of "our distant ancestors", inherent in the foundation of the realm, they will certainly be able to serve both the nation and humanity with new ideals. Taking a very surprising turn, Nanbara maintains that only in this way can the Japanese do justice to the "true eternity and the divine mission of our people in the world". Whose god is he talking about?

Readers of this text are bound to notice a certain discrepancy between the negative judgment of Japanese cultural foundations at the beginning, focusing on the irrationality of national theology, and the pathetic invocation of the deeds of the ancestors at the end. We will, for the time being, put this question aside and focus on to background assumptions that shape the whole text. They go back to the abovementioned major work on *State and Religion*. One of them concerns the tacit acceptance of the European trajectory,

<sup>5</sup> Uchimura Kanzō, the founder of this movement, preferred the English label "non-church movement". This was not a way to demarcate it from an official state Church (in Japan, a non-Christian country, there was no such thing); it was directed against the Church founded by American missionaries in Japan. But the movement had much in common with the free Churches known in European countries.

<sup>6</sup> The speech was printed in Nanbara [2004: 10–22]. Because of the brevity of the text, details of page numbers have been omitted.

including the foundational episodes of the Reformation and the Renaissance, as a model.<sup>7</sup> National Socialism appears as an error, a deviation from this great humanistic-religious mainstream. The other basic assumption is the universal meaning of Christianity, understood in a free-church sense and linked to an emphasis on individual conscience. Christian communication with god was to function as the integrative medium of a statist society. A non-Japanese reader might ask: Is the settling of accounts with the indigenous tradition leading Nanbara to imagine a Europeanization of Japan through Christianization? Is that a realistic or an acceptable perspective?

Of course Nanbara knew that modern Japan has hardly shared the Northwestern European experience of modernity and the internalizing of Christian faith. But he sticks to his fundamental thesis that a modern state cannot do without a shared religiosity; this is, according to his understanding of Europe, the precondition for the existence of citizens committed to reason and freedom. This may be seen as an anticipation of the claim later made by the famous German legal scholar Ernst Böckenförde, that the modern liberal and constitutional state depends on presuppositions which it cannot create. Further interpretation of the speech will inevitably lead to speculation. Perhaps he wanted to convert Japan to Christianity. Perhaps he believed in the renovation of Japan through the awakening of an old spirit. In fact, he used the expression “*Shōwa* renovation”, popular in chauvinist circles during the pre-fascist period.<sup>8</sup> Most plausibly, the whole argumentation suggests that this leading representative of the intellectual opposition that had kept quiet during the war had a cultural and political agenda: he wanted the Japanese to accept a de-contextualized version of German traditions distilled from pietist and free church sources, and this was somehow to be reconciled with a distilled substance of Japanese “ideals”. The abovementioned discrepancy between two readings of the tradition, one emphasizing irrational state theology and the other a capacity for creative learning, went unnoticed by both speaker and listeners.

In this way, we get a certain glimpse of the meaning behind the somewhat shocking reference to “the true eternity and the divine mission of our people”. According to Nanbara, Japan had long ago experienced a centuries-long cultural struggle, resulting in the incorporation of Buddhism and Confucianism, despite their contrasts with the native heritage. The West had also needed many centuries to transform the Greek idea of the state into Christian modernity. Nanbara admitted that such an outcome could not be expected from the short period that had elapsed since the Meiji renovation.<sup>9</sup> But he hoped that a new beginning after defeat in war would enable the Japanese to create something quite new, by incorporating the best aspects of modern Europe and at the same time reviving the ideals

<sup>7</sup> This tacit acceptance of a European model was also a factor in the debate on the history of capitalism in Japan, conducted in very passionate terms by Marxist professors and intellectuals in the 1930s. Most of the participants regarded the European history of capitalism, as outlined by Marx and Engels in the Communist Manifesto, as an uncontestable model. The main point of disagreement was whether the Meiji restoration of 1868 corresponded to the establishment of European absolutism or the bourgeois revolution of 1789. The concept of an “Atlantic revolution” was not available. Strangely, American capitalism was not considered in this discussion.

<sup>8</sup> *Shōwa* is the official term for the era of Emperor Hirohito, whom critics have held at least morally responsible for the fifteen years’ war.

<sup>9</sup> In this paper, the translation of *Meiji Ishin* shifts – intentionally – between Meiji Restoration and Meiji Renovation, in order to make both connotations explicit.

of ancient Japan. In that way, both humanity and the nation would be well served. Unfortunately, this vision was neither all that new, nor conducive to further novelty. It became an obligatory exercise on festive occasions, surviving even to this day, to speak of benefits for the nation and for humanity. When the emperor opens a yearly session of parliament, he often expresses the wish that its debates will contribute to the prosperity of the nation and to peace for humanity.

Moreover, the appeal for a new beginning presupposes – as we can now observe from hindsight – a very problematic construction of history, which the speaker did not spell out. He saw only Japan and Europe. There was no mention of the peoples on the Asian continent, where the imperial army had gone amok, murdering civilians and burning villages. And Europe was reduced to the three “world-historical nations”, as Hegel had called them: the Germans, the French and the British.

### Jesus and Japan

To sum up, Nanbara’s project combined three things: a Jeremiad on Japan’s lapse into deluded nationalism, a recourse to the quintessence of Christianity defined in the spirit of free churches, and an appeal for the reactivation of neglected potentials in native culture. As briefly noted above, this trinity has a prehistory. It goes back to Uchimura Kanzō (1861–1930), the most important founder of the free church movement. The appearance of such a movement, in a country marked by Axial traditions of Buddhism and Confucianism and since 1868 by the artificially inflated Shinto national theology of the *Tennō* system, was a remarkable development.<sup>10</sup> As a student, Nanbara Shigeru had been a member of Uchimura’s free church congregation.

Two of Uchimura’s statements have become famous: “I love two J’s, namely Jesus and Japan”, and “The two names that I love are Jesus and Japan” [*Uchimura 1983b: 49*]. As a free-church Christian believer and simultaneously a passionate patriot, Uchimura fought – during the first three decades of the twentieth century – for a renovation of Japan in a radical evangelical spirit. But his particular way of doing so was based on a specific diagnosis of Western societies. As he saw it, all the decadent phenomena in the ostensibly flourishing West were caused by permanent betrayal of the true teaching of Jesus Christ. In Germany, Luther’s teaching had degenerated either into a philosophy of religion or into social democracy. In England, the home of the mercenary spirit, a disintegrating Christian community could only be held together by a state Church. Uchimura criticized the European institution of state Churches in a manner reminiscent of Kierkegaard, whom he describes as a great prophet of the North. And in his view, in the USA Christian religious practices were now only a spiritual fuel for the accumulation of wealth. This was, in brief, his diagnosis of the West that he had come to know directly during his student years. But it should be added that Uchimura was also an admirer of the West, in the sense that he

<sup>10</sup> Throughout his adult life, Uchimura was a well-known public figure, especially because of one incident. As a teacher at Japan’s most prominent high school, where future members of the national elite were educated, he refused – on the occasion of a New Year school ceremony – to bow to the imperial rescript on education. This caused a public scandal, and he lost his job. On Uchimura and a short extract from his work, see Mishima and Schwentker [2015: 52–56].

attributed its genuine achievements to Christianity. But he thought that the really existing West had departed from this path.

From this diagnosis Uchimura deduced, somewhat surprisingly, that only Japan still had a chance to save the pure core of Christianity. As he argued, the Japanese military, economic and political elites were corrupt, but the ordinary Japanese were peace-loving people, deeply religious and in this sense akin to the ancient Israelites. This spirit had manifested itself in the succession of great Buddhist reformers in medieval Japan, but also in the founders of a great tradition of inquiry into ancient Japanese thought, the so-called *Kokugaku* School of the eighteenth century.<sup>11</sup> The native deep religiosity and piety of the Japanese was Uchimura's second presupposition, reinforced by the claim that the Buddhism imported from the continent had been spiritualized and refined. In Japan, it was still practiced, whereas it was almost forgotten in India and China [*Uchimura 1983a: 227*].

The third presupposition is, once again, the divinely ordained world-historical mission of Japan. For Uchimura as a radical pacifist, Japan is the doorkeeper of Asia and the predestined saviour of Korea, China, India, Persia and Turkey. But despite this divine mission, the Japanese political scene is full of intriguers, hypocritical aristocrats and unworthy descendants of old nobility. He concludes that if this Jeremiad (often invoking that prophet by name) from the political desert were to awaken Japan, it would become "a Christian country of the yellow race, as Hungary is now"; a rather shocking suggestion for readers of today [*Uchimura 1983a: 233*]. In this regard, the mission of Japan can also be said to consist in "uniting one half of humanity with the other" [*Uchimura 1983a: 235*]. This was apparently meant as a claim to mediate between East and West.

Whereas Nanbara's speech did not mention the world outside Japan and Europe, Uchimura was still thinking of Japanese leadership in a Pan-Asian sense, not in colonialist or militarist terms, but in the spirit of radical evangelical pacifism. Nevertheless, the two authors share a certain condescending attitude to the rest of the world in general and to its Asian main region in particular. As we know, discourses on identity tend to imply some kind of claim to leadership for the national public in question. They are accompanied by tacit or explicit self-affirmation, to the effect that the country at issue can realize a better version of modernity; in non-Western cases this entails a certain distantiating from the West, but in the Japanese cases discussed above, the claim is taken to more exaggerated lengths. It acquires a semi-global or – in other words – a hemispheric dimension. *Am japanischen Wesen soll die Welt genesen*.<sup>12</sup> The following words, reminiscent of the statement about the two J's, are engraved on Uchimura's tombstone: "I for Japan, Japan for the world, the world for Christ, and all for God."

<sup>11</sup> The key idea of the *Kokugaku* School, whose flourishing phase began around the middle of the eighteenth century, was a rebirth of ancient, pre-Buddhist and supposedly Shintoist Japan. In that regard, this school was a spiritual precursor of the Meiji restoration.

<sup>12</sup> This is a notorious slogan of German ultra-nationalists, amended to suit the Japanese case. The German word *Wesen* can mean essence, character or being (*menschliches Wesen* is a human being), so the message is – roughly – that through their superior character, the Germans will cure the world of its ills. (Translator's note).

## The Hopes of a Cosmopolitan *homme de lettres*

The belief in a valuable potential of the national tradition, or at least the hope to find it, despite widespread corruption (Uchimura) or military defeat (Nanbara), implies a cultural-geographical foundation for a world-historical mission. This was not a theme unique to the radical evangelical current or its disciples among political scientists. The same figure of thought can be found elsewhere, linked to a line of argument that has nothing to do with evangelical notions. The case in point is the idea of a hybrid Japanese modernity, put forward by Katō Shūichi (1919–2008).

For non-Japanese readers, some background information on Katō Shūichi may be useful. He studied medicine; during the American bombing campaign, he worked round the clock to treat the wounded in the Tokyo University Clinic. After the defeat, he joined a team of American and Japanese doctors who examined the consequences of the atom bomb in Hiroshima; this experience strengthened his prior pacifist convictions. From early on, he had been interested in literature. His unbelievably wide reading is evident from the thematic range of his many essays; they reach from classical Chinese literature through the Japanese literary tradition to the modern and classical literatures of Europe. The English translation of his *History of Japanese Literature* [Katō 1990] is regarded as a standard work and has been used at many Western universities. During his student years, he was a regular reader of *Mercure de France*; and since he had to learn German as a student of medicine, he soon developed an interest in German literature. In 1951, he went to Paris with a French scholarship, intending to study serology. But during his four-year stay in Europe, he decided to devote his future work to literature and cultural theory.

After his return to Japan, Katō was – for the rest of his life – active as a literary critic and a politically engaged essayist. His career also involved visiting chairs, sometimes for several years, at Japanological institutes, e.g. at the Free University in Berlin, the University of Munich, the University of British Columbia and Brown University. He was generally recognized as a towering left-liberal intellectual. Apart from being a *homme de lettres*, he was also an active pacifist. Together with the writer Ōe Kenzaburō, a Nobel laureate, he initiated the founding of an association in support of article 9 of the Japanese constitution (this is the clause about abstaining from armed force, now emptied of its content).<sup>13</sup>

For the present discussion, one of Katō's early publications is particularly important; it established his reputation as a public intellectual. Shortly after his return from the first stay in Europe he published a book with the title *Hybrid Culture*.<sup>14</sup> This was a term which he was – in light of his experiences in Western Europe – trying to use as a description of modern Japanese culture or civilization.

After a complete rupture of contacts with the West during the war, Katō was one of the first people to have a long stay in Europe, at a time when travel abroad was – due to the currency regime – barely conceivable for most Japanese. The journey to Europe had to be made by sea, which is today hardly imaginable. Given these circumstances, it is not

<sup>13</sup> The global initiative to found this association was taken, in 1991, by the American Charles M. Overby, a professor of engineering in Ohio, who had been a pilot of B-29 bombing planes in the Korean War. Katō and Ōe then responded.

<sup>14</sup> Here I have used the later paperback edition [Katō 1974]. The original edition, in 1954, had the title *Nihon Bunka no Zasshusei Hitotsuno chiisaki Kibō* (*The Hybridity of Japanese Culture: A Modest Hope*).

surprising that the abovementioned essay reflects a somewhat elitist attitude. The author, still young, regards himself as a connoisseur of both worlds and feels an obligation to provide a compass for the reorientation of his country. He is, in other words, adopting the same commanding position as Nanbara and Uchimura.

The cultural map of the essay may be summed up as follows: Modern Japan is characterized by a peculiar dynamic of struggle. The idea of a return to the old, lost Japan opposes the triumphant idea of modernization as Westernization. This dynamic culminated in the disaster of World War II. But following a short dominance of the Westernizing tendency, accompanied by democratization, the present situation – ten years after the defeat – is marked by a conservative reversal. This was Katō's diagnosis of the times.

He further argued that this inner struggle was taking place at a distance from everyday reality. In everyday life, for the masses, the two cultures – those of Japan and the West – were obviously mixed. For that reason, hybridity was the proper label for Japan's condition in 1955. Neither the lifestyle nor the language of the intellectuals was exempt from this hybridity. That was particularly evident in the internal contradictions of nationalistic discourses, pleading for a puristic liberation of Japanese culture from the negative influence of the West. Those who took this line spoke of a Japanese *spirit* (*seishin*), Japanese *tradition* (*dentō*), Japanese *culture* (*bunka*); but all these concepts had entered the language through the translation of European ones. For Katō, it was particularly ridiculous to speak of a samurai *spirit*. In short, even the cultural chauvinists could not articulate their dogmas without borrowing Western terms. And this cultural mix extends to the patterns of everyday life, including fashions of clothing and styles of home furnishing.

At the time when Katō was writing, English and French culture enjoyed – for a variety of reasons yet to be clarified – a distinguished reputation in the Japanese public sphere. Even the prestige of the German tradition survived the Nazi catastrophe, as we have seen from Nanbara's speech. And the idealized bourgeois society of Europe was regarded as a desirable social model. The renowned circle around the economic historian Ōtsuka Hisao, a prominent figure of the so-called bourgeois school, relied on an interpretation of Max Weber to support this orientation. Maruyama Masao added his voice.

On the one hand, Katō shared this premature idealization of Western European countries. He not only referred to English and French cultures as “pure types”; notwithstanding his sensitivity to connotations, he even used the expression “racially pure cultures”. On the other hand, his merit was to put this cult of Europe at a distance. As he wrote, “there is no reason to complain about a mixed character” [*Katō 2015: 79*]. Katō was sober enough to see through the illusion of a cultural transplantation. After the catastrophe of Japanese Fascism, many liberal and leftist intellectuals wanted to modernize their economically and morally ruined country along Western European lines; but this dream was unrealizable.

Instead, Katō proposed a kind of “transvaluation”, but neither of the kind attempted by nationalists before and during the war, nor in the spirit of the most prominent postwar intellectuals. The former had proclaimed the superiority of an imagined national culture, whereas the latter turned to self-abasement in the name of an extravagantly idealized but variously understood West. Katō's alternative was a transvaluation of his own culture, through its reinterpretation as a mixed one.

But then he takes a surprising turn, reminiscent of Nanbara and Uchimura. He recalls and praises the achievement of “our own remote ancestors”: the reception and refinement

of Buddhism. “They [our ancestors] accepted Buddhism without resistance, when it arrived in the country. But in the long run, they created a Japanese Buddhism” [Katō 2015b: 79]. And as he puts it, this early visible mixed or experimental character of Japanese culture is a reason for “modest hope”. He thus allows for the possibility that something world-historically new might yet emerge in Japan.

It seems clear that Katō put his trust in something like the spiritual substance of a people. The connotations of cultural essentialism are unmistakable. It is true that discussions about the constructed character of national culture only began in the 1990s, and that Katō was an old man when he took notice of the debate on essentialism and constructivism among cultural theorists. But at the very time when he was essentializing the notion of a mixed culture, the great French anthropologist Michel Leiris, coming from the surrealist current, was “deconstructing” the myth of a national culture, by dissecting and analyzing both his own French culture and the English one were “cocktails” of diverse and heterogeneous elements [Leiris 1951].

Katō also shares with Uchimura a certain dismissive view of the contemporary West, not incompatible with the idealization of its better versions. For example, he wrote: “From a sociological point of view, the present situation in the West, and more precisely in Western Europe, represents a blind alley of the more extreme kind. There is no need to elaborate on this. In particular, Europe’s role in the non-European parts of the world is reprehensible beyond words” [Katō 1974: 4].<sup>15</sup> To sum up, Katō’s case confirms the pattern exemplified by the other abovementioned authors: a more or less explicit admiration of European civilization combines with an open or half-open advocacy of Japan’s specific world-historical role, and this is backed up by an appeal to the cultural transfer achieved by the “ancestors” and a downgrading of the actually existing West.

### The Self-Praise of the “Japanese” Social Model

In 1979, a quarter of a century after Katō published his hybridity thesis, a book of almost 600 pages, with the title *Le Society as a Civilization*, was published in Tokyo [Murakami – Kumon – Satō 1979]. It clearly belongs in the categories of historical sociology and comparative civilizational studies. At this time, the postwar landscape of ruins had long disappeared. In contrast to the first years after the war, most Japanese citizens now believed that the country was enjoying unprecedented prosperity, and that this had raised Japan to the same level as the West. And the consensus was that this was due to the specifically Japanese form of life, although this keyword was not always interpreted in the same way. Many believed governmental propaganda about the relatively equal distribution of wealth.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> This may have been an allusion to France’s colonial war in Algeria. That example was also a great disillusionment for Ōe Kenzaburō. In one of the novels he wrote during this time, the hero rejects a French scholarship because of the Algerian war.

<sup>16</sup> As many surveys made at this time showed, the illusion that most Japanese belonged to the middle class was widely shared. But this illusion was shattered during the following decades. On this subject see [Shirahase 2011]; for those who read Japanese, another book by the same author can be recommended [Shirahase 2010]. On the basis of empirical data, this sociologist showed convincingly that the social stratification cannot be determined only on the basis of income and various kinds of property; expectations of the future and network connections also play a role.

The abovementioned book, written by three authors, begins with a preface announcing that the “specific Japanese form of modernization” is to be analyzed. There is a strong suggestion of explaining the secret of Japanese success. But the intention of the authors was not to write a propaganda piece or an apotheosis of governmental policies. They were making a more scientific claim. All three were professors at the prestigious Tokyo University, where they represented economics, political science and social science. But it may be added that they also participated in the formulation of a conservative-neoliberal social policy.

In the following paragraphs, I will summarize the argument of this book in four theses, based on my interpretation. The first thesis, formulated with reference to Max Weber but also in contrast to his views, presents the European path of modernization as only one of many versions. As the authors then declare with unmistakable pride, the Japanese road to modernity shows that a non-individualistic process of industrialization, not based on the opposition of subject and object, is possible. Here the reader might expect a theory of multiple modernities, grounded in Japanese experience, but developed at a level of abstraction that would satisfy theoretical criteria. But no such attempt is made. Instead of mapping the field of multiple modernities with the aid of appropriately diverse examples, they focus almost exclusively on showing that various aspects of Japan’s modernization – in their opinion a success story – can be explained in light of an institution called *ie*. They thus lapse into the familiar ethnocentric fallacy of cultural relativism.

That brings us to the second thesis. According to the authors’ reconstruction of social history, early medieval Japan – more precisely the period between the tenth and the twelfth century – saw a structural change from a society of clans to a society of *ie*.

The Japanese word *ie* has multiple meanings: house, family, a building housing a family, or many families. But it can also denote a lineage or a dynasty, as when we refer to the house of Hohenzollern or the house of Windsor. As the authors argue, a new class of warriors, *bushi*, more widely known in the West as *samurai*, emerged during the early Middle Ages in Eastern Japan, far from the influence of the highly cultured aristocracy that dominated the Kyoto court. Today the new stratum is often described as a military nobility. But many warriors were in fact wealthy farmers, possessing large plots of land and having many employees at their disposal. These employees were divided into groups responsible for different activities: agricultural work, taking care of horses, building, provisioning, forestry, military equipment, etc. And then there were the regulatory tasks of maintaining order and organizing defence, necessitating armed personnel. The warrior stratum was born from such groups of armed subordinates. The landed proprietors were often at the same time armed commanders. Here we might recall Max Weber, who in his short comment on Japan discussed analogies between *samurai* notions of loyalty and the contractual form of feudal relations that prevailed in the West [Weber 1988: 299].

In the opinion of the three abovementioned authors, all these member groups constitute a “house” (*ie*). They admit a certain similarity to what the historian Otto Brunner, dealing with traditional European society, called “the whole house” [Murakami et al.: 44]. But they note an important difference: in contrast to Western patterns, blood kinship – though important – was in critical situations relegated to a secondary role. As a rule, the leadership of the house was regulated by descent; the oldest son inherited the power of his father. But quite often the problem was solved by adoption, self-evidently when the head of the house was childless, but also when there were dissonances between father and son. The

main point was the perpetuation of the house, not of a family. According to the authors, the organizational principle of the *ie* shaped mentalities and played a key role in social conflicts. Local dynasties were exemplary cases, but the same applied to some powerful merchant houses. There could be competition between separate “departments” of an *ie*, but since they were all in its service, conflicts were not taken to their ultimate conclusions. Before they broke out into the open, they could be settled by a superior member, who arranged a tacit reconciliation and thus defended the interest of the house.

The third thesis is that these practices are still at work in modern Japan. That was the view of these three politically conservative professors from an elite university, who also acted as advisers to the government of Nakasone Yasuhiro (1918–2019, prime minister 1982–1987). As they argued, many associations, institutions, enterprises and academic organizations (including universities), founded after the Meiji restoration, functioned in the spirit of *ie*. One of their favourite examples was lifelong employment by a firm, accompanied on the side of the management by the expectation of complete loyalty from the workforce. A young graduate from the better kind of university will be employed by a large and prestigious firm. That makes the whole course of his life more or less calculable. During the coming years, he will go through several departments and come to know the inner life of the firm, until he becomes the head of a department. Then he may move even higher up, until he reaches the mandatory age of retirement, leaves the firm with a substantial package and becomes a member of the board of an affiliated enterprise. It is hard to imagine him leaving the firm in middle age because of a conflict or a more general dissatisfaction; for outside the firm, he would for practical purposes be a nobody. There would be no qualification confirmed by the state, no expert knowledge in any field. He would not be a professionally qualified merchant banker or an engineer, or even a car mechanic, but only a man from Mitsubishi or the ministry of finance.

A lot of such examples will in fact be found in many arenas of everyday Japanese life, even in the press and the academic field, where a certain training in critical thought is expected. Everybody knows that journalists asked about their occupation will, without exception, answer with the title of their journal. Nobody describes herself or himself as a journalist, only as a person from Asahi or some other journal. In-house promotions at the universities were long common. One is first of all a professor of some university, rather than a professor of law or engineering. And in industry as in trade, in universities as in the powerful ministries, in fact in every field of social life, the individual firms or institutions and relations between them form a markedly hierarchical system. All of this prompts the three authors to draw an ethnocentrically coloured and self-affirming conclusion: This orientation towards a particular collective appears as an important key to Japan’s economic success. This claim was put forward in 1979. In the following year, the German weekly *Der Spiegel* published an article with the title *Japanese cars. Europe falls under the wheels*. The title page showed a Japanese military flag from World War II.

Large parts of the book on *ie* society are redundant. But closer reading can extract something like a fourth and final thesis: a conception of specifically Japanese processes of will formation, supposedly derived from the *ie* principle. Important decisions are first prepared through many informal and secretive conversations among influential people behind the scenes. Reciprocity is important. Those who are negatively affected by the final decision, preferably expressed in a vague and ambiguous formulation, are offered

suggestive compensations; and those who do not understand the suggestions are gradually marginalized through a variety of tricks. In the end, the business goes on functioning. The three authors see this as a non-individualist, contextualist version of modernity, fundamental to Japan's success; all the more so since Western societies now find themselves in a blind alley, due to modes of thought rooted in the polarization of subject and object, as well as to their vision of domination over nature and their ideal of a social state. This is an important theoretical premise of the book, but little is done to substantiate it. For instance, there is no mention of the whole series of efforts to correct the subject-object model, made since the beginning of the twentieth century.

Readers familiar with the social sciences will inevitably raise many questions. Apart from the question whether the detailed research of historians can confirm the claims about structural change in the early Middle Ages, we must ask: is the *ie* model, proposed by professors of an elite university, valid for today's broader spectrum of social groups and strata? It is true that the warrior stratum, the *samurai*, and the later local dynasts were dominant groups, and to some extent they shaped a general mentality, but statistically speaking, they were markedly minoritarian groups.<sup>17</sup>

Those who implemented – and profited from – the *ie* principle in the course of the modernizing and industrializing process were also an elite minority. They were not at all the famous average Japanese. As the Japanese-Australian sociologist Yoshio Sugimoto has shown, the average Japanese is more adequately represented by middle-aged women without academic education, living in the provinces and doing routine work in local small enterprises [Sugimoto 2021: 25–27]. And for them, the *ie* society does not function as it does for the elite. They belong to the less favoured part of this system. They often have to change their jobs, and in any case, the small firms are at the mercy of economic conjunctures.

It is interesting that the thesis of continuity, defended throughout the book, is not only meant to link prewar times to postwar ones; it also claims validity for the future. The authors do know and mention a basic characteristic of modern society, namely its rapid change. But they argue that the *ie* character of Japanese life has been *relatively* constant and will remain so. As an example, they mention the self-understanding of women. They claim that many surveys have shown “the vertical relationship between parents and children to be more important for women than the horizontal, symmetrical relationship between the partners in a marriage. According to a survey organized by the Prime Minister's office, Japanese women regard their husbands and their children as more important than themselves, and the children as more important than the husbands. Even for the younger generation, marriage means primarily an alliance between two *ie*” [Murakami et al. 1979: 543]. And they prophesy a future life of this mentality, without suspecting that they were writing on the eve of a long-lasting process that would, even in Japan, revolutionize the relations between the sexes. The book thus appears as an attempt to legitimize forms of domination as a constant feature of Japanese life. And it is a miserable legitimization; as the proverb has it, self-praise stinks.

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<sup>17</sup> It is widely accepted that shortly before the opening of the country, the *bushi* or *samurai* numbered about two millions, whereas the whole population is believed to have been around thirty millions. Moreover, the boundary between *samurai* and wealthy burghers was fluid. Some of the latter were better situated than the *samurai*.

The book on *ie* society differs in an obvious way from the approach of the three intellectuals discussed above, Nanbara, Uchimura and Katō. This time there is hardly a mention of “achievements of the ancestors”, such as the spiritualization of Buddhism. That means, more generally, a shift of focus from the history of culture and religion to the forms of social and political organization, supposedly still at work in modern institutions.

Despite these differences, surely related to the progress from a landscape of ruins to a prosperous export-centred economy, there are also noticeable affinities between all these self-proclaimed spiritual leaders of the nation. Be it the model of an idealized Protestant modernity, with religion separated from politics; the revaluation of one’s native hybrid culture, accompanied by respect for the elegant national cultures of Europe; or the critique of an expansive and aggressive civilization, geared to the domination of nature and resulting in human isolation: the reference to Europe – or the West – is always central.

The frequent idealization of Europe can enter into strange combinations with negative diagnoses of contemporary European society. This is another commonality across ideological boundaries. The focus may be on decadence (Uchimura), on the loss of orientation, the exhaustion of cultural substance and reprehensible behaviour on the world scene (Katō), or on the blind alley of welfare society (the *ie* theorists) – in all cases, we are dealing with oversimplified images of the West. The complexities of modern societies in Europe are reduced to keywords.

The most important point of agreement between the texts discussed here is that a special position of Japan is defined in contrast to these keywords. The task may be to draw on the achievements of the ancestors and at the same time learn from the West, in order to build a native culture and thus to benefit humanity. Or the Japanese have a divine mission to distance themselves from decadent Christian countries, in order to become better and more authentic Christians and enter the world scene as saviours of the “barbaric” Asian peoples. Or the hybridization of cultures in modern Japan is presented as a world-historical hope for humanity. Finally, neoconservative and neoliberal social scientists (one of them a turncoat) saw the Japanese model of social order as a key to economic success surpassing European precedents.<sup>18</sup>

Europe as a permanent reference, distantiation from a one-sidedly devaluing image of the Europe of the moment, together with a positive revaluation and often manifest over-glorification of the national potential: these are the fundamental characteristics of nationalist discourse in Japan. The cases analyzed in this paper are exemplary, but we could find any number of texts with similar though less articulate lines of argument. They come in all sorts: promotion brochures for tourists, revisionist history in editorials of conservative newspapers, comparative essays on culture in more sophisticated journals, theoretical treatises on Japanese aesthetics, gastronomic descriptions of Japanese cuisine, reports on the contemporary art scene. The message is omnipresent, and the frequency of identity discourses is only surpassed by those on sexuality.

Let us add one more example from ceremonial cultural diplomacy. On the occasion of a plenary meeting of the PEN-club of Japan, the president of the Cultural Office (a quasi-ministerial position) and former ambassador, Kondō Seiichi, gave a lecture with the

<sup>18</sup> One of the three authors, Satō Seizaburō, is a former activist of the Communist student movement.

symptomatic title “Japanese culture in the world”<sup>19</sup>. He listed three characteristics of Japaneseness. The first was a closeness to nature, in contrast to Western quest for a domination of nature, rooted in Cartesian thought. The second was a preference for gradual nuances, in contrast to Western fixation on yes-or-no alternatives, and the third was the emphasis on non-quantifiable cultural values, opposed to the short-term profitability criteria of the West. For a critical observer, the text of this lecture represents a popularizing condensation of the stereotypes current in identity discourses, which at the same time answer the need for orientation in the modern world. Even TV talkshows offer fragments of these ideas.

### Concluding Remarks

What can we learn from this admittedly fragmentary discussion? At least two things. Firstly, the intertwining of identity discourses with those of orientation favours a fore-shortened image of the other, often reduced to keywords and used as a contrasting foil for variously articulated self-images; in that capacity, it can serve to support critical protest as well as self-glorification, but both options are liable to ethnocentric navel-gazing. For cultural discourses of more genuine self-understanding, a better grasp of the complexity of every modern society, one’s own and its others, are needed. That applies also to European discourses of orientation, inclined to perceive other civilizations as more marginal than is Europe seen from other parts of the world, but equally tempted to resort to keywords.

Secondly, the dominant principle of success leads to a particularly deceptive kind of self-overestimation. It is true that everybody has most direct access to her or his own regional, national or civilizational forms of life (he or she knows the rules of the game), and when this privilege combines with success on the levels most visible across cultural boundaries, such as those of wealth and power, it is tempting to claim superiority, or some kind of special mission. Nothing of that kind is guaranteed by empirical or rational grounds. But as we can observe, the Hegelian paradigm of justifying success by history has been more or less directly adopted by many nations in various world regions; that applies not only to Japan, but also to Korea, and even more to China.

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<sup>19</sup> The speech was printed in the regular brochure of the Japanese PEN-club: 2013, 10, v. 421.

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# The Symposium on Overcoming Modernity and Discourse in Wartime Japan

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Kolokvium o překonání modernity jako ukázka japonského diskurzu za druhé světové války

**Abstract:** The symposium on overcoming modernity (*kindai no chōkoku*) that took place in Tokyo in 1942 has been much commented upon, but later critics have tended to over-emphasize the wartime political context and the ideological connection to Japanese ultra-nationalism. Closer examination shows that the background and the actual content of the discussion were more complicated. The idea of overcoming modernity had already appeared in debates among Japanese intellectuals before the war, and was always open to different interpretations; it could indicate Japanese ambitions to move beyond Western paradigms of modernity, but in other cases it referred to more radical visions of alternatives to modernity as such. Some versions linked up with Western critiques of existing modernity, including traditionalist as well as more future-oriented ones. These differentiations are evident in the symposium, and associated with diverse schools of thought. An important input came from representatives of the Kyoto school, the most distinctive current in twentieth-century Japanese philosophy. Despite the suppression of Marxist thought, the background influence of the unorthodox Marxist thinker Miki Kiyoshi was significant. Another major contribution came from the group known as the Japan Romantic School, active in literature and literary criticism. Other intellectuals of widely varying persuasions, from outspoken nationalists to Catholic theologians, also participated. The result was a rich but also thoroughly inconclusive discussion, from which no consensus on roads beyond modernity could emerge.

**Keywords:** modernity; Westernization; nationalism; war; Kyoto School; Japanese Romanticism

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## Introduction

Early to mid-nineteenth century was a period when a significant number of intellectuals were proclaiming the end of modernity. In Europe there were those like Oswald Spengler who wrote of the “decline of the West” and René Guénon who attacked Western modernity on behalf of Oriental tradition [*Spengler 1961; Guénon 1996*]. This was also related to the apparent decentering of the Eurocentric worldview. In Japan the discourse on modernity’s end was tied to notions of the “fall of the West”, but also to the “rise of the East”, an overturning of the old order and its replacement by a new order from the East. On the international stage, what the Japanese called “the Greater East Asia War” (大東亜戦争) was being waged in the 1940s, allegedly for self-defense and self-preservation of Asia against Western imperialism and to establish a new, pluralistic world order of Asian nations.<sup>1</sup> Japan by then had successfully pursued its own modernization since the

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Meiji Restoration (1868) to raise itself to the level of the industrialized West. But modernization for Japan was also not without its problems, such as the waning of tradition, the widening of the economic gap between rich and poor, psychological as well as social turmoil and increasing sense of meaninglessness or ennui. Modernity was thus being challenged on two fronts: an “external war” against the modern Western (Anglo-American) nations and an “internal war” against the pro-Westernizing movement of “civilization and enlightenment” (文明開化) that imported many innovations from the West [Horio 1994: 293]. To the extent that “modernity” overlapped with “Western civilization”, the discourse on modernity’s end in Japan was tied to a self-identified “anti-European” basis and to the war being fought [Hiromatsu 1989: 157; Fujita 2018: 345–346]. On the basis of that background, “overcoming modernity” (近代の超克) became a popular slogan during the decades leading up to and through World War II, as a challenge to the culture and value system of modernity as such.

Yet, at the same time, overcoming modernity could not be without its contradictions in Japan. If modernity was simply Western and modernization was Westernization, the overcoming of modernity for Japan would just mean the overcoming of Western influence internally or Western imperialism externally. But Japan had already been modernized in its *own* forms, making the issue quite complex.<sup>2</sup> A significant motivation for Japan’s modernization was the feeling of vulnerability in the face of Western colonial expansion. The U.S. was pushing in from the East through the Pacific, European powers were coming from the West through India and Indo-China, and the Russians were claiming the islands north of Japan [Parkes 1997: 306]. The military strength that allowed Japan to resist Western imperialism was a product of its own drive to modernize. And there was a growing sense of pride in having entered world politics with the ability to defend itself and the region. The sophisticated Japanese critics of modernity thus could not afford to be exclusively nostalgic nor one-sidedly anti-modern. Ironically in its path to modernize and resist colonialism, Japan had to adopt the same colonialist policies of the West, beginning with the acquisition of Taiwan in the Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895), to the acquisitions of the southern half of the Sakhalin Island and control and eventual annexation of Korea from the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905), increasing influence over China, the establishment of the puppet state of Manchukuo in 1932, and its attempt to gain control throughout China with the China Incident of 1937.<sup>3</sup> After the war, Takeuchi Yoshimi (竹内好) (1910–1977) expressed this contradiction in his essay “Overcoming Modernity” (「近代の超克」) through a series of oppositional relations, e.g., restoration and renovation, royalty and exclusion, national isolationism and opening the country, ultranationalism and “civilization and enlightenment”, East and West, and so on [Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 338; Takeuchi 2005a: 146]. In Takeuchi’s view, this logic that the non-West (Asia) must become Western to resist the West, or become modern to resist modernity, is inseparable from those aporias of modern Japanese history.

<sup>1</sup> This was the paradox of the war that Takeuchi states was at once a war of colonial invasion (植民侵略戦争) and war against imperialism (対帝国主義の戦争) [see Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 306].

<sup>2</sup> Japanese modernity, for example, at the time was comprised of what Jason Josephson has called the “Shinto secular”, Shinto as embedded in the structure of the modern nation-state [Josephson 2012: 230].

<sup>3</sup> The China Incident is the July 1937 battle between China’s National Revolutionary Army and Japan’s Imperial Army that started the second Sino-Japanese War.

We may be able to resolve that contradiction, at least to some extent, in light of Shmuel Eisenstadt's recent thesis on multiple modernities, by viewing Japan's quest to "overcome modernity" as a quest for a form of "alternative modernity". Eisenstadt argues that many of the nationalist and traditionalist movements that emerged in non-Western societies from the mid-nineteenth century up to the post-war decades "articulated strong anti-Western or even antimodern themes, yet all were distinctively modern" [*Eisenstadt 2000*: 2]. While the European pattern of modernity had spread throughout the world via economic, technological, and military expansion to non-Western societies, the appropriation of its elements allowed many to actively participate in developing new and various modes of modernity through selection, reinterpretation, reformulation, and innovation. The unique circumstances in Japan contributed to a Japanese form of modernity [*Eisenstadt 2000*: 14–16]. One might therefore argue that the "overcoming modernity" discourse in Japan manifests that distinct program of modernity and expresses its attempt to distinguish itself from the West.<sup>4</sup> Eisenstadt however also recognizes the contradiction Takeuchi pointed to, and describes it as a tension between the self-recognition of critics of modernity as part of the modern world and their "ambivalent attitudes toward modernity in general and toward the West in particular" [*Eisenstadt 2000*: 15]. Faced with that tension, intellectuals nevertheless were tasked to somehow interpret and give sense to what was happening. In that atmosphere of confusion, the phrase "overcoming modernity" evidently struck a chord to become deeply tied to the Greater East Asia War, evoking a common but ambiguous sentiment within intellectual circles [*Fujita 2018*: 344; *Kosaka 2018*: 245; *Takeuchi 1979*: 274].

My aim here is to examine the ideas and arguments of these wartime intellectuals in their discussions of modernity, with a focus on the in/famous symposium on "Overcoming Modernity" (「近代の超克」) held in 1942, whose proceedings were published in the journal *Bungakkai* (『文学会』; *Literary World*).<sup>5</sup> I will argue that the attempt to "overcome" modernity expressed in the symposium, for many of the participants and in different degrees, can be understood as an attempt to assert and develop a modernity alternative to that of the West. I would like to follow this with an assessment of whether some of their approaches may be viable or not in our present but distinct context.<sup>6</sup> I will begin by examining the thought of two thinkers who were important members of the intellectual currents represented in the symposium. Although they did not take part in the symposium their influence cannot be ignored.

<sup>4</sup> *Eisenstadt 2000*: 14. For Eisenstadt [*2000*: 2] modernity involves processes of "continual constitution and reconstitution of a multiplicity of cultural programs".

<sup>5</sup> Ever since Takeuchi's 1959 essay this symposium has been linked to, and often discussed together with, another series of three symposia held during 1941–42 and whose proceedings were published in the journal *Chūōkōron* (『中央公論』; *Central Review*), and which had some overlapping participants. However, due to space, in this paper I will limit my discussion to the *Bungakkai* symposium and will discuss the *Chūōkōron* symposia in a separate essay.

<sup>6</sup> In regard to the issue of complicity with the wartime regime, there has been a lot of mudslinging in the commentarial writings, especially in English, concerning these wartime discussions, with the use of ad hominem and strawman arguments on both sides, defenders and bashers. Here, in agreement with David Williams, I want to avoid what Roland Barthes called "the contagion of judgment" [*Barthes 1975*: 32; *Williams 2014*: 22], and resist the temptation to make moralizing judgments.

## Immediate Predecessors in the Kyoto School and the Japan Romantic School

Two intellectual currents represented in the “Overcoming Modernity” symposium were the Kyoto School (京都学派) of philosophy and the Japan Romantic School (日本浪漫派) in literature and literary criticism. From those two schools two immediate predecessors of the symposium participants were Miki Kiyoshi (三木清) (1897–1945) and Yasuda Yojūrō (安田與重郎) (1910–1981). In these two we see two distinct approaches to modernity, despite their Marxist backgrounds.

Miki was a Kyoto School philosopher but also a Marxist, or at least an ex-Marxist, depending on one’s perspective – his Marxism was never orthodox but he also never made any public conversion (転向),<sup>7</sup> as did many other leftists, away from the Marxism of his earlier years. He had a close relationship to the symposium as an influential member of the *Bungakkai* journal coterie [*Hiromatsu* 1989: 147]. But although he was invited to participate, he was unable at the time, having been drafted by the Army. He was under scrutiny for his leftist activism and thus sent to Manila on a work assignment with the Army. Before that he was involved in Konoe Fumimaro’s (近衛文麿) (1891–1945) Shōwa Research Association (昭和研究会), a prewar think tank established in 1930 for discussing political reform, and intended to inform Konoe’s premiership; and then in the Imperial Rule Assistance Association (大政翼賛会), created by Konoe as Prime Minister in 1940 to promote the goals of his movement for a “new order”.<sup>8</sup> While contributing to Konoe’s think-tanks, Miki had laid down the principles of what he called “cooperativism” (*kyōdōshugi* (協同主義)) that was to avoid the faults of both mechanistic egalitarianism and despotic authoritarianism – the weaknesses of Anglo-Franco-American liberal individualism, Soviet Communist universalism, and the totalitarian ethno-nationalism of Germany – by grounding itself upon the organic spontaneity of the masses [*Hiromatsu* 1989: 146–147]. He argued for the necessity of such a philosophy to ensure that “if Japan’s conduct in China is to be different from previous Euro-American imperialist invasions by the European and American capitalist nations, then its characteristic behavior must have a characteristic theory corresponding to it” [*Miki* 1967: 293; see also 242]. His “philosophy of world history” was also meant to correct the Eurocentric view of world history because “[t]he world, in its ideal state, should not be unicultural but multicentral” [*Miki* 1986: 12–13]. On this basis he advocated a “new intellectual principle” that can “overcome” from a higher standpoint *modernism*, the signs of collapse of which are already manifest”. According to Miki, “modernization of Japan has been largely a process of Westernization”; but what is to replace that Western modernity cannot simply be something intrinsically Japanese with no universality [*Miki* 1986: 6–7]. Just as Greek culture, in addition to its Hellenistic elements, had “certain universal elements” to profoundly influence world cultures, the point is to create a Japanese culture “possessing an equivalent generality in the oriental world” [*Miki* 1986: 9]. But this formation of a modern East Asian culture cannot exclude

<sup>7</sup> This was a common phenomenon of “ideological reversal” or “conversion” during this period that the majority of Communist Party members and their sympathizers and other leftists participated in to usually embrace more “nationalist” ideals. On this see [*De Bary – Gluck – Tiedermann* 2005: 940].

<sup>8</sup> Konoe liked to fill his think-tanks with intellectuals from both the Right and the Left, including ex-political prisoners in an attempt, as if, to accommodate the entire political spectrum for his “revolution” or “reform” of the government.

or dissociate itself from Western modernity as Easterners must rely upon modern scientific methods [Miki 1986: 11]. Here Miki appears to be advocating a new form of modernity alternative to that of the West.

Yasuda, on the other hand, viewed modernity in Japan, identified with the movement of “civilization and enlightenment”, as having no chance of rehabilitation. Its only path is decay and hence to be completely rejected [Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 334]. His ideal was instead the “passion for ruin” (脱落への情熱) which would break down the present “irony of Japan” (日本のイロニー). However, in his *Japanese Bridge* (『日本の橋』) of 1936, he also called for a recovery of the “homeland” (故郷) through the “Japanese classics” (日本の古典) with its aesthetic sensibility, “antiquity when gods and men were all together” (神人同床の古代) [Harootunian – Najita 1993: 756; Hiromatsu 1989: 194–195; Yasuda 1985–1989a]. But he never adequately defined that primal antiquity aside from a vaguely romantic agrarianism.<sup>9</sup> Yasuda explains how, as one of the last remaining Marxists, he was shaken by the Manchurian Incident<sup>10</sup> and struck by its new worldview uncontaminated by the filth of politics. “Manchukuo” (満洲国) – the Japanese renaming of Manchuria – with its pan-Asianist ideal, came to represent for him a bold and daring ideal of civilization and revolution, in which he perceived the symbolic overcoming of Western modernity. And this signified for him the germination of the Japan Romantic School [Hiromatsu 1989: 191; Yasuda 1985–1989b]. He states that he retained his Marxism as an earthly expression of a worldview but that it ceased its relationship to the Soviet Union or even Marx and altered its meaning to simply become the struggle for justice. But he also viewed Marxism in a distinct sense to be the last stage in the “civilization and enlightenment” movement and viewed the Romantic School’s special mission to be the toppling of this final phase and the starting of a new one, to build “a bridge in the night reaching toward a new dawn” (次の曙への夜の橋), an alternative to the modernity brought from the West [Harootunian – Najita 1993: 758; Hiromatsu 1989: 195; Matsumoto 1979: iv; Yasuda 1985–1989a].

### The Symposium on “Overcoming Modernity”

The symposium on “Overcoming Modernity” was held on July 23rd and 24th, 1942, in Meguro, Tokyo, soon after the start of the Pacific War, among a large group of intellectuals, representing different academic disciplines and intellectual currents, at the invitation of the *Bungakkai* periodical, a popular but high-brow magazine of general interest. The event was planned and organized by Kamei, Kawakami, and Kobayashi (see below), literary critics involved in the journal. Takeuchi states that it was the most active forum for “centrist intellectuals” after the virtual annihilation of Marxism [Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 337]. Most of the essays were submitted prior to their roundtable discussions but a couple (by Miyoshi and Nakamura) were written as impression pieces (感想文) after the event [Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 285–286]. The proceedings, including essay contributions, were first published in the September and October 1942 issues of the journal and

<sup>9</sup> That was Hiromatsu’s critique of Yasuda. See *Hiromatsu 1989: 194–195*.

<sup>10</sup> Also known as the Mukden Incident. This involved the 1931 explosion of dynamite close to a Japanese owned railway line in Mukden, a city in Manchuria, for which the Japanese Army accused Chinese dissidents and responded with a full invasion leading to the occupation of Manchuria.

then published as a book by Sōgensha in 1943.<sup>11</sup> Among the participants involved in the symposium were members of roughly three intellectual currents: writers and critics, some of whom were editors of the *Bungakkai* journal, the Kyoto School philosophers, and writers and critics belonging to the Japan Romantic School, with overlaps among them.

*Bungakkai* was the gathering place of the New Arts School, a modernist literary movement, representing a “cultural liberalism”, that aimed to assert independence of the arts from the Marxist Proletarian movement in the heyday of Marxism before its demise. But its ideas were miscellaneous and members too diverse to categorize though all were trained in Western literature. Its membership overlapped with the other two groups involved in the symposium as well as including ex-Marxists [*Hiromatsu* 1989: 180; *Mina-moto* 1994: 205]. Author and literary critic Kobayashi Hideo (小林秀雄 (1902–1983) was the cofounder. Other members involved were literary and music critic and editor of the journal, Kawakami Tetsutarō (河上徹太郎) (1902–1980); poet and translator Miyoshi Tatsuji (三好達治) (1900–1964); literary critic, playwright, and novelist, Nakamura Mitsuo (中村光夫) (1911–1988); novelist, cultural critic, and ex-Marxist Hayashi Fusao (林房雄) (1903–1975); and literary critic and ex-Marxist Kamei Katsuichirō (亀井勝一郎) (1907–1966). Of these the last two were also part of the Japan Romantic School.

The Japan Romantic School was a movement associated with the literary journal *Nihon romanha* (『日本浪漫派』), first published in 1935 and founded by the above-mentioned Yasuda. Both Hayashi and Kamei, who were part of the *Bungakkai* coterie were also members of this school and participated in the symposium.<sup>12</sup> Yasuda was invited but did not participate due to a “sudden inconvenience”.<sup>13</sup> The constitutive elements of the school have been characterized as Marxism, National Learning (国学), and German Romanticism. Like the Marxists they were responding to post-World War I alienation and atomization. But for them revolution was to occur as an overcoming of Western modernity, including the complete negation of the “civilization and enlightenment” movement with which they identified Japanese modernity [*Hashikawa* 1965: 32; *Hashikawa* 2000: 25–26; *Hiromatsu* 1989: 193; *Kawakami – Takeuchi* 1979: 273]. The group rallied around Yasuda’s manifesto to mark their collective break from Marxism and literary modernism. They felt the rational requirements of Westernized society and demands of mass markets had eroded the aesthetic sensibility of native Japanese culture, and so longed for a return to that ancient nativity with its sense of “wholeness” even while acknowledging this to be but an unreachable dream [*Harootunian – Najita* 1993: 756].

Of the three currents many would agree that the Kyoto School was the most intellectually coherent. In the broadest sense, the “school” refers to philosophers who were

<sup>11</sup> They were published in the journal issue with the title “Conference Symposium on Cultural Synthesis: Overcoming Modernity” (「文化綜合会議シンポジウム—近代の超克」) but when published as a book by the publisher Sōgensha (Tokyo) in July the following year (1943), the book title became *Conference of Intellectual Collaboration: Overcoming Modernity* (『知的協力会議 近代の超克』) [*Hiromatsu* 1989: 255 n. 1; *Calichman* 2008: x].

<sup>12</sup> Other members included writers like Jinbo Kōtarō (神保光太郎) (1905–1990), Nakajima Eijirō (中島英次郎) (1910–1945), and Nakatani Takao (中谷孝雄) (1901–1995) and in the post-war years, novelists like Dazai Osamu (太宰治) (1909–1948) and Mishima Yukio (三島由紀夫) (1925–1970) were also associated with the movement.

<sup>13</sup> Takeuchi infers from Yasuda’s thinking of the time that he may have found such events meaningless [*Kawakami – Takeuchi* 1979: 287].

directly influenced by Nishida Kitarō (西田幾多郎) (1870–1945), whether as students or colleagues, during and after his tenure at the Philosophy Department of Kyoto Imperial University from 1910 to 1928. Along with Nishida, his junior colleague Tanabe Hajime (田辺元) (1885–1962), who shared many students with Nishida, is considered a co-founder. Besides the above-mentioned Miki, other Kyoto School philosophers had begun turning their attention towards political philosophy during the late 1930s and early 1940s. The ones involved in the “Overcoming Modernity” symposium were Nishitani Keiji (西谷啓治) (1900–1990), Shimomura Toratarō (下村寅太郎) (1902–1995), and Suzuki Shigetaka (鈴木成高) (1907–1988). It was unusual that Miki, who was also part of the *Bungakkai* group, did not participate as he had often participated in other such symposiums, but this was probably due to his being drafted to work overseas for the Army press corps [*Kawakami – Takeuchi* 1979: 286–287].

In addition there were a handful of intellectuals not affiliated with any particular current: composer and music theorist Moroi Saburō (諸井三郎) (1903–1977); journalist and film critic Tsumura Hideo (津村秀夫) (1907–1985); Catholic theologian and philosopher of religion Yoshimitsu Yoshihiko (吉満義彦) (1904–1945); and nuclear physicist Kikuchi Seishi (菊池正士) (1902–1974).

The participants met to discuss the meaning, origins, and impact of modernity at a time when with the start of war, people were chanting slogans without intellectual reflection. Kawakami explained that the point was to discuss the current world situation and Japan’s position within it, and to make sense of the war [*Kawakami – Takeuchi* 1979: 267]. After long years of international and domestic pressure and constant tension, especially since the Manchurian Incident of 1931, intellectuals saw the start of war as something that could lead toward resolution domestically and abroad, with a new structure replacing the old Western model of modernity. The symposium served to “... let some fresh air into the stifling intellectual atmosphere” [*Horio* 1994: 290] of the time by providing a venue for intellectuals to voice their thoughts to give some meaningful direction to the situation. What is shocking is that the discussions were even permitted during this period, and Karatani Kōjin thinks it may have been the only journal that sought to preserve “freedom of speech” as Marxism was completely suppressed by that time. But Karatani reminds us that its “liberalism” could only be literary and its “freedom” only aesthetic.<sup>14</sup> Through the understanding of modernity as something received from the West and its association with Western colonial imperialism, the overcoming of modernity in some sense signified for many the overthrow of Western and modern ideas and influences along with the military defeat of Western hegemony in favor of a Japanese hegemony in East Asia and the Pacific. But of course, the real situation was more complex and the discussions reflected, in different degrees, awareness of that complexity. The symposium as a whole, however, failed to provide air-tight arguments or concrete suggestions or any unified front. Nonetheless the discussants took the issue seriously as their own, and its publication succeeded in rousing a generation of intellectuals right after the outbreak of the US-Japan war.

Between the different intellectuals participating, a variety of views were expressed, both in their submitted essays and in their discussions, in regard to “modernity”, what it is and

<sup>14</sup> *Karatani* 2005: 109. Nonetheless, Karatani states that in its “literary liberalism”, the journal differed from the “trash pieces written by ideologues at the time” [*Karatani* 2005: 114].

what its “overcoming” entails. Most generally agreed that modernization in Japan since the Meiji period had led to a number of vices and misfortunes. Many spoke of the development of modernity in the West and its incorporation in Japan during the Meiji period with its “civilization and enlightenment” movement, its advantages and disadvantages. Hiromatsu Wataru discerns among them three axes that are not necessarily mutually exclusive: 1) the view that defines modernity as a “period of anthropocentrism” in contrast to medieval theocentrism; 2) the view that grasps modernity in terms of its economic, social, and political organization of capitalism; and 3) the view that conceives modernity as a “cultural typological” regulation in Western civilization’s posture of world domination [Hiromatsu 1989: 179–180]. Fujita Masakatsu finds two opposing general views: 1) the view that the evils of modernization and “modernity” essentially do not belong to Japan but are alien, and that their overcoming entails turning back to, restoring, the “purely” Japanese aspects of the past; and 2) the view that “modernity” is not something *other* but rather an issue of one’s self, the very place where one stands [Fujita 2018: 348]. Minamoto Ryōen sees the participants’ views to modernity split between those who argued modernity is something to be overcome and those who argued for a recognition of its value [Minamoto 1994: 207–208]. I think one can notice all of these positions, but the general underlying assumption was that modernity was originally a European phenomenon that influenced Japan’s modernization. As the more pernicious consequences of modernity, many agreed upon the extreme degree of specialization in various disciplines, the dehumanization, mechanization, and quantification resulting from technological and scientific “progress,” leading to a sense of lack of wholeness and alienation. They also expressed anxiety over the loss of an appropriate Japanese character and identity. Overcoming modernity as such would be the overcoming of Japan’s self-alienation and a path of self-restoration [Calichman 2008: 11–12]. In the face of the crisis on many different fronts, especially the war, the organizers felt the need to consolidate the efforts of intellectuals to contribute to solidarity with a “more rational and practical solution to the problem of Japanese modernization” [Calichman 2008: xi]. Yet some discussants recognized a certain ambiguity in the terms, “modernity” and its “overcoming” and questioned the coherence of this task. In the following I will summarize the views of each participant.

### *The Bungakkai Coterie*

Among the intellectual currents represented, the *Bungakkai* coterie was the least intellectually coherent and most diverse in their stance. Among them Kawakami distinguished “our Japanese blood that had hitherto been acting as the real driving force of our intellectual activity” from “the Western intellectuality that had been awkwardly systematizing it” [Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 166]. “Modernity” would belong to the latter as something like a jacket borrowed from another to cover oneself, but leading to awkwardness, discomfort, and tension [Fujita 2018: 349].

Among the *Bungakkai* group, Kobayashi was the one most deeply preoccupied with the difficulty of maintaining a Japanese identity and came close to the position of the Japan Romantic School [Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 289]. In the symposium he exclaims that, while Western modernity is a tragedy, Japan’s modernity, with its rush to imitate, has been a comedy. For the truly creative standpoint that addresses the question of enduring

forms of beauty has no need for the new; beauty does not “evolve” to progressively become modern. Aesthetic creations are “unhistorical”. Humans are always struggling with the same issues and that sameness is eternal. The modern perspective of history prevents one from encountering, and makes one forget, those unchanging structures [Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 219–220]. He thus equates overcoming modernity with the rejection of the modern view to history as continuous progress. Overcoming the linear concept of time is thus the key.

In contrast to his *Bungakkai* colleagues, Nakamura noticed an ambiguity (曖昧), in both concept and practice, of the task of “overcoming modernity”. It would be simple if one could just take “modern” to be synonymous with “Western”. But to borrow a concept from the West in order to reject the West, he argues, would be a thoughtless contradiction. Contemporary Western intellectuals have already been expressing this project of “overcoming modernity” [Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 150, 155]. By the time of the Renaissance and with the ending of feudal society Europeans had begun discovering unknown worlds. They also found that unconditional belief in God was unnecessary. Nakamura argues therefore that the basis of European modernity lies in this spiritual state of having always to live among the unknown and search out the new [Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 203]. Europeans have had to live through this experience with its disillusionments. Nakamura thus asks whether the words “overcoming modernity” resonate for Japanese intellectuals with the same sort of emotive intensity and clarity of content as it must have for Europeans. Have the Japanese truly self-reflectively lived through modernity in the same way when modernity has been “a hasty foreign transplant”, a superficial import? [Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 150–152]. As if to ridicule the entire project of the symposium Nakamura confesses that for him, the words do not sound with the same intensity or clarity.<sup>15</sup>

Modernity in Europe is domestic but in Japan it is an import. To speak of “modernity” while ignoring the superficiality of Japanese modernity, Nakamura proclaims, is no more than “a meaningless idealistic game” [Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 152]. And yet the Japanese have already been irrevocably Westernized through the violent and frenzied change following the Meiji Restoration, to the point of no return. This rapid absorption of foreign civilization was necessary for the country’s survival, a matter of life and death. But the unquestionable superiority of the West’s material civilization had created a sense of credulity in proportion to the shallowness of people’s understanding of the West. The import of Western culture was focused on its scientific civilization but science is the result of rigorous training. He argues that it was not really science as tradition or practice but instead only a pile of ready-made scientific knowledge (科学的知識の集積) and technology that was imported and incorporated without the necessary time to digest that knowledge [Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 158–159]. The possession of that knowledge is not the same as understanding or grasping its meaning. If the Japanese people hastily cram that ready-made knowledge into their minds, they will lose the ability to think for themselves. Nakamura includes among such thoughtless and superficial trend-chasers even those who advocate reviving the classics for cultural self-awakening [Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 163]. Modernization in many fronts has thus contributed to a “deformity in spirit”. So the first step to

<sup>15</sup> Takeuchi notes that Nakamura’s essay, written after the roundtable sessions, during which he rarely expressed his thought, was clearly written as a critique of the symposium as a whole [Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 292].

its overcoming would be in clearly recognizing this spiritual crisis as an *internal enemy* (身内の敵), and then to truly comprehend the West. Despite raising these concrete issues, his questions were not taken up in the roundtable discussion. His views stand out, however, as among the more sophisticated positions expressed among the *Bungakkai* group and in the symposium as a whole.

### *The Japan Romantic School*

The representatives of the Japan Romantic School were Kamei and Hayashi, but both, as mentioned, were also part of the *Bungakkai* group. Hayashi described Japan's adoption of European culture as its submission to the West and faulted the "civilization and enlightenment" movement as responsible for the forgetting of the value of Japanese tradition and lineage. While Japan managed to restrain and resist the West, it could do so only by incorporating Western utilities and practical culture. In the attempt to ward off the Western imperialist threat and remodel itself into a modern nation-state, Japan ironically had to become foreign to itself, losing sight of its own true nature (本然の姿) [Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 110]. Among these Western imports Hayashi includes the spread of capitalism, the introduction of machine civilization, and the importation of democracy, liberalism, individualism, rationalism, utilitarianism, bureaucracy, specialization, mass production, consumerism, and so on, all devoid of any value or substance [Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 239–240]. Instead Japanese society has been corrupted by the pervasive rule of money and domination of vulgarity. But without historical recollection and realization of lineage, there can be no "living Japanese" who can create history. To purify Japanese identity from contamination, he thus calls on Japanese literature to "return to your true nature!" that can be found "in the heart of imperial loyalty" (勤皇の心), lying within and beneath the sedimented layers of Westernization and to cultivate it [Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 111].

Kamei, likewise in true Romanticist vein, traced the root of contemporary confusion back to the "civilization and enlightenment" movement of the Meiji era. If Hayashi looks to imperial loyalty, Kamei looks to the gods or *kami* (神) of Japan. Confusion, under the influence of foreign ideas and the spread of science has led to the loss of faith and sight of the gods. From the day the Japanese took over "modernity" from the West, the greatest enemy has been a lifestyle that slowly and deeply violates the spirit with its poison, spawning illusion and chatter, an illness or virus that everyone now carries [Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 6, 201, 202]. The consequence has been a decline in sensitivity (感受性) and the subjugation of man through machinery (機械) [Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 9, 12]. The increase in specialization and compartmentalization in various fields of knowledge, along with the increasing spirit of utilitarianism, has been a major disruptive force, leading to the loss of spiritual unity among the fields or disciplines but also of the wholeness of human nature (全人性). To overcome this era of exile from the gods, he longs for faith in – and rebirth of – the gods, a reintegration with the spirit of the *kami* [Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 200]. Interestingly, he also objected, however, to interpreting the classics by means of ruling slogans and empty catch-phrases and their circulation that promotes the vulgarization of language. He thus critiqued the deterioration of spirit that had surfaced under the sham excuse of "war time" [Minamoto 1994: 213]. In conclusion, he calls for a "holy war"

with two aspects. While the war outwardly aims to overthrow the Anglo-American forces, internally it aims to cure the psychological or spiritual malaise brought about by modern civilization [*Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 15*]. Members of the Japan Romantic School thus in general underscored the presence of that original Japanese identity – “the true nature” for Hayashi, faith in *kami* for Kamei – that distinguished Japan from the rest of the world. Such views of the Romanticists, however did not always mesh well with that of the Kyoto School thinkers.

### *The Kyoto School*

The Kyoto School’s approach to modernity was more systematic in comparison to the others. Suzuki, who specialized in European medieval history, makes the distinction between modernity as applied to Europe and to Japan. The situation in Japan is complicated because the issue of overcoming modernity overlaps with the issue of overcoming Europe’s world domination – the reason behind the Greater East Asia War – when modernity has also already been deeply internalized to become part of the Japanese people [*Calichman 2008: 146, 147; Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 176*]. He points out that even in Europe it has been disputed whether the modernity to be overcome is the nineteenth century that produced democracy, liberalism, and capitalism, or goes all the way back to the Renaissance. He suggests, however, that the nineteenth century was a necessary consequence of the development of the modern spirit traceable to the Renaissance, while also suggesting that modernity truly emerges at the end of the eighteenth century, having gone through the necessary developments of the Renaissance, the Wars of Religion, the post-Enlightenment, the emergence of civil society and capitalism, the French Revolution, and the emergence of science [*Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 180*]. He adds to this that one way to overcome modernity may be to look back to the medieval period and reflect on our indebtedness to it [*Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 186*].

Through the “civilization and enlightenment” movement Meiji-era Japan had been transformed into a great modern power. But Suzuki, like Nakamura, points to the fragmentary and superficial nature of the Japanese understanding of Europe [*Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 241*]. He reminds the others, however, that modernity in Japan is no longer alien as it has been deeply internalized to become part of the Japanese. What had been adopted was nineteenth century modernity – democracy in the realm of politics, capitalism in the realm of economics, and liberalism in the realm of thought – elements of modern civilization that contemporary Europeans are in the process of reexamining. This in turn has awakened an intellectual crisis in Japan as well. But since Japan has already become a powerful modernized country, the contradiction is deep and the issue cannot be resolved by a simple denunciation of the foreign [*Calichman 2008: 147*]. For modernity’s overcoming is many-sided even if it involves issues relating to the foundation of worldviews and the nature of civilization. Although Suzuki’s formulation covers almost the entirety of the gamut of issues, the roundtable discussions ignored his suggestions. He ended up withdrawing his submitted essay later from the book version of the proceedings.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> His essay, “A Note on ‘Overcoming Modernity’” (「近代の超克」覚書) was published in the October 1942 issue of *Bungakkai*, 41–43, but he withdrew it from being published in the book version that appeared in 1943.

Fellow traveler of the Kyoto School, Shimomura states in the symposium that modernity originates in Europe and its overcoming, as a Japanese problem, means a confrontation with European modernity. This means that the issue of Japanese modernity is not necessarily identical with the issue for Europeans [Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 112]. Like Nakamura's point about science, Shimomura states that the Japanese had received only the *outcome* of modernization, its external institutions and technology, while discarding its "internal spirit or *ethos*" [Kosaka 2018: 236] and without historically experiencing the *process* of modernization. But insofar as Japan had been modernized and hence Westernized, "Europe is no longer a mere other [他者]" and "modernity is us, and the overcoming of modernity is the overcoming of ourselves ..." [Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 113]. Its overcoming then must be accompanied by self-critique.

As if directing his remarks at Kawakami or the Romantics like Hayashi and Kamei, Shimomura also mentions how it would be dishonest to simplistically take modernity as an "age of misfortune" without recognizing its positive aspects [Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 115]. While things become specialized (専門化) or differentiated (分化) in modernity, this in itself is not equivalent to decadence for specialization has a certain purpose. Even the supposed opposition between religion and science is not a real conflict but an opposition between certain religious dogmas and certain scientific theories and is eliminated in modernity once each is purified of the other – specialized – as science loses its status as naïve metaphysics and religion loses its status as naïve science [Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 237]. One main incentive behind the European discourse of overcoming modernity lies in the degeneration of culture into a mechanized civilization in which people are enslaved to machinery. But Shimomura reminds us that the invention of machinery was to free us from slavery and wonders if the assumption of the purity of medieval spirituality may be an idealization [Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 113–114]. Against the medievalist Yoshimitsu, who looked to a return to the medieval, he points out that it is meaningless as well as impossible to return to the past to seek some lost unity belonging to the medieval era. To simply point to man's enslavement to machines would be cliché when machines were originally meant to liberate. He explains the origin of machinery to lie in the technical nature of science, a characteristic of modern knowledge that attempts to overcome, or work with, nature and its laws. This involves idealism as the spirit that recognizes all being to be mediated by the knowing subject. Even empiricism and positivism as well as the Protestant Reformation were informed by this spirit of idealism [Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 188]. Shimomura therefore traces modern science not to materialism but to idealism (觀念論). He argues that this modern approach to cognition is what led to the formation of machines and the resulting reorganization or reconstitution of nature, establishing the *objective* (客觀的) independence of the human spirit [Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 114–115; Minamoto 1994: 211]. If humanity today is indeed enslaved by machinery, it is not the responsibility of machines but rather of the institutions operating them and ultimately the human spirit who created and runs machinery. It is not really machine civilization but rather the machine-making spirit itself that needs to be problematized [Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 271].

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The speculation by several commentators has been that this was due to his disappointment with how the discussion progressed. It was only published much later in 1980 [Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 287; Hiromatsu 1989: 87; Minamoto 1994: 209].

The tragedy of modernity, for Shimomura, lies rather in the inability of the old model of the soul to keep up with the new modern body whose organs are no longer the fleshly body but machinery [*Kawakami – Takeuchi* 1979: 116, 262]. It is an issue of imbalance. The point is not to reject the civilization of machinery but for culture to positively catch up with, and rule, that civilization. The particular Japanese task vis-à-vis modernity then is not about replacing it with some “purely” Japanese element of pre-modernity but “to reflect and critique what we had received and how and to what extent we had received it. This is the sole content of the issue of overcoming modernity for us” [*Kawakami – Takeuchi* 1979: 112]. What is needed is a new metaphysics, a new “theory of spiritual cultivation,” for the modern bodymind. Shimomura’s explication and characterization of modern science, however, was generally ignored, and the issues he set before the symposium did not get far in the roundtable discussions [*Hiromatsu* 1989: 28; *Minamoto* 1994: 212, 227].

Nishitani, the most well-known of the three Kyoto School participants today, had already previously written works on related themes, and contributes his insights from them to the symposium. He expresses his view of modernity as something situated politically, economically, and culturally at the end of post-Renaissance or “early modern” (近世) Europe when its “world” began to spread to the rest of the globe. Modernity in Japan was introduced after the Meiji Restoration, but in a fragmentary manner when Western culture had already splintered into various specialized fields, having lost its unifying center and unified worldview [*Kawakami – Takeuchi* 1979: 19]. The culture of the early modern period made its decisive break from the medieval period through the three movements that established the religious Reformation, the Renaissance, and natural science as sources for proceeding intellectual currents. But these streams that have dominated the spiritual culture of the modern West are fundamentally discordant, each harboring a radically distinct worldview [*Kawakami – Takeuchi* 1979: 19–20]. The Reformation represents the standpoint centered on God, natural science represents the standpoint centered on the natural world, and the Renaissance represents the standpoint centered on humanity or the soul. The three pillars of human existence have splintered and fallen into unbridgeable fission. By contrast, in medieval Europe they were harmoniously united under the Christian creed. But in modernity each stands alone, claiming to sustain the whole [*Kawakami – Takeuchi* 1979: 20–21]. Japan, to survive, was forced to incorporate Western culture with its practical organization of fields like science, technology, economics, government, and so on. But Western culture’s own discordant division has infiltrated post-restoration Japan, threatening to split the very foundation Japan’s unified worldview would be built upon, leading to its current confusion [*Kawakami – Takeuchi* 1979: 21].

Nishitani’s response to that modern confusion is to probe into the depths of subjectivity, to its bottomless abyss beyond the limits of the modern subject, on the basis of which an ethics for the world can be erected. Modern epistemology postulates the opposition between subject (主観) and object (対象). Modern man seeks to establish his own subjectivity by positing this opposition, transforming others into objects while constituting itself in relation to that object. Nishitani’s response is to invoke the Nishidian concept of absolute nothingness (絶対無) as the foundation giving rise to both terms of the oppositional logic. Nishitani develops this concept of nothingness in his own terms as the “standpoint of subjective nothingness” (主体的無の立場) [*Kawakami – Takeuchi* 1979: 29]. As true subjectivity (真の主観性), not a being, it is not some *thing* that can be grasped objectively

but rather an act of free spontaneity. A selfless ethics is to be constructed on the basis of a religiosity that probes into the depths of subjectivity and down to this “standpoint of subjective nothingness”, where we act in pure spontaneity but without ego. This permits culture, history, and even science the freedom to pursue their own standpoints [Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 23–27].

Nishitani claims this standpoint of subjective nothingness to be the original spiritual dispensation of the Japanese traditions which can provide its own unique authentic redefinition of modernity, a reconstruction of a united foundation for the formation of a new worldview and self-realization of the new man. He claims Japan to be the only country where this Eastern religiosity has been closely bound to national ethics to become the nation’s cornerstone [Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 29]. As the only non-European country to have developed the strength of a European nation, Japan thus bears the task to construct a new world order in Greater East Asia. But this must mean the founding of a just order to replace the old order of European colonialism [Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 32]. The overcoming of modernity is to be realized through the immediate interpenetration between the religious nature of the world (世界宗教性) and the ethical nature of the nation-state (国家倫理性), channeling its moral energy (道德的エネルギー) based on subjective nothingness to the rest of the world.<sup>17</sup> The nation must step beyond its self-centered standpoint by grounding itself on that selfless standpoint of subjective nothingness, opening up a “horizon of the communality of nations” based on the “nonduality of self and others” (自他不二) and “self-benefit in benefitting others” (自利利他) [Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 36]. The task of overcoming the spirit of modernity consists in securing the ethical nature of this moral energy (道德的エネルギーの倫理性) running through individual, state, and world [Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 34; Minamoto 1994: 220]. Each nation can then take its place within the community of a Greater East Asia. Japan’s leadership within that community is justified on the basis of its self-awareness that this spirit has originally been part of Japan’s tradition [Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 34]. Japan can thus claim self-negating altruism in its guidance of East Asia.

In a certain sense Nishitani’s claim to Japan, rather than any other nation, as the bearer of this ethical nature, seems to reify the nation’s special status despite its grounding in the unreifiable and pre-substantial unground of nothingness, and if so, one might accuse him for logical inconsistency. Questions arise whether his statements pertain to Japan’s a priori essence or to the consequence of historical development. But despite certain Orientalist or Japonocentric ideas, including the characterizations of nothingness as “Oriental” (東洋的) and manifesting especially in Japan, this concept of nothingness, fraught with ambiguity, *also* points to a deconstructive undertow through its attributed self-negation. Even while repeatedly locating it in the Eastern, in particular, Japanese tradition, Nishitani also describes it as the abyssal un/ground transcending all dichotomies. Followed consistently, this logic of nothingness and self-negation would destabilize and undermine all substantializations or hypostatizations, revealing binary oppositions – such as East and West, or Japan and its other – to be contingent. In presupposing Japan’s role

<sup>17</sup> Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 29. Nishitani took over this concept of *moralische Energie* from the German historian Leopold von Ranke and expanded it as “the driving force of national ethics ... [that] is directly the driving force of a world ethic ...” to prevent injustices [Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 33].

as representative of the East *vis-à-vis* the West, Nishitani assumes the very framework of East/West dichotomy, so much a part of the “overcoming modernity” discourse in its anti-Eurocentrism, but which, to a large extent, had itself been inherited from Western modern Orientalist discourse. But his notion of subjective nothingness would paradoxically unground and expose as contingent, along with other dichotomies, this oppositional logic of East vs. West.<sup>18</sup> The irony is that in the very attempt to overcome modernity, Nishitani on some level repeated that dualism belonging to the modern framework that opposes the “modern” qua Western to a reified traditional East, represented by Japan. On another level, however, Nishitani argued for Japan’s own form of modernity that may not easily fit into the dichotomization of East vs. West. For the concept of nothingness, while historically rooted in the Eastern traditions of Mahāyāna Buddhism, Daoism, and Zen, does not have to be denied universality for the sake of its historical origins, any more than the idea of a monotheistic God having roots in the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern context.<sup>19</sup> The real question is whether such a concept indeed is viable or makes sense beyond its cultural origin.

One could argue that the nothingness invoked by Nishitani – in both its lineage and de-reifying content, both pre- and post-modern – provides a deconstructive route out of modern anthropocentrism and metaphysics. As the division of the globe into two hemispheres of East and West is today breaking down to unveil a greater chiasmic complexity along with the inherently porous nature of cultures, the concept of “nothingness”, as an unground (*Abgrund*) of the world, is especially apt for this deconstructive, including *self*-deconstructive – self-negating – significance that undermines essences, including its own *self-reified* essence, predicated upon ethno-nationalist assumptions. Taken as an abyssal space it provides a *clearing for the plurality* of cultural differences as well as for novelty and change. If modernity marks the peak in the development of Western ontology in its perspective of being qua substance in terms of nature (*phusis*) in the ancient world, God for the medievals, and finally the subject (*cogito, I, Geist*), from Descartes to Kant to Hegel, with its anthropocentric imposition upon, and objectification of, the rest of reality and the world, its overcoming suggested by the Kyoto School would be through its desubstantialization in the abyssal nothing(ness) as its unground but also as an openness for difference and plurality, alterity and alteration. Taken in that sense could it not be a clearing for multiple modernities as well?

### ***Other Participants***

Participants from other currents and disciplines expressed a variety of other views. The music composer and theorist Moroi expressed his view that Japan’s modernity came about by imitating Western civilization as a jumble of both good and bad elements. European modernity with its anthropocentric view is now in decline so the Japanese people need

<sup>18</sup> Calichman argues that this inconsistency conceals Nishitani’s reactive wish for an exclusively Japanese identity, *vis-à-vis* the West, the desire to see the Orient, and especially Japan, as unique [*Calichman 2008: 19–20*].

<sup>19</sup> Any concept that one looks to as grounding principle, for which one claims universal validity, for that matter originates in some specific cultural context. Nothingness, on the other hand, is not necessarily an idea exclusive to the East as similar insights have been intimated or expressed on the margins of the Western tradition as well, e.g., the nothingness beyond, before, and not delimited to God the person.

to awaken to this fact and confront its disorder [Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 39, 50]. One sense of overcoming modernity for Japan would be through a national reflection and thoroughgoing critique of Japanese modern culture. It would involve grasping the essence of Western culture, critically and systematically, to distinguish between what ought to be adopted and what ought to be abandoned. The positive sense of its overcoming would also mean building up Japanese culture and recovering its spirit (精神) by returning the sensual (感覚) to its original place, restoring everything in accordance with the spiritual order (精神の秩序). But in relation to the Japanese classics, their pursuit must be done with an attitude that “restoration is renewal” (復古とは維新である) [Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 55, 56]. In music overcoming modernity transfers into creating new music that is essentially spiritual, rescuing music from the art of sensory stimulation and restoring it to the art of the spirit [Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 38, 206–207].

The Catholic theologian Yoshimitsu focused more on modernity as a Western problem, which he diagnoses metaphysically and theologically as a problem of fundamental spirituality and of atheism. Western modernity has led to the “violent whirlpools of modern society” from the Renaissance to the French Revolution to Communism [Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 60–61]. But this is also a problem for Japan. He agreed with Nishitani in the roundtable that there existed a unity in the Middle Ages between religion, culture, and ethics, which then became disintegrated in modernity. The Renaissance involved the loss of true, living religious spirituality, an estrangement from medieval Christianity [Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 182–183]. And with modernity’s anthropocentric rationalism and liberalism came the dissolution of the ideas of an external spiritual kingdom and inner religiosity. This “crisis of the West” has spread over the entire planet to become an issue for present-day Japan as well [Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 182]. In this worldwide crisis, modern man is a tragic figure who must rediscover God [Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 185]. Yoshimitsu orients this objection to modernity toward the Middle Ages as a time of faith that can cure modernity’s faithlessness – a move toward what Nikolai Berdyayev (1874–1948) called the “new Middle Ages”. As if to warn against current trends in Europe – especially Nazi Germany – he adds that this cannot be just a reactive negation of modernity nor a return to a pre-Christian Germanic ground of the people that would signify an *apostatic idolatry* of a new pagan myth [Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 76]. So the problem of “conquering modernity” is a question of how to revive this universal principle of unity, how Europe can once again rediscover God and how Japan, given the influence of modern European culture, can also rediscover God [Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 182]. Referring to Catholic poet and philosopher Charles Péguy’s (1873–1914) call for a fundamental spiritual revolution against modernity, Yoshimitsu clarifies that modernity’s overcoming will be a return to the religiosity of medieval Catholicism, represented by a theocentric humanism or what Jacques Maritain (1882–1973) called “integral humanism” (*humanisme integral*), oriented to a supernatural life of grace. He believes that with repentance of Western modernity, a liberation from the modern ego through the *penitence of the soul*, a new East Asian spiritual civilization will be built [Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 79–80]. The others in the symposium, however, not sharing his Catholic faith, ignored his proposals.

In the 20th century the U.S. has increasingly come to replace Europe as leader of the West. Some of the discussants talked about how this has led to the increased importation

of American culture with its “crass, hedonistic materialism” and the cult of “fast living” and “eroticism” depicted in American movies and spread through mass production strategies to undermine traditional culture and values [*Harootunian – Najita 1993: 765–766*]. Journalist and writer Tsumura focused his critique on the American culture that Japan had imported following the Taishō era (1912–1926) [*Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 124, 125–126, 134–135*]. In his attack Tsumura also targets democracy as a movement that levels things down to the average, and material and machine civilization that allows us to live as cheaply and as easily as possible while also contributing to the levelling down [*Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 260*]. In comparison to this contemporary spirit (現代精神), infected by Americanism, the modern spirit (近代精神), for him, has still much to offer.<sup>20</sup> Tsumura found it thus imperative to manage machinery so as to prevent it from consuming human life, and to inherit the Japanese classical spirit and tradition together with the modern spirit of the West. In order to conquer Americanism, he thus pointed to the common cultural will in both Europe and Japan – he has in mind the Axis powers – to overcome the old world order [*Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 122, 127, 129*].

Kikuchi, the physicist, on the other hand expressed a similar ambivalence towards the project of overcoming modernity as Nakamura. His view was that there is neither modernity nor antiquity in science [*Minamoto 1994: 207*]. If it is indeed the case that modern scientific thought has negated everything divine and spiritual, this would be a serious problem. But he finds that idea to be the reductive or simplistic perspective of materialism with its naïve realism. Kikuchi claims that this would not be a problem if we could understand that the world, grasped scientifically, is but one aspect of a larger world, which he suggests could be the nothingness discussed by Nishitani [*Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 145, 149*]. He thus side-stepped the entire issue of overcoming modernity as a problem.

## Conclusion

As we can see, a wide variety of views, including both affirmations and rejections of the modern, were expressed in the symposium on “Overcoming Modernity”. But it lacked any deep interaction among the participants and failed to result in a unified understanding of what “modernity” is. Nor did it unfold any coherent argument or concrete scheme that everyone can agree on for the direction of its “overcoming”. Kawakami, as chair, confessed in regard to the unclarity of the title, that it was meant to serve more as a slogan he thought he could throw at the participants to spur them towards some common sentiment. But without any consensus on what the conference was even about, both before and after the event, no consistency in thought ever emerged from their presentations and discussions. Even as the participants failed to engage each other’s arguments, there were tensions and differences discernible throughout the roundtable discussions [*Fujita 2018: 346–347*]. Despite some interesting suggestions and insights from a few individuals like Nakamura, Shimomura, and Suzuki, the conference failed to clarify the task, or meaning, of overcoming modernity.

<sup>20</sup> Kawakami – Takeuchi [1979: 135]; Minamoto [1994: 210]. During the roundtable interchange Suzuki responded to Tsumura’s simplification of American culture by pointing out the Puritan element in American culture which is quite different from what Tsumura had been talking about [*Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 258*].

There was the common wish, however, to reflect on the current situation at a time of anxiety [Minamoto 1994: 200]. Most, despite differences, sought the alternative ideal within something “Eastern” or “Japanese”. Looking to an ideal in the past and conceiving the present as a “fall”, some, in the form of a “Romanticist reaction”, called for a renaissance or restoration – recovering one’s “heart of imperial loyalty” for Hayashi, halting the vulgarization of language for Kamei, and so on [Calichman 2008: 7; Hiromatsu 1989: 99]. The “primal Japanese” ideal they looked to was not merely an idealistic being of the past but embodied in the present nation-state and society of modern Japan even if infected by the “poison” of “modernity”. But the participants recognized, to varying degrees, that they cannot simply reject the whole of modernity. To that extent, Hiromatsu notices, they intended a *reformation* rather than mere *regression* [Hiromatsu 1989: 99–100]. And here one might argue that the overcoming of modernity for them would in fact be the construction of an *alternative* modernity proper to East Asia. The mere appeal to return to Japan’s original identity to become *more* Japanese was not without certain risks – as Calichman notes – since Japan’s own colonial expansion had opened, or broadened, Japanese identity, making it accessible, beyond native Japanese, to Taiwanese and Koreans as well – Taiwan having been annexed in 1895 and Korea annexed in 1910. Moreover the figures of Japanese identity as historical representatives or symbols of Japaneseness that some participants appealed to – the emperor, the Japanese language, the Japanese classics, and so on – as embodiments are governed by contingency and thus can sabotage the project from within.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, the Japanese as the most modern of Asians and having fallen victim to the “infection” (感染) of modernity or Americanism, placed the attempt to restore that idealized origin in jeopardy. To the extent that it was no longer possible to speak of Western modernity as simply foreign or alien, the question of overcoming modernity demanded a kind of *self-critique*. Calichman lines up expressions of this sentiment nicely: Overcoming modernity is “an overcoming of ourselves” (Shimomura); it requires “recognizing such spiritual crisis as an internal enemy” (Nakamura); “the poisons ... circulate *within* our body” (Kamei); the Japanese intellectual himself is the site of the dualism between “Japanese blood” and “Europeanized intellect” (Kawakami); and “European civilization has today already become deeply internalized ... no longer merely ... alien ... but ... part of us ... the modernity ... to be overcome exists ... within us as well” (Suzuki) [Calichman 2008: 17, 145, 146; Kawakami – Takeuchi 1979: 113, 164, 166, 176, 201, 202]. Calichman notices as operating here tacitly, or in “repressed form”, a logic that can account for, but ungrounds – un/grounds – the oppositional framework of native vs. alien, East vs. West, opening one up to alterity, the tacit recognition of the porosity of their culture among the participants, its originary openness to alterity that would call into question claims to essential, hence “pure”, determinateness [Calichman 2008: 20, 23]. For there can be no notion of a culture or identity in its purity when external elements are always mixed up in its originary constitution. Calichman convincingly argues that the source of this crisis of modernity as a crisis of identity might simply be *historical* and that the self – whether individual or collective – exists *in principle* in crisis in its exposure to alterity over which it has no control [Calichman 2008: 18]. If so, the attempt to overcome

<sup>21</sup> Calichman [2008: 14, 15, 16]. What comes to mind is the recent Emperor Akihito’s voluntary abdication of the throne due to being “tired”.

the crisis of modernity may itself be a *modern* condition along with the crisis. But one could *also* argue, as I mentioned above, that this historicity and contingency is precisely implied by the notion of nothingness Nishitani invokes.

The symposium, once published, however, obtained a popular reputation, probably due more to its attractive title than to the coherence of its intellectual content, but also because of its timing and circumstances. Hiromatsu states that it had a massive impact on the intellectual youth of the time, speaking emotively rather than intellectually to their sense of despair [*Hiromatsu 1989: 181–182*]. For intellectuals, “overcoming modernity” represented a far loftier idea than military victory over Anglo-American powers or even world conquest, an idea expressing a grand task, vague enough and sufficiently undefined to work as a unifying incantation for young intellectuals, looking to make sense of the war. But Hiromatsu also suggests that the symposium may also have served as a kind of advertisement for the Kyoto School’s “philosophy of world history” that would give some “theoretical” composition to the theoretical chaos of the Japan Romantic School and the *Bungakkai* coterie and which was discussed with much greater depth, and in detail, in the parallel symposium organized by *Chūōkōron* [*Hiromatsu 1989: 201*].

Among the two major leftist philosophers of contemporary Japan who have commented on this symposium, Hiromatsu underscored the overlap in intention the symposium’s discourse shared with the Shōwa Restoration movement despite their distinct lineage.<sup>22</sup> Karatani on the other hand views this symposium as exemplifying a “literary liberalism” that differed from the more bombastic “trash pieces” written by ideologues of the time [*Karatani 2005: 114*; see also *Karatani 1989*]. But it also cannot be denied, as both Karatani and Hiromatsu would agree, that the interpretation, expressed in the symposium, of the Pacific War as a revolt against Western modernity and its hegemony over Asia was a view not unattractive to the Marxists who by that time had been forced underground and also to ex-Marxists (many of whom participated in the symposium) [see *Harootunian – Najita 1993: 760*]. The criticism of Meiji era utilitarianism and state bureaucracy was inseparable from the denunciation of the international order dominated by the West. The overcoming of modernity for many thus meant the uprooting of capitalism and Western materialism and colonial power in Asia, together with a reidentification of Japanese ideals while reviving similar ideas in other Asian countries and recognizing the necessity of Japan’s protection of East Asia [*Harootunian – Najita 1993: 767*]. The construction of a new ideal order that they all somehow vaguely pined for, however, could not be an outright rejection of the modern world. Instead it meant the building of an alternative Japanese or East Asian form of modernity that would overcome the faults of modernity imported from the West. This is so even if, as Hiromatsu writes, the symposium participants never clearly indicated what the alternative system replacing the old modernity or sublating its historical reality in social practice would be [*Hiromatsu 1989: 199–200*]. Eisenstadt’s idea of

<sup>22</sup> Hiromatsu [*1989: 102*]. The Shōwa Restoration movement was an anti-capitalist national reconstruction movement during the 1920s and ‘30s. The movement looked to some form of a post-Meiji revolution with the aim of overcoming the economic crisis and impasse of the political scene dominated by corrupt politicians. This culminated in a series of *coups d’état* and assassination plots from 1930 to ‘36, involving Army officers, secret societies, and politicians. These plots were all crushed but the pressure led to greater military influence on the government. The movement was also related to an anti-Western colonialist and pan-Asianist sentiment that would idealize and postulate the cooperation among the peoples of East Asia, a “cooperative harmony of the five tribes” (五族協和) of Japanese, Han Chinese, Manchurians, Koreans, and Mongolians.

multiple modernities and his theory of how modernizing societies develop has recently helped to refute the “homogenizing and hegemonic assumptions” of the Western program of modernity as found, for example, in Hegel’s *Philosophy of History* [Eisenstadt 2000: 1]. Many movements within non-Western societies – various nationalist or traditionalist movements – that emerged from the mid-nineteenth century up to after World War II have articulated strong anti-Western, even anti-modern themes, and yet, Eisenstadt points out, were distinctively modern. We can count here Japan’s program of modernization that developed, from its start in the Meiji period, into the wartime (WWII) rhetoric of resistance to Western imperialism, including the overcoming modernity discourses. On the other hand, however, counter to the hegemonic assumptions of the Japanese program of modernizing Asia, we probably also need to account for differences within Asia in the multiple ways of modernization, an issue that was not raised in the prewar and wartime discourse on modernity.<sup>23</sup>

Today U.S. hegemony is in decline as the world heads towards greater multi-polarity. In post-war Asia, Japan has again seized the economy of the East Asian sphere, and more recently so has China. The topic of “overcoming modernity” to that extent is still relevant [Karatani 1989: 272]. But to reiterate our point this would mean the construction of a new alternative modernity if it is not to mean an impossible return to ancient or medieval pre-modernity. I would agree with Hiromatsu that we need today to examine and reconsider, from the lens of contemporary concerns and historical contexts, the content of ideas expressed in the wartime discourse on overcoming modernity [Hiromatsu 1989: 224]. The difficulty is in clearly separating the fundamental issues from parts distorted by circumstances of the period – to not throw the baby out with the bathwater. There are still plenty of arguments, themes, and motifs reflected in the wartime discourse on overcoming modernity, such as the hermeneutical reassessment of nothingness from the Eastern tradition, the unity of global history and its recovery in accordance with a multi-polar dynamic to overcome the Eurocentric uni-linear view of world history, or the overcoming of the various dualisms of modern thought [see Hiromatsu 1989: 253–254]. To discuss these issues, we need to seriously engage and examine, especially, the philosophy of the Kyoto School anew.

The multipolarity of the world now revealed means, however, that we no longer need to uncritically adopt the dichotomization of the globe into the geographical hemispheres of East vs. West, as previously the Orientalists in the West, but also the symposium participants had done. We ought to recognize that, even if modernity originated in Europe, a multiplicity of modernities have arisen in a multipolar world along with a variety of cultural agendas in different modern societies. Eisenstadt claims that this diversity “attests to the continual development of multiple modernities, ... multiple interpretations of modernity, and ... to attempts at ‘de-Westernization’, depriving the West of its monopoly on modernity” [Eisenstadt 2000: 24]. What is called for today after the Cold War, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, after 9/11 and in the face of mounting tensions between the U.S., China, and Russia is the construction of a new pluralistic world order to contribute to the unfolding in world history of viable modernities, overcoming the faults of old models of modernity.

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<sup>23</sup> This is the point Takeuchi makes in his essay “Asia as Method” [Takeuchi 2005b].

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# Civilizational Aspects of Japanese History: Continuities and Discontinuities

JÓHANN PÁLL ÁRNASON\*

Civilizační aspekty japonských dějin: Kontinuity a diskontinuity

**Abstract:** This paper discusses the merits and problems of civilizational perspectives on Japanese history, with particular reference to the task of combining a comparative approach with valid points made by those who see Japan as a highly self-contained cultural world. After a brief consideration of Claude Lévi-Strauss's reflections on Japan, the central section of the paper deals with Shmuel Eisenstadt's work. His conception of Japan as a distinctive civilization characterized by pre-axial patterns is rejected on the grounds that the native mode of thought which he proposes to describe is more plausibly interpreted as an offshoot of Chinese traditions, although a notably autonomous and historically changing one. The transmission of Daoism to Japan, although much less explicit than the reception of Confucianism and Buddhism, was of crucial importance. That said, Eisenstadt's concrete analyses of Japanese ways to transform foreign inputs are often detailed and insightful, and his comments on the relationship between culture and institutions raise important questions, although they must in many cases be reformulated in more historical terms. The paper discusses the genesis, dynamics and collapse of the Tokugawa regime (1600–1868), and concludes with reflections on Japanese modernity, up to and including its present crisis.

**Keywords:** Japan; civilization; culture; East Asia; China; S. N. Eisenstadt; Tokugawa regime; Japanese modernity

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At the beginning of the introduction to this issue, I quoted Eisenstadt's remark on Japan's exemplary importance for comparative historical sociology, and noted the multiple ramifications of that perspective. There is, however, another side to the matter. As a major authority on twentieth-century Japanese history puts it, "something about Japan invites people to view it hermetically", and the same author adds that "it is not just outsiders who tend to isolate and insulate the Japanese experience; no one makes more of a fetish of the supposed singularity of the national character and the national experience than the country's own cultural essentialists and neonationalists" [Dower 1999: 29]. The domestic version of the "hermetic" view, known as *nihonjinron*, has been a significant force in Japanese cultural life, and not without influence on political attitudes; it has also come in for extensive scholarly criticism, and will not be further discussed here. But it seems worthwhile to take a look at some prominent outsiders, with a view to the question of possible – and not necessarily all bad – interconnections of the hermetic and the comparative approaches. As will be seen, that kind of cross-reference is evident in Eisenstadt's

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work on Japanese civilization, with problematic but certainly not irrelevant results. To place the issue in broader context, we should start with more openly speculative and adventurous exercises.

### Thinking with Anthropologists

The most widely known example of *nihonjinron* from the outside is without any doubt Ruth Benedict's *The Crysanthemum and the Sword*, first published in 1946. The most remarkable highlights of its subsequent career are the Japanese reactions, commonly seen as a very important step in the development of domestic discourses on uniqueness and continuity, and the success of a Chinese translation, coinciding with a downturn in relations between China and Japan. Criticisms of the book have demolished its basic premises and central claims [see e.g. *Mouer – Sugimoto 1986; Lie 2001*], and its attempt to grasp the cultural essence of Japaneseness is no longer a matter for serious debate. But for a proper perspective on the book as a historical phenomenon, the complex background to Benedict's work should be acknowledged. Although she wrote the book at the request of U.S. authorities preparing for the occupation of Japan, it is not at all a straightforward victor's guide to alien hearts and minds. Benedict was, as the title suggests, trying to bring together two very different aspects of the Western encounter with Japan: the aesthetic fascination that had been such a key element in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century perceptions of Japan, and the subsequent experience of Japanese militarism. On another level, she drew on the record of cultural anthropology and on Oswald Spengler's morphology of culture; the combination of these sources enabled her to portray Japan as a self-contained cultural world, while avoiding Spengler's restrictive classification of high cultures and his excessive emphasis on one primal symbol for each of them (Spengler dismissed the very idea of Japanese culture in a footnote, suggesting that the culture of Japan had been Chinese and was now Western).

The search for anthropological foundations of the hermetic view did not cease with the dismissal of Benedict's work. A more recent but much less widely noticed variation on this theme was proposed by the most eminent anthropologist of the twentieth century, Claude Lévi-Strauss. His reflections on Japan certainly do not belong to the most seminal part of his work, but as I will try to show, they suggest some interesting perspectives on the issues to be discussed in relation to Eisenstadt's views. The two texts in question are a series of three lectures on anthropology and the modern world, delivered in Tokyo on the invitation of the Ishizaka Foundation in 1986, and a collection of occasional writings on Japan, both published posthumously in 2011; the title chosen for the latter book, "The Other Side of the Moon", says something about the overall approach [*Lévi-Strauss 2011a, 2011b*]. Here I will not stick closely to the texts; rather, thematic affinities between general anthropological observations and specifically Japanese questions will be singled out and linked to further discussion.

The general thrust of Lévi-Strauss's argument is perhaps best summed up in the following terms: "Like many other comparisons that one might make, that of Europe and Japan speaks against the notion of uni-directional progress" [*Lévi-Strauss 2011a: 123*]; "à sens unique" could perhaps also be read as "with the same meaning"; it is not just the uniformity, but also the unequivocal character of progress that is at stake). His specific

strategy of comparison takes off from a critique of more commonplace views. The idea of affinities between European and Japanese feudalism is dismissed on the grounds that the military, dynamic and pragmatic spirit of the latter makes it a “perfectly original form of social organization” [Lévi-Strauss 2011a: 122], only superficially similar to the European case; the similarly widespread notion that Japan’s escape from feudalism and the turn to modernization resulted from the opening to the West in the second half of the nineteenth century is rejected, on the grounds that technological developments, levels of literacy and commercial economy from the sixteenth century onwards testify to an early and indigenously dynamic of modernization.

These two points merit closer consideration. The first cannot be accepted at face value; militarism, dynamism and pragmatic attitudes were no less characteristic of European feudalism than of the Japanese variety. Lévi-Strauss was nevertheless on to something, but it must be expressed in different terms: as a contextual factor, rather than an intrinsic feature. The most salient aspect of Japanese feudal elites is their record of initiating new processes of state formation and redefining the relationship of their power centres to the pre-existing state; different arrangements of this dual power (asymmetric, yet not undisruptable) succeeded each other during the medieval period, but the crowning achievement was the early modern Tokugawa regime, more stable and more effectively centralized than any of its predecessors. As for Lévi-Strauss’s second point, he is right to emphasize that Japan’s road to modernity did not begin with the opening to the West, and that indigenous developments were at work in multiple fields of social life. But if the broader context and the specific connections between domestic and external forces are to be clarified, the trends and turns of state formation once again appear as a decisive factor. The foundation and consolidation of the Tokugawa regime set the scene for a very distinctive mode of growth and change. The unification of the country created preconditions for commercial integration, urbanization and cultural flowering; paradoxically, this went hand in hand with a far-reaching isolation from foreign contacts (exaggeratedly known as *sakoku*, the time of the closed country). The Tokugawa state might, in that regard, be described as a developmental container. Another paradox, even more puzzling, is the long-term pacification imposed by a military power elite after its most epoch-making victory, and the impact of this radical change on the social force most actively involved in it. The most prominent military families became local dynasties, but the numerous lower ranks of the *samurai* provided the personnel needed for administrative purposes on both central and domain levels. This bureaucratization of the *samurai*, as many historians have described it (at least in the sense that the middle and lower ranks were drawn into administrative roles), was one of the crucial preconditions for the transformation initiated in 1868 and consolidated during the following decades. But the Tokugawa period also saw the emergence of a new intelligentsia, largely from a *samurai* background.

The *samurai* input was essential to the activism that ensured a rapid break with the old regime, as well as to the selective leaning on traditions that helped to legitimize and stage-manage the new one. It also proved – despite the transformation of the *samurai* ethos during the centuries of isolation and pacification – remarkably conducive to the militaristic turn soon taken by the reconstructed Japanese state. These developments must be seen in a broader context of interrelations between tradition and modernity; to get a grasp on that problematic, it will be useful to return to Lévi-Strauss’s reflections, and to take a closer look

at the anthropological underpinnings of his approach to Japan. I will not try to recapitulate the whole of his ideas on Japan, nor to reconstruct any underlying unity of a rather disjointed train of thought; the points picked out here are chosen on the basis of their affinity with the civilizational issues to be discussed below.

The first presupposition to note has to do with a constitutive paradox of anthropology. This discipline affirms a fundamental equality of cultures, in the sense that it refrains from “intellectual or moral judgments on the respective values of such and such systems of belief or such and such forms of social organization” [*Lévi-Strauss 2011a: 135*]. To put it another way, cultural relativism is – as Lévi-Strauss explicitly states – an obligatory starting-point for anthropological research and theorizing. The other side of that is the anthropologist’s acceptance of her or his own dependence on a specific cultural background, from which any proposed criteria of judgment will be derived. “Every culture ... is essentially incapable of making a true judgment on another culture, because a culture cannot escape itself” [*Lévi-Strauss 2011a: 135*], and notwithstanding modern anthropology’s commitment to three universalizing projects (the ideal of scientific objectivity, the vision of a universal humanism going beyond the traditional Western understandings of that idea, and the quest for “authenticity” through a grasp of the subjective significance attributed to social phenomena), this relativizing principle also applies to its results. But that is not the whole story. The anthropologist can to a certain extent counterbalance or mitigate the constraints of relativism, and there are two particularly relevant ways of attempting that. Although it is impossible to rank human societies in terms of their place within a universal scheme of progress, comparative studies can reveal progress in specific fields and acknowledge the distinctive achievements of different cultures. When it comes to Japan, Lévi-Strauss is most inclined to stress the development of aesthetic sensibilities and their importance for nineteenth-century Western perceptions of Japan; seen from Europe, Japanese explorations in this domain appeared as guidances to further ventures.

The second way is more challenging, and it is the main justification for referring to a paradox of anthropology. If it is the case that an anthropologist, however aware of the intellectual standards of his discipline, is inescapably tied to the horizons of his culture and therefore unable to match the knowledge possessed by insiders of another culture, it may still be possible to take advantage of the outsider’s position and attempt a kind of overview that is less accessible from within. Lévi-Strauss’s reflections reveal that ambition, although they do not add up to any synthetic picture. Here I will only consider two observations, one specific and the other more comprehensive, but both conducive to further discussion along the lines indicated above.

At the beginning of his lecture on “the place of Japanese culture in the world”, Lévi-Strauss introduces a theme that has, as he puts it, been equally decisive for his individual experience and his anthropological perception of Japan [*Lévi-Strauss 2011b: 19–22*]. It is the strong impression of a continuity between mythology and history. He recalls visits to Japanese shrines as confirming this intuition and contrasts them with less easily imaginable links to sacred history in the Holy Land (where, as he puts it, both his culture and his origins ought to have made him more sensible to such connections). Given the treatment of myths elsewhere in his work, there is no doubt that he sees this aspect of Japanese culture in a positive light; he is one of those who have tried to reveal the underlying rationality of myth and thus establish a continuity with more explicitly rational efforts in

later history, even if his distinctive version of this view allows for more distance between archaic and advanced modes of thought than many others. It would be easy to object that twentieth-century Japanese history has cast a much less favourable light on the mythological legacy. The ideological constructs invoked to justify the self-destructive road taken by imperial Japan had a more outright mythological thrust than the European cases to which they are sometimes compared. But it might be more interesting to take a closer look at Lévi-Strauss's particular account of mythology's original meeting with history; it suggests some questions for further consideration and reveals problems inherent in the search for archaic sources of Japanese specificities (that line has, as will be seen, also proved tempting in other cases).

Lévi-Strauss refers to two landmark texts, the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon shoki* (assumed to have been compiled, respectively, in 712 and 720) and describes them as having “with incomparable art” [Lévi-Strauss 2011b: 24] both integrated universal themes of mythology and codified an enduring fusion of mythology and history; he adds that this achievement constitutes the fundamental problem of Japanese culture. How could it, despite its marginal geographical situation and long periods of isolation, accomplish a synthesis of elements that are elsewhere found only in more dispersed condition? On closer examination, these claims seem vastly exaggerated in regard to global significance and oversimplified inasmuch as they imply a self-contained cultural articulation. A contextualizing shift of focus will throw light on a constellation that is of great interest for comparative history, but in a sense very different from Lévi-Strauss's picture.

It is true that both texts aim at a synthesis of mythology and a historical narrative with legitimizing purposes, but not with the same relative weight. The mythological component is much stronger in the *Kojiki*. Another noteworthy difference is that the *Nihon shoki* is written in classical Chinese, the *Kojiki* in a mixture of Chinese and Japanese written with Chinese characters. This reflects – with different nuances – a Chinese connection, inseparable from the contemporaneous political construction of a relationship to China, and more generally to the East Asian cultural world. To quote the most widely read history of Japanese literature, “the compilers sought out fragmentary myths and stories originally transmitted in the provinces, interwove ballads known at court and among the people at large and embellished and organized the whole of this material through the medium of adopted figures of speech from China, historical formats similarly adopted and Confucian philosophy” [Katō 1990: 39]. However, the same author adds that “in the very way the stories are told the structure of the indigenous spirit emerges” [Katō 1990: 39]. The question whether – and in what sense – one can speak of a structure of the indigenous spirit must be posed, but will require a more extensive preparatory grounding. In the meantime, the historical context of the two compilations – the appropriation of local traditions in order to strengthen control over the provinces, the ideological and political ordering of relations with China, and the emergence of a court culture – should be noted; and one further aspect may be added. As recent scholarship [especially Ooms 2008] has shown, the joint codification of myth and history was an integral part of the political settlement that ended a conflict between two branches of the ruling dynasty. Dynastic continuity is often counted among the unique features of Japanese history, but one of the necessary qualifications is that it was twice troubled by violent intra-dynasty schisms, in the late seventh and – more lastingly – in the fourteenth century. The outcomes differed. The seventh-century crisis

came to an end with the victory of Emperor Tenmu (673–686) and led to a strengthening of central power wielded by the imperial court, whereas the fourteenth-century one began with a rearguard action against the marginalization of the imperial court by military rulers, caused a temporary split into northern and southern courts, and concluded with a more massive disempowerment (but not de-legitimation) of the dynasty than before.

The unity of myth and history thus turns out to be an outcome of power struggles, a product of eclectic but purposeful ideological strategies, and a component of the long-lasting legitimizing framework that has helped to preserve – if not always to practice – a distinctive version of sacral rulership across multiple social and political upheavals. It is true that the divine genealogy of the Japanese imperial dynasty proved exceptionally resilient and conducive to elaboration, and there is – especially in the case of the *Kojiki* – no denying the aesthetic appeal that transcends ideological uses and occasions. But to gain a long-term perspective on the limits as well as the potentialities and ambiguities of the texts in question, their later destinies must be taken into account. The two canonical works took shape at the same time and in the same environment, but their subsequent histories of reception were very different. The *Nihon shoki*, originally – at least according to some readings – intended for a Chinese audience, became a paradigm of court historiography and an essential point of departure for later chronicles. The *Kojiki*, though never forgotten, was strikingly neglected for a very long time, until it was rediscovered during the Tokugawa era, especially by Motoori Norinaga (1730–1801) and the *koku-gaku* school inspired by him. Norinaga's work on the *Kojiki* made the text much more accessible, but it also reinforced archaic notions of divine origins and sacral dignity, which Norinaga took more literally than many of his contemporaries [Watanabe 2012: 229–252]. In the early modern context, these archaisms acquired new layers of meaning; in connection with the advancing process of nation formation, they supported the interconnected sacralization of dynasty, country and community that became a key feature of Japanese ultra-nationalism.

The unity of myth and history, invoked by Lévi-Strauss as a given and lasting legacy, is thus entangled in transformations, early as well as more recent ones, and a challenge rather than a premise for historical interpretation. Similar considerations apply to the other point to be noted; it has to do with a more general characterization of the Japanese experience. At the end of his 1986 lectures, Lévi-Strauss turns to reflections on cultural diversity and creativity. He claims – without any detailed argumentation – that the most creative epochs in history have been marked by communication across cultural distances; then he adds that modern humanity seems to have embarked on a road towards global civilization, and raises the question whether this trend would not lead to a self-impoverishing loss of diversity. He credits Japan with an exemplary history that might show the way to counteract the threat: “For centuries, Japan has maintained the equilibrium between two attitudes: at times it has been open to external influences and ready to absorb them; at times it has retired into itself, as it were to gain time to assimilate the contributions from outside and put its own mark on them” [Lévi-Strauss 2011: 140]. There is no doubt that this formulation stays too close to quasi-official visions of Japanese history. It is nevertheless hard to deny that a certain interplay of openings to the outside world (always conditional), withdrawals from it (never absolute), and transformations or reinventions of imported models (variously oriented) has been a striking and recurrent pattern. It remains to be seen whether we can describe it in less streamlined terms than those proposed by Lévi-Strauss.

The first step is to emphasize that changing combinations of the three aspects are neither reducible to internal changes of course, nor simply a matter of cultural attitudes. They are always enframed in broader geopolitical constellations and restructurings. The epoch-making innovations of the seventh century (most directly associated with the Tai-ka Reform of 646) were, not least, a response to changing configurations of power in the region. The reunification of China, the rise of the very vigorous and expansionist T'ang dynasty and the consolidation of a single state on the Korean peninsula added up to an unprecedentedly challenging environment and a compelling reason to accelerate state formation in Japan. The very different changes around 1600 were prompted by two geopolitical considerations: the war in Korea, launched by a Japanese invasion, threatened to spiral into unmanageable complications, and the complex balance of central and local rule imposed on the Japanese archipelago by the founders of the Tokugawa regime seemed vulnerable to conjunctions of separatist forces and foreign influences. As a result, the *sakoku* strategy of withdrawal and minimized contacts was adopted. Finally, the nineteenth-century opening was not simply a reaction to the immediate threat posed by the American warships arriving in 1853. Before that, the Japanese power elite and its potential rivals had been following the misfortunes of China at the hands of a superior Western power, and were well aware of the imperial dynamic behind the new arrivals in East Asia. There was, in other words, a global perspective that lent meaning and substance to the new orientation.

A second complicating aspect is that opening and closure do not simply alternate; rather, they recurrently but variously combine in ways of redefining Japan's relationship to the outside world. The seventh- and eighth-century transformation would have been unthinkable without a very sweeping cultural opening to the Chinese world. But at the same time, the architects of the transformation – an emerging dynastic clan allied with aristocrats and bearers of Chinese culture and Buddhism – constructed an image of closed identity, fundamentally important for later long-term developments. Several aspects of this complementary closure may be distinguished. The newly structured Japanese state was kept out of the Chinese “tributary” system of international relations, and from the later seventh century onwards, diplomatic contacts were kept at a minimal level. In relation to Chinese imperial authority, emphasis was placed on the equal dignity and distinctive divine origin of the Japanese rulers. A key move was the historical closure achieved through an official dynastic genealogy, embedded in a mythological and cosmological compendium; this was the ideological role of the texts mentioned above. Last but not least, the “invention of Japan” [*Souyri* 2010: 112] as a self-contained entity obscured the massive contribution of Korean immigrants, many of them refugees with special cultural and administrative qualifications from the peninsular states that were being conquered by the rising kingdom of Silla. This side of the story has only recently been taken into account by historians.

When closure predominates, as it did in the Tokugawa era from the early seventeenth century, it can be shown that certain kinds of opening were integral to the regime. A Dutch trading station ensured a minimal contact with Western outposts, and a gradual licence to gather knowledge about Europe made the country significantly better prepared for a later change of course. A further interesting feature of this era was an intensified reception of Confucian thought, important both in its own right and as a counterpole to the nativist ideas of the *kokugaku* school. This was a new phase of the opening to China, but at a distance and without any background or outlet in interstate relations.

The Meiji restoration/revolution of 1868 is at first sight a paradigm case of radical opening. But further consideration of the background and the sequel suggests a more nuanced picture.

The activists who were to play a decisive mobilizing role in the final confrontation with the old regime had – in many cases – been involved in xenophobic protests against the impending concessions to foreign pressure (the so-called *sonnō jōi* movement); when it came to the crunch, that did not prevent them from supporting the new course of “seeking knowledge all over the world”. However, the nativist imaginary of closure resurfaced in the course of stabilizing the Meiji regime. After some initial fluctuations, a particularly uncompromising type of nationalism emerged as the ideological framework of the new order. This was, as some critics put it, an attempt to make the nation the measure of all things. Maruyama Masao’s classic analysis of “ultra-nationalism”, as it developed from the 1890s to the Pacific War [*Maruyama 1995*], stressed the refusal to acknowledge any transcending claims to universal validity. Ultra-nationalist ideology was, in other words, a more closed universe of discourse and imagination than any other kind of nationalism.

The rise of modern Japanese nationalism and its road to disaster were intertwined with complex processes of modernizing change and empire-building. That brings us to the third aspect of Lévi-Strauss’s supposedly recurrent pattern: the adaptation of cultural or institutional borrowings to Japanese contexts and traditions. Here the question to raise is whether the domestication or reinvention of imported models has also involved a problematic that became – in a longer run – acute enough to spark crises and transformations. The landmark developments discussed above merit closer examination from this point of view, beginning with the “japanized” version of Chinese-style sacred monarchy that took shape in the seventh and eighth centuries. Earlier scholarship on this subject was sometimes inclined to minimize the social impact of the new central institutions; but historians now seem largely in agreement that there was a determined and comprehensive attempt to establish central control, backed up by a strong monarchy and accompanied by conquest of outlying regions of the archipelago. The drive for autocratic (some authors would say despotic) control was at its strongest under Emperor Tenmu (672–686). But the very vigour of the centralizing push was to activate trends that led to far-reaching restructurings of social power. Strict subordination was to be imposed on local officials and power-holders, but at the same time, they were entrusted with key roles in maintaining the regime centred on the imperial court (first in Nara and then in Kyoto). This is the context in which historians situate one of the most fundamental problems of Japanese history: how to explain the rise of the *samurai*? Proposed answers involve both armed retinues of court aristocrats and the growing power of local strongmen.

The early modern unification under a military regime differs from the archaic “invention of Japan” in fundamental respects. As noted above, the Tokugawa ascendancy was the culminating phase of internal processes, and the foundational arrangements did not draw on external models. We can nevertheless, with regard to the later history of the regime, speak of a certain interplay between borrowing and adaptation. One of the most interesting features of Tokugawa Japan is that despite the imposition of a rigid social and political order, “the boundaries of acceptable thought were only roughly defined and sporadically enforced” [*Totman 1993: 160*]. This intellectual flexibility enabled new departures in relation to Chinese thought. The starting-point was a closer study of the Neo-Confucian

teachings that had developed (and to a certain extent spread to the larger Chinese world, especially Korea) since the eleventh and twelfth century; but this gave way to more autonomous readings of Confucian sources, described by historians of ideas as a naturalization of Confucianism, and including attempts to understand the very beginnings of that tradition better than the Chinese themselves had done. Reactions to such efforts led in turn to a revival of nativist thought that gradually reinforced the prestige of the imperial dynasty. Together with structural and geopolitical factors, and in response to an unprecedented external challenge, this ideological potential was to play a role in the demise of the Tokugawa regime, completed in 1868. Some aspects of that process will be discussed below, in connection with Eisenstadt's understanding of Japanese civilization.

The sequel to the Meiji restoration/revolution of 1868 was a new round of the interaction between opening and adaptation to domestic contexts. For the new regime, the most urgent task was to transform Japan into a state capable of holding its own and becoming a full-fledged actor in the global arena. This necessitated multiple modernizing drives: an industrialized economy, a fully centralized bureaucratic state, and an empire-building strategy were essential to survival and success (for the architects of the Meiji state, the last-named goal seems to have been an obvious implication of modern statehood). The initial signal for a distinctively Japanese framing of these projects was the claim to restore direct imperial rule. This was, on the face of it, a strikingly archaizing move; the last attempt to reassert the authority of the emperor against military rule had been made in the fourteenth century. Observers and historians of modern Japan have therefore often been tempted to dismiss this as a fiction, and to argue that bureaucrats or militarists were ruling behind the imperial façade. But matters were more complicated. The re-empowering of the emperor cannot be described as mere fiction; the most convincing counter-evidence is the role that the Shōwa emperor is now known to have played in the militarist turn of the 1930s and the subsequent war. Not that he ever achieved or aspired to autocratic power; but in the context of the decision-making machinery, his position was a unique and significant one, however difficult it may be to define in precise conceptual terms. In this regard, Ian Kershaw's study of major strategic decisions during World War II is illuminating [*Kershaw 2008*]. In comparison with the other cases analyzed in that book (Britain, Germany, Italy, the Soviet Union and the United States), there is no doubt that the Japanese decision to "strike south" comes across as the most opaque. Japan's interwar political regime, especially after 1930, has often – and for good reasons – been labelled a faction-ridden oligarchy; this would have been enough to complicate decision-making, but the half-absent presence of the emperor made the situation a good deal more confused. Because of his divine aura, he could neither intervene directly as a party to the process, nor abstain from incarnating ultimate authority.

The imaginary but not fictitious institution of direct imperial rule was doubly important. On a formal level, it was enshrined in the Meiji constitution of 1890, where sovereignty was attributed to a dynasty of divine origin. During the preparatory debate on constitutional issues, Itō Hirobumi – at the time Japan's most influential statesman – had argued that the only possible Japanese way to match the stabilizing role of Christianity in Western societies was to rely on myths and cults linked to the imperial dynasty. The perpetuation or at least partial defence of dynastic sovereignty was not unknown in the European state system, but the legitimation through divine descent was uniquely Japanese. Moreover,

direct subordination of the military – and the corresponding ministry – to the emperor enhanced his supremacy.

It is generally taken for granted that the constitution-makers did not literally believe in the divinity of the dynasty. But it does not follow that they were only interested in political expediency. They took the mythology of the imperial institution seriously as a symbol of enduring identity and historical continuity, hence of a national self-image to which they were committed. In this sense, the ideological significance of the imperial centre transcended its formal role.

### **Eisenstadt's Image of Japan**

As noted above, the notion of Japanese uniqueness has been a key component of the nationalist discourses on identity, but open to significant variations. Lévi-Strauss's reflections are strongly connoted by an outsider's vision of uniqueness, albeit of a markedly impressionistic kind. The most systematic attempt to construct a theory of Japanese uniqueness, not just from the outside but in the context of explicit world-historical comparison, is to be found in Shmuel Eisenstadt's book on Japanese civilization [*Eisenstadt 1996*]. This work is also the most sustained combination of comparative and hermetic approaches (the latter to be understood in the metaphorical sense outlined above with a reference to Dower); and in that context, we can reframe some issues touched upon by Lévi-Strauss.

As we have seen, the hermetic approach can never be completely separated from comparative references; but to acknowledge a minimal and sometimes implicit dependence is one thing, to elaborate a balanced synthesis is another, and projects of the latter kind need both general considerations and adjustment to particular cases. For historical sociology, the comparative aspect is fundamental and indispensable. The idea that "entangled history" (*Verflechtungsgeschichte*) should replace comparative perspectives, as occasionally suggested in recent years, seems based on an elementary mistake: the analysis of processes unfolding across national, cultural or regional boundaries can never do without comparison of their impact in different settings. But a more detailed clarification of the hermetic angle and its specific relevance to Japan is in order. If the primary meaning of the term suggests a closed frame of reference and interpretations in terms of internal connections, the first association with Japan might be the strikingly autonomous reworking of institutional models, ideas and cultural orientations coming from outside. That applies to the great seventh- and eighth-century transformation as well as to the modernizing changes after 1868. Even the foreign-controlled reforms after 1945, at first so little autonomous that the label "neo-colonial revolution" [*Dower 1999*] has been used to describe them, eventually gave rise to a socio-economic regime very different from American notions of modern capitalism; it came to be perceived as a rival to the erstwhile occupying power, and considerable pressure was exercised in order to bring it closer to supposedly correct standards. But although these episodes reflect a marked ability to domesticate and redefine inputs from elsewhere, they involved massive (and in the last case very asymmetric) interaction with the outside world. A more self-contained pattern of development will be evident if we take a closer look at the long trajectory between changes induced by contacts with China and Korea and those triggered by a momentous encounter with the West. Over

more than four centuries, from the late twelfth to the early seventeenth, Japan underwent a complex and ramified process of state reformation, beginning with the establishment of a power centre controlled by a military elite, separate from the imperial court, and culminating in the unification of the country under a more effectively centralized military regime and a long-lasting marginalization of the court and the dynasty in Kyoto. In between, the struggles for power had led to a short-lived but spectacular attempt to restore imperial rule, followed by a new military takeover and then a disintegration into multiple warring domains, including – briefly – a power bloc of Buddhist monasteries. The whole process was essentially a matter of internal dynamics; comparable long-drawn-out upheavals elsewhere in the Eurasian world were always more closely linked to broader contexts (in particular, the offshore power at the other end of Eurasia, still known as the United Kingdom, has no such record of self-contained transformation). Japanese encounters with the outside world during this period may have hastened some turns, but did not affect the main trends in any significant ways. The Mongol invasions in the late thirteenth century weakened the military regime centred in Kamakura, but did not cause its downfall; the rapidly abandoned war of conquest on the Asian mainland at the end of the sixteenth century never amounted to more than a momentary digression from the path of internal state consolidation; the rejection of Christianity in the early sixteenth century was probably more due to fear of its possible use by separatist domain rulers than by any perceived threats from Western Christian power, but the basic shape of the Tokugawa regime was in any case achieved before the persecution was launched.

A further step towards an overall hermetic conception is taken when it is argued that all the transformative developments, those induced by contacts with or challenges from other states as well as those arising from internal dynamics, can be shown to have remained within an enduring and specific cultural framework. For that claim to make sense, the cultural presuppositions will obviously have to be defined in meta-historical and at the same time flexible terms. But the final twist to a hermetic interpretation comes when the continuing and comprehensive cultural pattern is traced back to archaic beginnings.

Eisenstadt's analysis of Japanese civilization takes both these steps: he links its lasting imprint on institutions and practices to indigenous modes of thought that were, as he argues, active at the earliest documented stage of interaction with other cultures and capable of absorbing foreign influences without accepting their most radical implications. But the defining characteristics of this Japanese civilizational pattern can only be fully clarified through contrasting it with a very pronounced alternative, prevalent on the scale of global history. The paradox of a thoroughgoing hermetic approach is that it needs a particularly emphatic version of the comparative one to spell out its conclusions.

Eisenstadt had developed a fully explicit comparative framework before he began to take an interest in the Japanese experience; the main foci of reference were the dominant and durable civilizations of the Eurasian macro-region. But when it came to closer engagement with Japan, he could link up with reflections coming from within, including – not least – notably critical appraisals of the Japanese tradition. He refers to Maruyama Masao's work on this subject [*Eisenstadt 1996: 7*], and Eisenstadt's perspective can plausibly be understood as a radicalization of two key points in Maruyama's diagnosis: the under-structured, syncretic character of the Japanese tradition, and the difficulty of articulating a transcending stance [*Maruyama 2006*]; a noteworthy corollary of the second point

is the interpretation of Japanese Marxism as a perceived promise of transcending thought). Eisenstadt's line of argument takes off from the latter theme and transforms it into an indicator of fundamental differences between Japan and the cultural worlds to which it has variously related in the course of a long and entangled history. When Maruyama emphasized the underdevelopment of transcending capacity as a crucial weakness of Japanese thought, he had in mind the predominant traditions of particularism and contextualism; Eisenstadt redefines the problem in terms of a civilizational dimension, attributed to the major Eurasian traditions but supposedly absent in Japan, although the ways of keeping it at a distance and defusing its impact have been distinctive enough to justify the description of Japan as a self-contained civilization – not isolated, but capable of imposing its own terms of contact. The criterion of comparison is a culturally codified ontological principle, a distinction between transcendental and mundane levels of reality, seen as a defining characteristic of civilizational patterns which Eisenstadt calls “axial” and attributes to the cultural worlds most prominent in global history.

The idea of comparing the Japanese historical experience to Chinese, Indian, Islamic and European trajectories is obviously a tempting one, especially when linked to long-term perspectives, but closer examination of terms and presuppositions is needed, and it must begin with questions concerning the concept of axiality. It is based on Eisenstadt's interpretation of the period already known to earlier authors as the Axial Age (dated roughly from the eighth to the third or fourth century BCE), and two steps of definition may be distinguished. The first one posited a cultural common denominator of changes in civilizational centres as different as the ancient societies of Greece, Israel, India and China; this unifying novel feature was a radical ontological dividing line between “transcendental” and “mundane” dimensions of reality, more or less systematically linked to visions of reforming the lower level (more specifically its “human province”, to use Elias Canetti's expression) in light of transcendental norms. Such projects resulted in comparable but by no means identical institutional changes. The second step was then a disconnection of the structural perspective from the chronological one; the conceptual focus shifted from an axial period in history to an axial type of civilizations, and the latter category was defined in terms of a capacity for self-reflection and self-transformation on the basis of ultimate and universal principles. Christianity and Islam, emerging as world religions long after the originally circumscribed axial age, then stand out as paradigmatic cases of axiality.

This sweeping generalization across cultural borders imposes limits on further comparison, and it favours – by implication – a certain marginalizing view of Japan. But debates on the axial age and its interpretations have cast doubt on Eisenstadt's constructions [see *Árnason – Eisenstadt – Wittrock 2012; Bellah – Joas 2012; Arjomand 2014*]. No consensus has developed out of these discussions; the following remarks express the position of the present writer, formulated in greater detail in contributions to the abovementioned collective volumes.

It has proved difficult to confirm claims about a common cultural core of civilizational patterns emerging during the axial age. Scholarship on ancient Chinese thought has, on the whole, not tended to support the case for a distinction and a tension between transcendental and mundane levels of reality; in the Chinese context, transcendence can only be understood in the loose sense suggested by Benjamin Schwartz: “A way of standing back and looking beyond.” In the Greek case, the dividing line stressed by Eisenstadt is

only applicable to a very limited extent, and not linked to the innovations most characteristic of ancient Greek civilization. The reference to a separation of transcendental and mundane realities seems to draw primarily on Judaic and Indian thought, but at the same time to blur the fundamental differences between these two traditions. Furthermore, the institutional innovations in the various axial centres were highly varied; in particular, the paths of state formation differed, not least in regard to imperial ambitions and possibilities. The upshot of closer examination and comparison seems to be that we should think of the axial age as a period of major and exceptionally concentrated transformations, but that the search for a common denominator does not yield anything more specific or uniform than significant changes to the relationship between religion and politics – or, to use an expression that I have proposed elsewhere, to the religio-political nexus [Árnason 2014]. Such changes are important in their own right, but also – in varying degree – because they open up a space for invention in other fields (the development of philosophical reflection, along different lines in Greece, India and China, is a case in point). There is, however, no justification for constructing a model of “axiality” that would enable a projection beyond the original chronological context. These conclusions undermine the idea of a fundamental pattern that would encompass the variety of Eurasian cultural worlds and confine Japan to an atypical periphery. They also suggest that it might be more rewarding to consider successive receptions and transformations of the more or less path-shaping patterns inherited from the axial age, and that would include closer analysis of cross-cultural encounters and engagements in the course of the Eurasian *longue durée*. But to trace the implications of such a shift for views on Japanese history, we need a more detailed discussion of Eisenstadt’s account.

A very significant part of his argument concerns Japanese transformations of cultural themes and religious ideas borrowed from other traditions, especially those that Eisenstadt describes as axial. The chapter on “Some aspects of the transformation of Confucianism and Buddhism in Japan” [Eisenstadt 1996: 219–263] is a systematic and convincing survey of such changes. Eisenstadt argues that “Buddhism, like Confucianism, did not transform the basic premises of the Japanese social organization”, and that the internal organization of both these currents took a “familistic and factionalistic direction consistent with the existing frameworks of political struggle” [Eisenstadt 1996: 225]. The upshot was a “far-reaching de-autonomization of their respective organizations and activities and their becoming embedded within existing social frameworks” [Eisenstadt 1996: 228]. Correspondingly, when it came to the defining religious ideas and attitudes, “the major trend was in the immanentist and particularistic direction” [Eisenstadt 1996: 242]. This did not exclude significant new departures, such as the reformist currents in Kamakura Buddhism (thirteenth century) or the recurrent and varying reinterpretations of Confucianism in Tokugawa thought, but Eisenstadt stresses the limited impact and ultimate cultural weakness of these initiatives. Even so, there is no denying the “deepening and diversification of religious consciousness and discourse” [Eisenstadt 1996: 237] that was in the long run achieved; and the line of interpretation so far followed suggests containment and circumscription, rather than complete “Japanization”. But Eisenstadt wanted to go one step further, and that is what made him vulnerable to accusations of *nihonjinron* from the outside. One of the most sweeping but also most cryptic formulations of this additional claim relates to the history of Japanese Buddhism: “What is, however, unique in the case of Japan is that

its pagan premises, a basically this-worldly religious outlook, have transformed those of a 'great' religion in shaping the tradition of an entire civilization" [Eisenstadt 1996: 235]. Here the term "pagan" is obviously used in the general sense of pre-axial. It remains to be seen where these pagan premises are to be located and identified, and how they have managed to dominate a whole civilization despite its long-term exposure to axial influences.

When Eisenstadt moves to examine "Japanese culture or cultural tradition", he begins with strong statements about "distinctive Japanese conceptions of ontological reality"; they are, most importantly, characterized by "a high degree of mutual embeddedness of what in Western parlance are called nature and culture, that is, a strong sense of the interrelations between the transcendent and the mundane worlds", as well as by "an emphasis on gods as continuous regenerators of the world, but not as its creators" [Eisenstadt 1996: 318]. Further implications are noted, but we need not quote them *in extenso*; it is, however, worth noting that both a pragmatist attitude to the world and a preference for mythocentric rather than logocentric discourse figure among the derivative features. The fundamental premise is a specific cultural ontology.

Eisenstadt proceeds to cite the *Kojiki* and the *Nihongi* (referred to above as the *Nihon shoki*) as the "first fully articulated formulations" of this underlying ontology [Eisenstadt 1996: 319]. In light of the above comments on these two eighth-century texts, some reservations about their capacity to reveal basic, enduring and indigenous cultural conceptions are in order. They are political constructs, geared – each in its own way – to the task of legitimizing the ruling dynasty and its form of sacral monarchy through embedding in a mythological narrative with cosmological connotations. Moreover, they mark a new stage of the comprehensive but politically centred transformation that had been in progress since the turn of the sixth and seventh centuries, and the high point of direct rule by the monarch; this shift involved a violent conflict between two branches of the dynasty. Obviously, the whole enterprise required cultural underpinnings, but the assumption that it rested on a whole inherited world-view and transmitted it unchanged to later generations is unfounded. The context is too intertwined with contingent power struggles, strategies and ideological options for far-reaching conclusions about ontological premises to be plausible.

Eisenstadt was clearly aware of the need to go beyond the reference to canonical texts with a political background; but his main attempt to solve that problem leaves something to be desired. Returning to his claim about persisting conceptions of reality, he notes that they have "often been identified – rightly or wrongly – with Shintoism, that is, with basic ontological beliefs or assumptions that could be better called underlying native orientations" [Eisenstadt 1996: 320–321]. "Rightly or wrongly" suggests some doubts about the equation; but further comments show that he wants to distinguish between changing organizational forms and doctrinal elaborations of Shinto on the one hand, and enduringly underlying orientations on the other. The latter are unequivocally identified with an indigenous mode of thought. "Older Shinto conceptions" [Eisenstadt 1996: 249], "nativist orientations of the Shinto templates" [Eisenstadt 1996: 243] are invoked both to explain the conditional acceptance of Confucianism and Buddhism in the early phase of Japanese history and the limits to new understandings of Confucianism in the Tokugawa era. The implications are clear, and decisive for the idea of Japan as a civilization in its own right: a pre-existing pattern of world articulation guided and qualified the borrowings from other cultural worlds that

were necessary for the building of a more centred and codified socio-cultural order. However, recent scholarship in this field has increasingly stressed that Shinto as a distinctive religious tradition is the relatively late product of a complex social and cultural history, and cannot be credited with an active role in the transformation that established Japan as a separate part of the East Asian configuration. To quote Herman Ooms, who has done some of the most path-breaking work on this subject, “there is general consensus nowadays that Shintō, as we have come to know it, did not exist at that time, and could not have developed without the appropriation of continental elements, some of them Daoist” [Ooms 2015: 39; on the political and dynastic context, see Ooms 2008].

The reference to Daoism is crucial, and draws attention to a long-neglected aspect of the Sino-Japanese relationship. Eisenstadt did not have much to say on the Japanese response to Daoism; he referred to it as “rejection or dilution” [Eisenstadt 1996: 257], and although he added a long footnote [Eisenstadt 1996: 514–515, footnote 44] admitting that there was more work to be done, that concession did not affect his argument about native orientations. A quarter of a century later, the emerging consensus is that Daoist input, however fragmented, played a key role at crucial moment [see especially the essays collected in Richey 2015]. “Daoism is present as a series of fragments; as elements that inspired and framed cultural and especially political components of the state-building enterprise that occurred in the late seventh and early eighth centuries” [Ooms 2015: 37]; on this view, the inaugural transformation of Japan did not culminate in the Taika reform of 646, as often argued by earlier historians, but somewhat later, during the reigns of Emperor Tenmu and his consort and successor Jitō (686–697). It is true and interesting that in the seventh century, an embassy sent by the Japanese ruler explicitly rejected a Chinese offer to send Daoist masters to Japan. But Ooms suggests [2015: 39] that there may have been more to this refusal than meets the eye. In the late sixth century, a Chinese emperor belonging to one of the pre-unification northern dynasties had briefly brought Daoist temples and rituals under direct state control while marginalizing the Daoist establishment. It seems very likely that this precedent was known in Japan, and that the Japanese dynastic strategists preferred to draw their own lessons from an abandoned Chinese past, rather than follow the lead of present and powerful Chinese rulers with a particular interest in Daoism. Be that as it may, the Daoist elements mentioned by Ooms were neither directly related to the texts most representative of Daoism as a philosophical current, nor did they entail any copying of Daoist ways to organize religious life. But there was a background cosmology shared and variously elaborated in philosophical and religious discourses, “a distinctly Daoist-flavored attitude regarding the essential unity of human and cosmos” [Smith 2015: 13]. In the Chinese tradition, this shared imaginary overlapped with the cosmological vision of *yin* and *yang* as opposed but complementary principles; under the label *onmyōdō*, the latter became a key frame of reference for Japanese divination.

The fragmentary borrowings from this broader Daoist culture entered into the mythological pattern built around the newly empowered dynastic state, and into its very elaborate court ceremonies. Ritual was so important for eighth-century Japanese state building that some historians have used the concept of a liturgical state. But there is also evidence of more diffuse popular interest in Daoist cults and deities. Michael Como [2015: 25] refers to “the powerful ritual dimensions inherent in early Japanese responses to a wide array of phenomena such as urbanization, large-scale construction projects, epidemics, the

transmission and diffusion of medical and engineering technologies, etc.” On this level, the involvement of Daoist fragments seems to have been massive.

This re-evaluation of Daoism in early Japan has major consequences for our understanding of the great seventh- and eighth-century transformation and its historical legacy. It now seems clear that the adoption and adaptation of the Chinese model, initiated and framed (though not totally controlled) by an autonomous political centre that redefined itself in the process, related to all the three currents recognized as components of the Chinese tradition; that the definition of “native orientations” was an outgrowth of this encounter with a more complex cultural world; and that, paradoxically, the ostensibly native patterns owed most to the least clearly visible input from China (on the institutional and explicitly ideological levels, Confucianism and Buddhism had higher profiles than Daoism). This view militates against the notion of Japan as a separate civilization and strengthens the case for considering it as a variant or offshoot of a broader East Asian civilization that we can call Sinic (to borrow a term from Arnold Toynbee and use it in a modified sense, but with appropriate emphasis on Chinese origin and centrality). Among such non-Chinese variants, Japan was clearly the most original, autonomous and enduringly creative. It should of course be added that – as noted above – the role of Korean contacts and immigrants was obviously crucial for the Sino-Japanese connection, but it has proved very difficult to trace this part of the story in detail.

It is not being suggested that the imposition of modified Sinic patterns represented an absolute break. There is no doubt that domestic archaic elements were integrated into the transformative pattern (even in the more dominant Eurasian civilizational centres, radical changes of the kind that Eisenstadt associates with axial breakthroughs were in practice accompanied by compromises), and that various continuities were maintained at the level of folk religion. But no available source or system of traces can justify the assumption of a whole self-contained and self-perpetuating “native” mode of thought. Nor can any pre-existing unity of the Japanese archipelago be taken for granted. The emergence of a new polity with a new cultural framework (sometimes described as the *ritsuryō* state, with reference to law codes introduced by the architects of the transformation) was also the most decisive step towards the unification of the insular complex called “Japonesia” by a French geographer [*Pelletier 1997*]. The whole process is best understood as an exceptionally creative encounter; there is hardly another comparable case of a society undergoing such radical change through autonomous adaptation of a foreign model. If we want a closer view of the original features involved in this civilizational transfer, we should start with the most visible connection between culture and politics, rather than an apparent cultural primordiality that turns out to be derivative.

The crucial point is the construction of sacral rulership. Historians have often noted the specific Japanese twist to that part of the Chinese model. It is now generally agreed that the title *tennō* was first used by Emperor Tenmu, and that it was an adaptation of occasional Chinese usage with Daoist connotations [*Ooms 2015*]. More importantly, the Japanese redefinition of supreme authority resulted in a major deviation from the Chinese tradition: the “mandate of Heaven” claimed by successive Chinese dynasties was replaced by the myth of divine descent, attributed to the one and only dynasty that was in power at the time of the great transformation and retained its symbolic status forever after, notwithstanding major changes to the power structures. If the religio-political nexus is to be

seen as a central constituent of the socio-cultural world [Árnason 2014], this particular version of it calls for a closer look at contextual impact and long-term implications. The genealogical continuity between divine and human ancestors, extended to living rulers, lent support to – and was in turn supported by – more general notions of ontological continuity between different realms of reality; a certain affinity with the interpretive pattern that Eisenstadt ascribed to Japanese civilization can thus be explained in more historical terms. Some criticism has been levelled at “big bang theories”, crediting the imperial court and its ideologists with implausible power to restructure a whole cultural framework. However, historical evidence suggests that the emerging centre had indeed achieved an exceptional capacity to impose a new order. And in so doing, it could draw strength from more diffuse currents. There are good reasons to assume that the spread of a de-institutionalized Daoism, with a proliferating collection of deities and visions of multiple correspondences and continuities between human and cosmic reality, was of major importance for the transformative process. It is a well-established fact that the ascendancy of Buddhism during the eighth century overshadowed the Daoist aspects of religious life and court ideology, but they survived in more latent form, not least inside varying branches of Buddhism.

### Politics and Religion: Maruyama’s Perspective

The seventh- to eighth-century transformation is, for a variety of reasons, a key episode in Japanese history. It created a political order that proved highly resilient and gave rise to a cultural legacy of lasting significance. From a more long-term point of view, it can be seen as a starting-point for far-reaching changes in later centuries. Finally, the ideological and institutional reinterpretation of the Chinese model could be turned into a paradigm for other projects of autonomous learning from foreign experience, real or envisaged (recent variations on this theme are discussed in Mishima Kenichi’s contribution to this issue).

An interesting view of early Japanese prefigurations was proposed by Maruyama Masao [1988]. His essay on *matsurigoto*, a traditional term which he translates as “matters governmental”, belongs to a late stage of his work and reflects a certain disillusionment with the modernizing efforts of Japanese political thought. He had become aware of what he called the “basso ostinato of Japanese political life”, and hoped to clarify its nature by examining the “recurrent patterns of thinking” [Maruyama 1988: 28] that manifested themselves through the modifications of ideologies imported from the Asian continent or the West. Although the affinity with Eisenstadt’s argument is obvious, this continuity of responses is not quite the same thing as a self-perpetuating mode of thought. We might say that Maruyama leaves open the question whether the “basso ostinato” is invented simultaneously with the first major adoption of foreign models, or grounded in pre-existing cultural patterns.

Maruyama examined the eight-century political vocabulary (there are no comparable sources of earlier origin) and singled out *matsurigoto* as the most revealing term; but he rejected the interpretation – current among prewar Japanese nationalists and apparently first defended by advocates of imperial restoration in the fourteenth century – that took this word to justify the equation of political and religious affairs. Sacral connotations of *matsuri* were invoked to back this claim. Maruyama quoted the eighteenth-century master thinker of nativism, Motoori Norinaga, in support of another reading; this is all the more

remarkable since Norinaga had also been cited as an authority by the ideologists of religio-political unity. But as Maruyama shows, the textual sources clearly indicate a different meaning: *matsurigoto* “implies offerings and services” to a superior [Maruyama 1988: 29, quoting Norinaga’s commentary on the *Kojiki*]. However, the ultimate human superior was the emperor, who in turn served the gods, and this connection links the notion of *matsurigoto* – as Motoori explicitly states – to the idea of “government under heaven”. In the final instance, we are thus dealing with a religio-political nexus, but of a more flexible kind than imagined by latter-day religious nationalists, and with the specific twist that “government was defined not so much in terms of the rulers, as in terms of the subordinates” [Maruyama 1988: 33], those who offer services.

The most interesting part of Maruyama’s argument is the suggestion that “a paradigm ... based upon the political vocabulary of the eighth century ... is crucial to the understanding of the political dynamics of later periods” [Maruyama 1988: 28–29]. This long-term interpretive impact is, in the final instance, due to “the separation of the level of legitimacy from the level of actual power” [Maruyama 1988: 38]. Admittedly, the culminating phase of the eighth-century reforms was marked by the direct personal rule of a strong emperor, but the devolution of power began very soon after that and very close to the centre; that trend was already obvious in the invention of a new institution, a governmental council (*daijōkan*) meant to function as an intermediary between the emperor and the bureaucratic apparatus. This was already a significant addition to the Chinese model. Further shifts were at first contained within court society, where the rise of the Fujiwara family led to a major rearrangement. In the longer run, the devolutionary trend was – as Maruyama saw it – taken to much greater lengths: “Power developed downward as it became more informal and private. The climax of this convergence was *ge-koku-jo*, or inferiors overpowering their superiors, a phenomenon which characterized the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries when powerful local warriors rose to power and chaos prevailed. The remarkable thing, however, is that no matter how extreme *ge-koku-jo* may have been, it never led to any change in the level of political legitimacy in Japan as a whole” [Maruyama 1988: 41–43]. To underline the latter point, he adds that the emphasis on politics as doing ritualized service to superiors, together with the separation of legitimacy from effective power, made it difficult to conceive of revolutionary change.

This line of argument merits some further comments. Maruyama was not proposing a culturalist and monocausal explanation of the whole development that gave rise to feudal power structures and military government, theoretically legitimized by a powerless imperial dynasty. The transformation of Japan between the late eighth and the early seventeenth century was a complex social process, involving a variety of forces, and its key aspects – the empowerment of provincial officials and warriors, the crises that paved the way for the establishment of new power centres, and the extreme fragmentation around 1500, followed by unification under military rule – can only be explained in terms of multiple factors. Maruyama’s point is, to rephrase it in slightly different words, is that the causal network included an established cultural definition of power, conducive to devolution and informalization, but also to the perpetuation of existing ways to legitimize rule. Cultural pre-suppositions thus facilitated the redistribution of power in two complementary respects: they licensed downwards shifts and discouraged open breaks with tradition. This is a view rather reminiscent of Weber’s comment about ideas channelling interests (power struggles

are a prime example of interests in conflict), with the added twist that the dynamic of changing power balances reveals logical but unintended implications of guiding ideas. There is no doubt that the architects of the *ritsuryō* state regarded the divinization of the dynasty as an empowering move, but it turned out to favour the disconnection of power and legitimacy. The exalted sacral status of the ruler made it easier to minimize his involvement in worldly affairs.

### Cultural Orientations and Political Transformations: Notes for Further Discussion

Maruyama's search for connections between archaic and early modern Japan, based on a mutually transformative intertwining of cultural meanings and power structures, suggests a more general point to be raised against Eisenstadt's interpretation of Japan. At the beginning of a chapter on Japanese institutional dynamics, he poses the question of "relations between culture, social structure and historical contingency" [*Eisenstadt 1996: 345*]. The matter to be clarified is, in other words, the impact of ontological presuppositions, discussed in the preceding chapters and equated with a native mode of thought, on the institutional sphere. Eisenstadt's answer is a list of "elective affinities or homologies" between "the strong immanentist ontological conceptions and the mode of definition ... of the major social actors, the arenas of social action, and the Japanese collectivity" [*Eisenstadt 1996: 345*]. Here I need not reproduce it *in toto*, but the key features are easily summarized. They have to do with this-worldly "vitalistic and activist components", with a "centrality of mythic, non-discursive – as against logocentric orientations", and "flexible movement between different contexts", which also entailed "openness to change and to external influences" [*Eisenstadt 1996: 345–346*].

The problem with this approach is not primarily about the validity of specific points; they are indeed based on a wide range of concrete examples. It is more a matter of the overall perspective and its implications. The relationship between cultural ontology and institutional arenas is theorized in terms of durable affinities, rather than historical dynamics. That line of analysis is at odds with Eisenstadt's general emphasis – in theoretical texts as well as in other case studies – on institutional dynamics and their transformative impact. Not that his interpretation of Japan ignores historical transformations: the second part of the book discusses Japanese feudalism, the Tokugawa state and the "revolutionary restoration" of the Meiji era. But these chapters are followed by closer examination of a supposedly indigenous and stable civilizational framework; the final conclusions are therefore more suggestive of civilizational containment than of any civilizational factors conducive to change. This is a logical consequence of the line taken on Japan as a distinctive civilization with an indigenous and enduring mode of thought. To conclude the present discussion, I will suggest some ways of linking the alternative defended above – a more historical conception of Japanese variations on shared East Asian civilizational themes of Chinese origin – to dynamics of socio-cultural change. The processes in question are, in the final instance, "articulations of the Sinosphere", to use Joshua Fogel's term [*Fogel 2009*]; but here I will limit the overview to early and advanced modern developments that already presuppose a long history of internal Japanese articulations.

The rearticulation now commonly seen as the genesis of early modern Japan was a twofold one. A unification of power structures after a period of extreme fragmentation

went hand in hand with a reconnection to cultural sources of legitimacy; neither of these processes could be completed without institutional innovations, but those who emerged as architects of a new order strove to maintain an appearance of re-traditionalization. Whether the conflicts and upheavals of the sixteenth century could have taken another course is a tempting question for exercises in alternative history, perhaps the most interesting of its kind in the Japanese historical record, but will not be pursued here. What matters for our purposes is the very forceful, comprehensive and long-lasting settlement that was imposed.

The disintegration of central power structures in the wake of the Ōnin war (1467–1477) led to a proliferation of smaller units ruled by local military dynasties and locked in perpetual warfare. In some cases, the ruling families implemented “house codes” that may be seen as guidelines for state building on a small scale, and the most elaborate among them show a strong emphasis on the rationalization of practices and resources [*Ooms 1989: 23–25*]. But there was no direct road from these experiments to a reunified state. The fluctuating power wielded by rival *daimyō* families had to be concentrated and redefined in relation to surviving symbols and embodiments of supreme authority. At the same time, the military elite and those who aspired to lead it had to face a new challenge from a social force that had taken advantage of the space opened up by the fragmentation of power; a coalition of Buddhist monasteries and village communities, known as *Ikkō-ikki*, was by the middle of the sixteenth century a major contender for hegemony in the central regions. Although this constituted a significant redistribution of social power, the *ikkō-ikki* bloc cannot be reduced to a peasant movement; leadership was firmly held by a dominant Buddhist monastery, and the dynamic of the movement seems to have tended towards a Buddhist notion of sacral kingship, comparable to the emperor in Kyoto but not taken to the level of direct confrontation [*Ooms 1989: 29–39*; see also *McMullin 1984*].

The successive strategies of the three “unifiers” – Oda Nobunaga (1534–1582), Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537–1598) and Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616) – took off from this constellation, confronting the *Ikkō-ikki* on the battlefield and engaging in complex manoeuvres *vis-à-vis* the imperial court. Following Ooms’s analysis [*Ooms 1989: 18–62*], it seems that the sequence of three bids for supreme power began with an implicit deviation from traditional patterns and ended with a unilateral settlement that left the symbolic status of emperor and court untouched but codified a total transfer of power to the victor of a final showdown within the military elite, who then proceeded to impose a regime of strict control on both allies and defeated adversaries. Nobunaga, who made the most decisive moves but was killed before he could claim complete success, projected an image of himself as a divinized autocrat, apparently in response to his Buddhist opponents; he did not insist on this in dealings with the imperial court, but resisted attempts to integrate him into the system of court titles, and the most plausible account of this episode is that the relationship between traditional authority and ascendant power was at a crossroads, with very different possibilities open and the main protagonists as yet uncommitted to clear options. Hideyoshi retained the self-divinizing strategy, but with a new emphasis on integrating it into a Shintō framework. He is known to have – in official correspondence – described religious traditions of other countries, Buddhism and Confucianism in particular, as offshoots of Shintō; this was obviously linked to his vast expansionist ambitions, not shared by the other unifiers and never justified in realistic terms.

Ieyasu, who presided over the last phase of unification, toned down the idea of self-divinizing (he arranged for a posthumous cult of himself as a Shintō deity); more importantly, and contrary to his predecessors, accepted the title of shogun, bestowed by the emperor and already a strong symbol of traditional legitimacy; but care was taken to minimize any implications of delegated power. Ieyasu soon sidelined the title by transferring it to his heir; he claimed a direct sacral affiliation with the “way of heaven”; and he claimed authority to regulate the life of the Kyoto court. In brief, the settlement that accompanied final unification was marked by a double emphasis: on the avoidance of a break with the imperial centre and its traditions, and on the unconditional power of the new centre established alongside it. This outcome of an ambiguous process rested on a pragmatic adjustment of meanings, rather than a coherent programme. To put it another way, the reintegration of politics and culture involved agency and decision, and cannot be reduced to a self-perpetuating civilizational logic. But the result was of civilizational significance: “Military power, the naked instrument of domination, was transubstantiated through association with the sacred into political authority of a religious character” [Ooms 1989: 61].

The historical details recapitulated above are important for the understanding of later developments. Tokugawa Japan was a very ingeniously constructed and structurally resilient polity, but there were limits to unity and potentials of subversion, inherent in the very pillars of the regime; they were kept in effective check for a long time, but in the end, their joint impact proved fatal. Three factors of this kind deserve particular mention. Although the paradox of the powerless but ritually sovereign imperial institution was not directly explosive, it offered an opening for those who might – with backing from elsewhere – be able and willing to challenge the Tokugawa settlement. At another level of the power structure, the autonomy left to the feudal domains and their hereditary rulers could become a basis for strategies and alliances directed against the centre; this systemic risk was neutralized by an elaborate machinery of control, but never eliminated. Finally, the Tokugawa founders opted for an eclectic ideological framework, accommodating Confucianism, Buddhism and Shintō. Earlier notions of a Neo-Confucian orthodoxy based on a Chinese model have been decisively refuted by recent scholarship, most systematically by Ooms. The officially accepted pluralism opened a certain space for innovation; as historians of Tokugawa thought [especially *Maruyama 1974* and *Watanabe 2012*] have shown, elements of critical reflection on social and political problems can be found in various currents active from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, but it was the nativist thought developed by the *kokugaku* school (associated with but not reducible to the Shintō revival) that proved most consequential.

Around and after the middle of the nineteenth century, more precisely during the exceptionally eventful period known as *bakumatsu* (1853–1868), the three abovementioned factors fused in a way that brought Tokugawa rule to an end. A coalition of forces spearheaded by samurai activists from the domains of Satsuma and Chōshū allied with court nobles advocating a return to the principle of direct imperial rule and mobilized broader support among circles influenced by nativist thought; there was no mass mobilization on a scale comparable to the paradigmatic Western revolutions, but the nativist imaginary and its ideological expressions helped to link the mythology of the imperial institution to an emerging nationalism of more modern kind. This transformative convergence was not predetermined by any systemic logic. To quote Max Weber, it must be

explained in terms of a “concatenation of circumstances”. Conrad Totman’s very detailed and documented history of early modern Japan places a strong emphasis on the ecological background; on this view, rapid economic and demographical growth in the isolated archipelago led to a depletion of resources that made later Tokugawa times very different from the seventeenth-century efflorescence; a “period of stasis” set in around 1710 [Totman 1993, especially 235–279]. While the stark distinction between growth and stasis is to some extent a matter for debate, there is no doubt that the unusual pattern of high but geopolitically contained growth, accompanied by sustained urbanization, resulted in environmental problems that affected the resource basis of the regime and its scope for action. But more direct and visible reasons explain why the de-stabilizing factors came together and caused a rupture when they did. On the one hand, the threat of foreign intervention, beginning with the arrival of American warships in 1853, provoked resistance, fragmented at first but then – after some complications – unified around the vision of radical social and political change as a precondition for retaining national independence. On the other hand, the fact that this project was turned against the Tokugawa regime must be seen in the context of the latter’s own record of attended and proclaimed reforms. The history of Tokugawa Japan included successive episodes of reform, with some input from intellectual currents; the most notable was probably the Kyōhō reform (1716–1735). No proposal to alter the fundamentally hierarchical order of society was ever on the agenda, but there were serious efforts to improve administration, economic performance and living conditions. The last of the reform projects, initiated by the Tokugawa councillor Matsudaira Sadanobu at the end of the eighteenth century, was also the most conservative; among other things, it included an unprecedented (and ineffective) ban on heterodoxy. But looking at the record as a whole, a periodically reaffirmed claim to reforming capacity seems to have been part and parcel of the social imaginary that sustained Tokugawa rule. It cannot be said that such inclinations had wholly disappeared in the 1860s. A last-minute reform programme was adumbrated by the Tokugawa centre before its demise, and its partisans put up some resistance to the victorious opposition. But what counted was the appeal to broader perceptions. The *bakufu* was seen as an exhausted institution, discredited by its inability to resist Western intrusions, and it had no alternative to the myth of imperial restoration as a bridge between tradition and nationalism.

### Meiji Japan and beyond

A new phase of Japanese modernity began in 1868; if we describe it as advanced, that should not be taken as an unqualified affirmation of progress; rather, the point is that it was characterized by an acceleration of trends defining the modern condition and an opening of larger spaces for their unfolding. From now on, further transformations of Japanese culture, society and politics took place in close and continuous interaction with a global environment, and they were not pre-structured by stable cultural premises. On this issue, Eisenstadt’s general descriptions are unobjectionable: “This period was characterized by many uprisings – those of Tokugawa loyalist peasants, local Buddhist priests, dislocated samurai groups, and more modern popular movements such as the Citizen Rights ... The relatively coherent policies that developed in this period of trial and error, toward the end of the 1890s, crystallized to a large extent in response to trends and movements seen by

the Meiji elite – the so-called oligarchs and the slowly emerging bureaucracy – as threats to national unity and cohesion and, consequently, to international standing” [Eisenstadt 1996: 25]. The ideological framework of this consolidation is described in the following terms: “This ideology did not emerge automatically as a sort of natural continuation of Japanese tradition, even if its crystallization was in many ways reminiscent of that of the Tokugawa ideology, especially in the ways both transformed the same components of Neo-Confucianism” [Eisenstadt 1996: 33]. Given the distinctive prelude to the constitution of Tokugawa ideology, discussed above, and the militantly nationalist character of the Meiji “civil religion” (Eisenstadt also used that term), the comparison seems dubious. But more importantly, the emphasis on changing approaches, conflicts and politically enforced solutions casts doubt on the strong assumptions about civilizational continuity, inherent in the conception of enduring pre-axial patterns. Admittedly, it may seem tempting to take the cultural closure imposed by ultra-nationalism as evidence of such a continuity. But the closure was never anywhere near what its most extreme advocates wanted (John Krummel’s contribution to this issue is instructive in that regard; the event that it describes exemplifies both the constraints of wartime politics and the enduring pluralism of intellectual life). Moreover, a nationalism that was – because of Japan’s involvement in world politics – forced to confront global ideologies found itself in a situation different from traditional precedents. In that context, one critical observation should be recorded: Eisenstadt’s analysis of Japanese modernity has surprisingly little to say about Japanese colonialism and its head-on collision with Western powers; it ended in self-destruction, but the consequences were massive and must be seen as a key aspect of Japan’s imprint on global history.

That said, there is no denying that Eisenstadt has made a strong case for Japan as a particularly prominent example among multiple modernities, and the reasons have to do with a long-term historical trajectory as well as traditions that bear some traces of early beginnings. When it comes to chronological demarcation, the direction taken after 1868 seems continuous enough – despite uncertainties in the early decades and political shifts after World War I – to refer to the period from 1868 to 1945 as Meiji Japan and characterize it as a distinctive stage in the history of Japanese modernity. This periodization is, among other things, relevant to the question of Japanese fascism. There is no consensus on this issue among historians, but the arguments against the notion of a Japanese fascism seem stronger than those of the other side. Despite undeniable affinities between the wartime Japanese regime and its European allies, the former lacked some of the features that had been crucial to the rise of fascism in Europe: there was no mass movement with paramilitary offshoots, no charismatic leader, and no ideology of radical political transformation (the extreme nationalists who called for closer unity of emperor and people were too traditionalistic to fit into that category). What did characterize the Japanese situation was a constellation of partial fascist influences, significant in their own right but not adding up to a coherent overall pattern. The reform bureaucrats who played a central role in empire building (not least in the construction of a showcase puppet state in Manchukuo) and preparation for war were influenced by European fascist regimes, though more by perceptions of their practices than by their ideologies. This part of the story has been analyzed in detail by Janis Mimura; however, reservations may be made about her concept of techno-fascism, defined as “a new form of authoritarian rule in which the ‘totalist’ state

is fused with the military and bureaucratic planning agencies and controlled by technocrats” [Mimura 2011: 4]. This is a convincing summary of the aims pursued by the reform bureaucrats, but if we prefer a historically specific concept of fascism (and there are good reasons to insist on that, against the all too common indiscriminate use), the absence of the abovementioned factors speaks against the amalgamation posited by the notion of techno-fascism. Another instance of limited affinity with fascism was the case of the extremist officers who attempted (and botched) a coup in 1936. Finally, intellectual life in the years between World War I and the 1945 collapse took some surprising turns, and there were even thinkers with Marxist connections who showed interest in fascist ideas. All things considered, then, the Japanese points of contact with European fascism were partial and disjointed.

If 1945 was a particularly obvious end of an era, it is proving much less straightforward to agree on a defining label for postwar Japan. Three or four decades ago, economic exceptionalism seemed the most plausible approach to that question, and the most seminal work in that vein was Chalmers Johnson’s book on the Japanese miracle [Johnson 1982]. Its key to post-imperial Japanese history was the concept of the capitalist developmental state; Johnson took care to emphasize the capitalist context, but this has not always been duly recognized in later debates on the developmental state. He focused on a multi-faceted cooperative relationship between the public and the private sector, which he also characterized as a rational version of economic planning, in contrast to the irrational planning practiced in Soviet-type economies. His analysis stressed the need for an institutional explanation; that ought to have made the book interesting for a theorist of Japanese civilization, but Eisenstadt only mentions it in passing, without any discussion of its argument.

Later difficulties of the Japanese economy, increasingly evident from the 1990s onwards but rooted in older problems, have led to more sceptical views on the developmental state, and even to dismissive conclusions about its record. No detailed discussion of these matters is possible within the limits of the present paper, but a few concluding remarks on ways of posing the problems may be added. In the first place, recent troubles are not a valid reason for downplaying the real achievements of the high-growth period. A historical perspective on postwar Japan, especially one with comparative aims, must acknowledge “the overall transformation of the country from a ruined, bombed-out shell to the world’s number two industrial and economic power”, as well as the fact that this happened “in a demonstrably peaceful society with free elections and free speech” [Taggart Murphy 214: 95]. It is not uncommon for patterns of social practices to enter a phase of diminishing effect – or even structural crisis – after prolonged success. When dealing with such cases, historical sociology will insist on close attention to specific contexts and avoidance of one-fits-all explanations; by the same token, doubt is in order when a particular sector of social life is separated from broader interconnections and its supposedly systemic logic assumed to account for changing fortunes. In the case at hand, the domain directly concerned is the economy, and economics is – among the social sciences – notoriously most attracted to streamlined explanations. The economic scheme that appears to fit the Japanese case best is the idea that institutions and policies geared to catching up with more advanced countries will prove less suitable after that aim has been achieved. Richard Katz’s book on “the system that soured” [Katz 2001] is the most systematic elaboration of this argument, but it has also been invoked by more popular commentators. An obvious objection is that the Japanese

“miracle”, as it was widely labelled, was no ordinary catch-up; both the extreme desolation from which the postwar recovery started and the exceptional position that Japan came to hold in world economic affairs set this case apart from others. At the height of success, the Japanese economy appeared as an effective and in some striking ways superior rival to the West on the latter’s own ground. The fears of a coming Japanese hegemony were never realistic, but there was a genuine shift in the relative weight of varying capitalisms, and that calls for examination of specific causes and preconditions. Johnson’s institutional perspective is still relevant, but may need more emphasis on complementary factors. Taggart Murphy [2017: 97–98] argues that institutional explanations were obstructed “by various ideologically motivated Japanese attempts to place some of these institutions beyond investigation by assertions that they resulted not from conscious political design but were inimitable outgrowths of Japanese culture”. The idea of *ie* society as a civilization, discussed and criticized in Mishima Kenichi’s contribution to this issue, is a case in point; it was no doubt overstretched, but *ie* as an organizational principle (commonly translated as “house” in the sense of a kinship unit, or – as in this case – constructions modelled on such units) did exist in the Japanese tradition, and does seem to have been made some use of in the structuring of economic life. There were no simple outgrowths of culture, but there could – through conscious design – be reactivations and adaptations of traditional forms.

Another contextual factor was the double-edged relationship to the United States. On the one hand, the conversion of the militaristic imperial state into a developmentalist one, with a focus on the accumulation of economic power, maintained bureaucratic rule in a new context and thereby helped to minimize the impact of the constitutional reforms imposed by the US occupation authorities. On the other hand, the alliance negotiated after the occupation ensured privileged access to the US internal market; as Gary Hamilton and Solec Shin [2015] have shown, this meant that structural changes to US retail trade became a major boost to economic growth in Japan (and other East Asian countries).

A further argument against oversimplified accounts of Japan’s journey from triumph to troubles is the complicated sequel to the period of highest growth. There was no straightforward descent into stagnation. What happened in the late 1980s “was, in many respects, the greatest financial bubble ever” [Taggart Murphy 2017: 178]; it is now unanimously regarded as a prelude to the protracted crisis of later decades, but at the time, it could – because of Japan’s reinforced presence on international financial markets – be mistaken for a new dimension of growth; quite a few observers shared that view. In retrospect, and with particular reference to the financial crisis that shook the world in 2008 and the following years, it seems clear that the Japanese bubble should be seen in a global context and as an early example of trends subsequently active on a much larger scale. Problems related to global financialization and its diversified impact are the cutting edge of present comparative research on capitalism, but those who have attempted synthesizing work in that field are on the whole not very interested in the Japanese experience. The most ambitious and acclaimed history of the financial crisis [Tooze 2019] has next to nothing to say on Japan. On the other hand, some studies of the Japanese bubble and the following recession have developed ideas suggestive of broader application. Bai Gao set out to analyze the consequences of the Japanese encounter with two major changes to the dynamics of global capitalism. The Japanese model, perfected in the 1960s, was based on strong coordination of state, banks and corporations; the changes were “the shift in the cycle of capital

accumulation from the expansion of trade and production to the expansion of finance and monetary activity, and the shift in the major policy paradigms of advanced capitalist economies from social protection to the release of market forces” [Gao 2001: 7]. Richard Koo [2009] coined the concept of “balance sheet recession”, referring to high levels of debt in the private sector and efforts to reduce them, rather than maximize profits; he saw this as a key cause of the long stagnation after the bubble and suggested that it might also apply to major recessions in Western economies.

All the above considerations suggest that an analysis of Japan’s “post-miracle” economic trajectory demands close attention to multiple contexts, and that means interdisciplinary perspectives of a kind not easily achieved. Among relevant publications, T. J. Pempel’s account of a “regime shift” represents a noteworthy pointer in that direction. He defines a political-economic regime as follows: “A regime is composed of three essential elements: socioeconomic alliances, political-economic institutions, and a public policy profile. These three overlap and reinforce one another”, he then adds a comment underlining the historical character of all three: “Coalitions and alliances come and go; institutions are born and swiftly die; policy directions shift like the wind” [Pempel 2000: 20]. This emphasis on transience does not prevent the author from recognizing “long continuities”, but his point – explicitly related to Japan – is that they can only be grasped in interaction with more or less radical shifts. The upshot is that each of the “three essential elements” has broader historical implications, and for a proper assessment of them, we need comparative approaches. To the best of my knowledge, there is still no work that could be credited with a major breakthrough along these lines. To put it another way: while it is clearly the case that Johnson’s model of the developmental state is no longer applicable to contemporary Japan, it has so far not been replaced by any comparable combination of conceptual insight and empirical grounding. But if we want to conclude with a shorthand description, a quote from one of the most detailed studies is probably still apposite: “The Japanese model is changing, but the transition is continuous rather than discontinuous. For practical purposes, it is impossible to identify a clean break ... Likewise in the future, we are not likely to see an end to the Japanese model but only its continuous redefinition” [Vogel 2007: 224]. This seems consistent with a more recent portrayal of the Japanese state as still undergoing a “neo-liberal hybridization of the developmental state” [Suzuki 2014]. No case has been made for this process having reached a final stage.

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## A Study of Social Imaginaries Journal, Zeta Books

The spectrum of social science journals that are close to our *Historická sociologie* journal has recently expanded with a new title – *Social Imaginaries*. This journal is named after a quote from the book *Crossroads in the Labyrinth* by Cornelius Castoriadis. The journal, like Castoriadis's book, is based on the labyrinth metaphor, which is also a human creation, and in which new, interconnected corridors are created through which one must pass. Reason, imagination, social creation and action are needed here. The truth of the passages is recognized in fragments through discussion and articulation.

*Social Imaginaries* is a new project by an international editorial collective, largely based in Australia and including former students and colleagues of Jóhann Árnason. The idea of founding a journal with this title came from Suzi Adams (Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia); she then initiated the project together with Jeremy Smith (Federation University, Ballarat, Australia), and they were joined by other colleagues. Jóhann Árnason was invited as an editor at large.

Suzi Adams's conversation with Jóhann Árnason in vol. 2, no. 1, on philosophy, sociology and history outlines the interdisciplinary agenda of the journal. More specifically, what connects the journal's editorial team is, no doubt, its members' effort to follow up on the seminal but not sufficiently recognized ideas and theories of Cornelius Castoriadis which are referred to by all of the published issues and also serve as their basis. The endeavour to analyse in depth the civilizational characteristics and specificities of various cultures is another distinct trait shared by the members of the editorial team. It is now clear that the entire team bases its work not only on Castoriadis' theories, but on those formulated by Árnason as well. *Social Imaginaries* is the second English-language journal with which Árnason is associated, the first one being *Thesis Eleven*, its title alluding to Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach which says that, "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it" [*Steinmetz 2010: 76*]. Though the journal also dealt with civilizational issues, it had a broader focus on social and critical theory. Professor Árnason left *Thesis Eleven* years ago and now publishes regularly in *Social Imaginaries*. However, the *Social Imaginaries* and *Thesis Eleven* journals aren't the only periodicals associated with Jóhann P. Árnason. *Historická sociologie* which has a long tradition and an integral connection to the humanities, is another project on which Professor Árnason is collaborating with the magazine's founder Bohuslav Šalanda. That journal explores historical, sociological, and political science perspectives, particularly in relation to long-term social processes. Its scope includes, among other things, civilization studies – the province of professor Árnason, one of the greatest experts in the field.

Works of Árnason, inspiring him to devote one of his first books, *Praxis und Interpretation* [Árnason 1988], to the former's philosophy. Árnason's research into Castoriadis' theories is vital both due to its critical connection to Castoriadis' thinking, and the persistent

effort to introduce him to the wider public [Árnason 1989: 25–45]. It can be said it was Castoriadis who made Árnason truly interested in the philosophical foundations of historical sociology. But Castoriadis was not the only one who inspired Árnason's work. Max Weber and Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, with whom he developed the idea of axial age civilizations and multiple modernities, left a big mark on his work, especially when compared to Weber's interpretation of Western modernity [Árnason 2019: 55–72]. At this time, the dimension of civilization and the civilizational aspect of human societies became Árnason's focal point. Lately, he has been attempting to connect historical sociology with phenomenology, inspired by Merleau-Ponty's philosophy and Jan Patočka's phenomenology, especially the latter's *Nadcivilizace* and both his early and late concept of philosophy of history. Thus, the focus has been primarily on the civilization-analytical approach to historical sociology [Šalanda – Šubrt 2020: 147–155]. This concept of post-transcendental phenomenology, however, brings him back to Castoriadis and the reviewed journal *Social Imaginaries* which is supposed to present a more systematic interpretation of modernity as a new civilization while emphasising the issue of communism, a distinct alternative modernity of the 20th century [Šalanda – Šubrt 2020: 113].

The journal *Social Imaginaries* analyses a variety of cultural patterns intertwined with constellations of power. Broadly speaking, it views society as political institutions formed in historic constellations and also as a result of cultural encounters. It also publishes submissions related to history and philosophy, as well as sociological and political science analyses. As expected from the journal, the articles are high-quality, since the authors are experts in their fields. A good example is *Religion as Conceptualised in a Roman Perspective* by Jörg Rüpke. This is a detailed exploration of ancient Roman religions which strictly rejects any reduction of ancient religions to ideological and ritual systems that strengthen a political and “civic” identity. To the contrary, Rüpke claims that “the ancient evidence demands an approach that focusses on individual actors and their situational and strategic uses of religious communication. ‘Traditions’ are shaped and modified in such acts of ‘appropriation’” [Rüpke 2017: 37].

*Introduction to Castoriadis's “The Imaginary As Such”* by Jóhann P. Árnason, an opening article in the very first issue, is another significant contribution, as it establishes the journal's future direction. Árnason describes and analyses Castoriadis' books and works, presenting not only an introduction to Castoriadis' *The Imaginary as Such*, but to the whole journal and its purpose. After all, the journal is entitled *Social Imaginaries* – is there any other author who could be more fitting as a subject and outline for the journal's needs? Indeed, there are not many options in this regard, especially since the journal's first issue opens with a clear explanation as to why it intends to delve into *The Imaginary as Such* and Castoriadis. “The scope and aims of *Social Imaginaries* fill an important gap in current international debates. The journal's emphasis on ‘imaginaries’ provides a major point of difference from other public fora. The term ‘social imaginaries’ points to several interrelated trends of a major shift in the humanities and social sciences towards a new approach to the question of modernity” [Editorial Collective 2015: 7–13].

Besides analysing Castoriadis' works, the journal follows up on his theories and to an extent deepens them. Authors focus on revealing modern concerns, assuming that imagination is a creative, not simply reproductive phenomenon, and involved even in modern conceptions of reason.

The idea that social changes include a radical discontinuity which cannot be understood from the perspective of any specific cause or presented as a chain of events, only as changes which occur through the social imaginary, is one of Castoriadis' most crucial theories. The journal especially points to the idea of a radical imaginary category which can be manifested only through individual radical imagination and the social imaginary.

I would particularly like to mention *Mapping the theme of Creativity in Cornelius Castoriadis's and Paul Ricoeur's Social Imaginaries* by George Sarantoulis which clarifies Castoriadis' dichotomy between instituted and instituting imaginaries, as well as the difference between Paul Ricoeur's ideological and utopic poles of cultural imagination. The article also criticises Joas' dominant sociological theories of action. Sarantoulis presents an entirely new view of creativity as an integral dimension of the human condition where social imagination of perspective is necessary in order for one to comprehend the creativity of human action [Sarantoulis 2019: 11–36].

*Introduction to Marcel Gauchet's "Democracy: From One Crisis to Another"* by Natalie J. Doyle is another significant contribution which deepens Castoriadis's findings. The article draws not only on the work and theory of this radical democratic intellectual, but also on the political theory of Claude Lefort, his colleague and a co-founder of the radical-socialist and anti-Stalinist group *Socialisme ou barbarie*. But the main focus is on Gauchet's discussion of the current neoliberalism as based on the works of Cornelius Castoriadis and his "analysis of the historical innovation which Greek democracy represented and which was extended with modernity" [Doyle 2015: 151–161].

Social Imaginaries, the reviewed journal, undoubtedly introduces a new comprehensive view of political institutions. It publishes debates and analyses which aim to explain the current human condition in modernity, using a multi-disciplinary method and individual articles which nevertheless follow up on another in every issue. Castoriadis' philosophical theory of the imaginary is no doubt a crucial source on which the journal is based to a significant degree. But although the journal is inspired by said theory, it definitely does not adhere to it rigidly which is only commendable as this approach leaves enough space for a genuine combination of disciplines. Individual issues thus also refer to other thinkers and theoreticians, though always referencing the still little-known social imaginaries.

*Social Imaginaries* is a great success among current publications as it presents an overview of the key areas in political theory and other humanities. It can clarify both the questions of historical interpretation, and problems related to current politics. Future issues are therefore highly anticipated.

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**Adam Tooze: *Crashed: How a Decade of Financial Crises Changed the World*.**

**London: Allen Lane, 2018, 218 pp.**

**Adam Tooze: *Shutdown: How Covid Shook the World's Economy*.** London: Allen Lane, 2021, 368 pp.

Adam Tooze's history of the financial crisis, published ten years after the triggering events and covering the sequel until the Brexit vote and the beginning of the Trump presidency, has been widely and rightly acclaimed, not least for its effort to place the spectacular economic upheaval in a broader historical and geopolitical context. But it can hardly be said that Tooze's analysis and theorizing of recent developments is generating the debate that it merits. The following reflections will primarily focus on questions concerning political backgrounds and ramifications of the financial crisis, but also note a few points about Tooze's more recent work on the consequences of Covid-19, as well as some issues raised by responses to the earlier book.

To the extent that Tooze's approach has met with criticism, two objections loom largest: he is accused of an excessively America-centred view on world affairs, and of inappropriate emphasis on prominent actors. Both objections can to a significant extent be countered by treating Tooze's project as work in progress. His book on the interwar years [Tooze 2015] contains strong statements on an enduring American hegemony; I expressed doubts about that view in an earlier issue of this journal [Árnason 2018], but the books reviewed here are much less open to such criticism, and Tooze has also emphasized the multipolarity of the contemporary world in interviews and articles; in his most recent book he refers to "centrifugal multipolarity" [S 294].<sup>1</sup> It is distinctly unfair to describe his opinion on this matter as unstable [Anderson 2019]; more likely, closer engagement with American affairs has led to clearer awareness of internal as well as external limits to American power. The latter aspect is massively evident in

present geopolitical entanglements with China and Russia, unsettled relations with the European Union, and misadventures in the Middle East; the former is, as Tooze sees it, primarily due to the discrepancy between the structural capacity of US state institutions and the declining intellectual and moral level of US politics. He refers to "the increasingly unhinged quality of American political discourse" and "America's incipient civil war atmosphere" [C 373, 573]; and on one occasion, during the Trump presidency, he used the expression "Punch-and-Judy show". The author of such statements is hardly "star-struck with America" [Anderson 2019: 87].

The shift to a multipolar vision, combined with a critical assessment of American claims to superpower status, results in a more nuanced approach to global dynamics. Globalization without hegemony is multi-central, and centrality can shift in response to changing historical constellations; crises can break out in multiple contexts, and may affect more or less central parts of the global configuration. The interpretive guidelines that follow from this perspective are summed up in the concluding chapter of the book: "On top of the structural, slow-moving tensions that global integration may generate, it also produces sudden ruptures, events that cannot be fully accounted for or reduced to structural terms, or regulated by law. These crises are hard to predict or define in advance. They are not anticipated and often deeply complex. And they are urgent. Such moments demand counteracting intervention. They demand action. It is this juxtaposition that frames the narrative of this book: large organizations, structures and processes on the one hand, debate, argument and action on the other" [C 613].

The reference to crises and interventions brings us to the second criticism noted above: a supposedly excessive focus on institutionally empowered actors, notably central bankers. To begin with an obvious rejoinder, it is a fact that the main counter-crisis strategies were devised and implemented by governmental actors (in a broad sense, including the supra-state apparatus of the EU). Protest movements accompanied the history reconstructed in Tooze's book, but only in a very marginal role, and the cases where

<sup>1</sup> The two books reviewed here, *Crashed* and *Shutdown*, are cited in the text as C and S respectively, with page numbers.

they seemed to mean more were both geopolitically peripheral and structurally doomed. In Iceland, a protest movement forced a government out of office at the height of the financial crisis, but the leftwing coalition that then took over had to carry out unpopular policies which resulted in loss of the next election and a return of the old guard (led by a politician who in due course turned up in the Panama papers and had to quit, but without any broader political consequences). In Greece, a radical leftist party backed by a wave of popular protest won power, but was forced to capitulate to pressures from a bloc of stronger states. Like it or not, the actors that mattered, on both sides of the Atlantic, belonged to the establishments; whether Tooze tends to idealize them can only be judged from case to case, and some comments on that matter will be found below. The claim that he credits bankers with saving civilization is, in any event, a caricature of his views. And it should be noted that he explicitly identifies as a left liberal; imputations of conservative bias are without foundation.

To acknowledge the importance of key actors is not to imply that they always did the right thing, or were at least cognizant of what they were doing. People can make history with vastly inadequate understandings of their own actions, and that applies to protagonists of change as well as defenders of established order. Tooze's crisis narrative stresses both structural dynamics and human agency, and the description of the latter is not primarily about "the courage to act", to quote the self-aggrandizing title of a memoir written by one of the most powerful central bankers; rather, the emphasis lies on an inescapable necessity to act and a difficult assertion of the ability to do so.

The story of explosive crises, fragile recoveries and repeated upheavals is too complex to be adequately recapitulated in a short review. But the main trends may be framed in terms of a great refutation (to invoke, by contrast, the "great moderation" of which leading establishment figures boasted before the crisis erupted in 2007). The refuted view was most succinctly expressed in Alan Greenspan's claim that "the world is ruled by market forces" [quoted in C

574], so much so that it hardly mattered who happened to be president of the US. This was the consummate statement of the triumphalism that prevailed among western power elites after 1989; but to grasp its full significance, we need to spell out the tacit and to some extent uncomprehended implications. An obvious connotation, left unspoken by Greenspan, was the role of the US economy as a global centre of gravity. On a more conceptual level, it was taken for granted that financial markets were essentially intelligible in the terms originally formulated for markets of a more elementary kind; this is one of the assumptions most sustainedly problematized by those who have set out to reform economic thought in light of the crisis experience. For Greenspan, the governing forces embodied rationality and were accessible to calculation. The upshot of all these presuppositions was a vision best summed up as a global eclipse of the political. It returned in multiple guises, some more shocking and disruptive than others: Trump, Brexit, the troubles of the EU, and – last but not at all least – the rise of China. The result is, as Tooze puts it, "the fiasco of the project of Greenspan's generation" [C 575]. To clarify the reasons for this diagnosis, it should – as a first step – be noted that the political dimension emphasized by Tooze is very much a geopolitical one. His reconstruction of the unfolding crisis dynamics is strongly geared to regional patterns and processes; the United States, the European Union, Russia, China and the "emerging markets" are the main arenas of events and contexts of strategic action. A brief comment on the last-named category seems appropriate. It is a striking testimony to the flattening of the Western political imagination that countries as different as Brazil, South Africa and India should have been subsumed under the notion of "emerging markets" (often together with Russia and China, although these two powers were for obvious reasons more readily recognized as cases apart); but there is no doubt that this levelling view affected perceptions and policies, and in that sense, the reference is justified. The countries in question should, however, be seen as a grouping with very partial shared features and divergent longer-term paths. At the moment, three years after

the publication of Tooze's book, two of them – Brazil and South Africa – are going through massive political crises with uncertain perspectives, but of different kinds.

Let us now summarize the key components of Tooze's narrative, beginning with the so-called subprime crisis in the US, which triggered a trans-Atlantic and then global upheaval. This was "the wrong crisis" [C 25], i.e. not the one that had most often been predicted to arise from the critical state of American public finances; the unexpected course of destabilizing events was of some importance for responses and further developments. But as Tooze shows, it is – in retrospect – not surprising that the great recession began with a breakdown of the mortgage system. American real estate was a very large part of global wealth; it had become a prime field for financial speculation, turning government-sponsored measures to private purposes; the ensuing boom unfolded in the context of far-reaching deregulation and a proliferation of financial instruments whose logic seems to have been as imperfectly understood by their users as was their global reach.

When the destabilizing dynamic set in, the impact was international from the outset. Tooze is sharply dismissive of European attempts to explain the crisis as an American or at most Anglo-Saxon phenomenon. Not only was it "by way of London that the dollar was made global" [C 80]; German and French banks, as well as those of smaller countries, were deeply involved in the expanding (and finally exploding) financial bubble. No less important was the common mentality of policy-makers on both sides of the Atlantic: "Sharing a deep faith in markets, neither realized the threat posed by the new, market-based model of banking" [C 115]. When the faith was found wanting, the only alternative was state intervention, and at that point, the differences between the federal institutions of the United States and the interstate arrangements of the European Union proved crucial. Tooze does not use the conceptual distinction between politics and the political, more popular among French and German scholars than in the English-speaking world, but it seems to fit his line of argument. In the American context, the

concept of the political – used, with some variations, to denote structural presuppositions – would refer to the federal framework, including both central institutions and the division of powers between federal and state authorities; the complementary concept of politics has to do with actors and alternative projects, more specifically with the alternance of cooperative and adversarial relations between the two parties represented in Congress. As noted above, Tooze stresses the contrast between enduring capacities of core structures and a declining culture of political life, but closer analysis of a very particular case – the unintended brinkmanship of 2008 and its aftermath – calls for some qualifications. It was in the nature of things that the state intervention needed to bring the bank crisis under control depended first and foremost on the Federal Reserve, "inserting itself into the very mechanisms of the market-based banking model" [C 207], but it had to be backed up by legislative power, and Tooze underlines the ability of the outgoing Bush administration (the president himself not included) and the Democrats to agree on a bipartisan strategy. There was, however, a flip side to that success. The state-sponsored rescue operation was rightly perceived as socially skewed towards the very creators and practitioners of the bankrupt model, and popular discontent caused by this response could be harnessed by the Republican party, already on course to become not "so much a partner in managing the crisis as a symptom of it" [C 201]; but the anti-bipartisan shift initiated by the Republican leadership was magnified and transfigured by the Trumpian takeover of the party's basis. In this way, successful crisis management contributed to the polarization that has now brought about major changes to the patterns of US politics; they would, of course, have been impossible without the structural strength that the Republicans derive from disproportionate representation.

Tooze's account of the crisis refutes the claim – advanced by some commentators – that it was not a truly global one. It is true that some countries were markedly less affected than others, and reasons for that are still debated; but there is no doubt about the impact on global

trade, and notably effective anti-crisis measures by important states are also part of the global story. In the latter regard, China is a particularly striking case. To understand its response to the 2008 crisis, it is – according to Tooze – necessary to note two basic facts about the Chinese economy: In the two decades before the crisis, Chinese growth was – contrary to popular preconceptions – much more due to domestic demand than to exports, and “80 percent of government spending is done at the regional and local levels” [C 247]. On the other hand, the domestic dynamism – including major infrastructure projects – also translates into demand for imports. Given the overall weight of China in the world economy, its mode of crisis management was of crucial significance; Tooze ranks it among the most decisive factors: “Together with the huge liquidity stimulus delivered by the US Federal Reserve, China’s combined fiscal and financial stimulus was the main force counteracting the global crisis. Though they were not coordinated policies, they made real the vision of a G2: China and America leading the world” [C 251]. The irony of it is, of course, that this convergence of anti-crisis measures happened at a moment when the geopolitical antagonism of China and the United States was already making itself felt.

When it comes to the “second instalment” of the crisis, affecting the Eurozone from 2010, the American involvement seems more important than the Chinese one, both as a direct cause and as a precedent. The “liquidity swap lines” which the Federal Reserve provided to other central banks extended its role as “lender of last resort” beyond the US. Attempts to treat this episode as a separate development, defined as a “sovereign debt crisis”, are as unconvincing as the earlier notions of a purely American crisis. The troubles of the Eurozone were an integral part of the financial crisis, raising essentially the same problems as elsewhere. Banks had to be bailed out and liquidity had to be provided (the Greek crisis, described in detail by Tooze, was kept within the limits of a sideshow). One major problem was that the European Central Bank (ECB) did not have the same scope for liquidity-easing measures as the Federal Reserve. Under the directorship of Mario Draghi, ways

of bypassing this obstacle were found. But Tooze’s account of Draghi’s intervention, perceived by some readers as a heroization of technocratic leadership and of central bankers in particular, is in fact more complicated. Quoting the Reuters new agency, he describes Draghi’s pledge to do whatever it takes to save the euro as a gamble; we might add that it clearly falls into the category of “great empty talk”, to borrow a time-honoured Chinese figure of speech. Draghi could not possibly know what would be needed, nor how far the ECB could go beyond its established frame of competence. But it is an undeniable fact that “great empty talk” can make history, if a concatenation of circumstances turns out to back it and helps to impute a sense of reality. The idea of Draghi’s speech as a turning-point is, as Tooze concludes, an exaggerated “retrospective construction” [C 438]. It fits an older pattern of mythologizing the role of prominent individuals in the process of European integration.

Within the limits of this review, it is not possible to cover all regional aspects of Tooze’s crisis narrative. But it seems appropriate to note one significant absence (also briefly criticized by Anderson [2019] in his otherwise rather biased comment on Tooze). Japan is barely mentioned; the only significant reference [C 158–159] has to do with the impact of the crisis on Japanese trade with other countries. In fact, there are several reasons why Japan would merit a more extensive discussion. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Japan had gone through its own financial bubble, unique at the time, and a comparison with the later and more global outbreak might be instructive. So would a closer look at Japanese responses to the 2008 events and their aftermath, obviously shaped by the specific experience of protracted economic trouble before and after the turn of the century. Finally, relations between Japan and China are a prime example of economic and geopolitical dynamics in unresolved tension; they are also one of the most exposed spots in the American system of alliances that is now being reactivated as a counterweight to China.

Tooze’s analysis of the financial crisis concludes with reflections on “a striking similarity

between the questions we ask about 1914 and 2008" [C 615]. This comparison merits some further thoughts. The *prima facie* case for analogy has to do with very general but not irrelevant aspects: "How do huge risks build up that are little understood and barely controllable? ... Did we sleepwalk into crisis or were there dark forces pushing?" [C 615]. To put it another way, the problem is – on both occasions – a derailment of global structures created and processes launched by social actors but transcending their intellectual and practical grasp. It is easy to imagine an optimistic rejoinder to Tooze's suggestion, beginning with the point that 2008 was about economic upheaval, whereas 1914 had been about military confrontation, and that the difference reflects the pacifying impact of a civilizing process, renewed with some success after the great breakdown in the first half of the twentieth century; in addition, improved communications between states and their economic elites could be invoked, not least with reference to a certain shared culture of central bankers, which Tooze obviously regards as an important factor. Nothing of that kind was at work in 1914. But this should not be accepted as the last word. The best way to relativize it would be a reframing of the question in terms of power and its different types; for present purposes, this can be done along roughly the same lines as in Michael Mann's treatise on social power [Mann 1983], except that it seems (and has in my opinion been confirmed by the debate around Mann's work) best to treat military power as an aspect of political power, rather than a separate type. Both 1914 and 2008 can then be seen as aggravations of troubled relationships between economic, political and ideological power.

1914 was primarily about geopolitics and imperial rivalry, but economic power had an impact on the course of events, both as a part of the background and in the context of the unfolding conflict. The unprecedented progress of trans-national economic integration in the decades before the war was also a growth of economic power, unequally divided between states and classes. It gave rise to illusions about global economic linkages making major wars impossible; arguments to that effect were swiftly refuted

when the July crisis of 1914 broke out, but the more or less articulate belief in pacific effects of economic integration reached far beyond explicit discourse, and counted for something in the unprepared and improvised responses of those acting on behalf of the main powers. On the other hand, awareness of economic power as a source of military strength was also of some importance for mutual perceptions of the states most prominently involved in geopolitical rivalry; that applied to German fears of Russia's developmental potential as well as to the impressions raised in east and west by Germany's rapid transformation into an industrial powerhouse. As the military conflict gathered momentum, the mobilization of economic resources became ever more important; although the methods differed, the overall result was a new experience of combining political and economic power, destined to further variations and ideological elaborations during the twentieth century.

The last observation brings us to the question of ideological power. In that regard, the 1914 constellation was complex and its aftermath explosive. The war was a clash of empires, but they appealed – with somewhat varying success – to national identities and ideologies. This nationalization of empires was a key factor in the globally impactful turn of European history between the 1870s and World War I, and proved powerful enough to defeat a force that had been expected to put up more fight. An international socialist movement with a strong working-class basis had developed simultaneously with the culminating phase of European imperial expansion, and was seen as the most serious opponent of militarism; when put to the test, it was no match for the national-imperial adversary. However, the latter was in turn overpowered by the destructive dynamic of the war, and the outcome was a revolutionary overthrow of imperial power in Central and Eastern Europe as well as the Near East. The history of the interwar years was in large measure shaped by confused interaction of the intact powers with the successors of the collapsed empires (including attempts to appease the most dangerous among them on the grounds that he was a bulwark against another one who proved less dangerous).

If we shift to 2008, the first step towards comparison is to stress the power aspects of economic globalization. The most elementary one is the unequal weight of economic centres; that point is duly noted in the narrative summarized above, and to the extent that it involves state institutions with economic functions, it translates directly into geopolitical power. On the other hand, the power embodied in trans-national economic linkages constrains the power of states, but in very unequal ways. A further complication is the overlap with ideological power: although the belief in market forces governing the world was proved wrong, it had up to a point been self-reinforcing in the sense that it could inspire political decisions in favour of market forces. Taking all these points into account, it is certainly true that the relative visibility of economic and military power has – compared to the early twentieth century – shifted markedly in favour of the former. But that is not the whole story. Militarism, understood as a cultural emphasis on military power and a commitment to prepare for (though not to seek) military conflict has taken a back seat in Europe, but the same cannot be said about China or the United States.

The shadow of possible military conflict, with disastrous consequences, is nevertheless still part of the background to global politics. There is a solid core of truth in the claim that the exorbitant destructivity of nuclear weapons has acted as a restraint on great power rivalry, but several qualifying points must be added. The main nuclear powers have consistently tried to develop more usable versions; experiences during the Cold War showed both the danger of uncontrolled escalation into nuclear conflict and the possibility of accidental misunderstandings leading straight to extremes. Later proliferation has shown that the possession of nuclear weapons is still regarded as an asset in interstate competition; but if it appears as a guarantee of security from the viewpoint of individual countries or their rulers, the collective effect is a heightened risk. A final note to add is that automatized weapon systems are an increasing source of danger.

In brief, perspectives of military complications should be kept in mind when discussing

the problematic relationship between economic and political power, especially on the geopolitical level. Dissonances and unintended consequences on the domestic level (but in some cases with global repercussions) were mentioned in the above summary of Tooze's argument; following his indications, the geopolitical aspects are best spelt out in relation to different regions of the post-Communist world. In all three main cases, it can be observed that the integrative effects expected from economic globalization have not materialized, and that the power factors inherent in globalizing processes have skewed perceptions, provoked backlashes and triggered unexpected developments. Eastern Europe was, as Tooze puts it, the zone of "Europe's forgotten crisis" [C 220], much less noticed and debated than the troubles of Western economies; and this marginalizing attitude is probably not unrelated to the fact that the reasons for striking contrasts between the crisis experiences of different Eastern European countries are still not well understood. But in this part of the world, the financial crisis has to some extent been overshadowed by a longer-term and multi-faceted crisis of liberal models imported after 1989 but not functioning as expected [Krastev – Holmes 2020] and thus posing problems in the broader context of the European Union. As for Russia, the engineered economic upheaval labelled "shock therapy" by its advocates and "market Bolshevism" by its more realistic critics resulted in a statist backlash, too weakly based for a reversal of economic change but strong enough for a sustained effort to revive great power politics; the ramifications of that turn are still unfolding, but clearly in a way that undermines Western triumphalism and has the potential to affect the global economy in multiple regards. Finally, China is the rising power (or the "emerging market", to use the jargon of the economists) that – so far – comes closest to beating the West at its own game. In the years preceding the financial crisis, the Chinese economy had been increasingly shaped by market forces, but at the height of the crisis, the Chinese government responded with more massively interventionist measures than any other state attempted. Chinese integration into the global

economy is much more massive and multi-faceted than Russia's, but it has neither weakened the party-state nor led to Chinese acceptance of a supposedly unipolar order centred on the United States; rather, the authoritarian turn of domestic Chinese politics in recent years is unmistakable, and tensions between China and the United States now constitute the greatest danger of escalation into major military conflict.

To sum up, Tooze's comparison of 1914 and 2008 is highly suggestive, but further elaboration – only adumbrated here – would entail a closer look at parallels and contrasts. Another closely related question is whether the more recent global crisis caused by Covid-19 has thrown new light on the terms of comparison. It is commonly claimed that a crisis brought about by a pandemic is fundamentally different from an economic one. Tooze does not deny the difference, but the second book reviewed here adds some important qualifications, and a relevant passage is worth quoting at length: "The emerging infectious diseases paradigm, proposed by scientists from the 1970s onwards, was, like the models of climate change and earth systems ecology that emerged at the same moment, a profound critique of our modern way of life, our economy and the social system built on it. Our use of land across the globe, relentless incursions into the remaining wilderness, the industrial farming of pigs and chickens, our giant conurbations, the extraordinary global mobility of the jet age, the profligate, commercially motivated use of antibiotics, the irresponsible circulation of fake news about vaccines – all these forces combined to create a disease environment that was not safer, but increasingly dangerous" [S 31]. Tooze goes on to describe this situation as "a dramatic escalation of threat potential" and compare it to the arms race.

This emphasis on an internal and globally relevant background to the Covid crisis is reflected throughout the second book. But it is written at a lesser distance from the events than the first, the narrative therefore less conceptually structured, and finished while the crisis was still in progress, with appropriately tentative conclusions; we can nevertheless pick out a few salient points.

A reconstruction of the Covid crisis has to begin with China, and Tooze's opinion on that matter is very clear-cut. He does not deny that local authorities in Wuhan failed to raise the alert as quickly as they should have done, but once the information was passed on to the leadership in Beijing, measures were taken with phenomenal "ruthlessness and speed" [S 52]. As a result, the epidemic was contained. By contrast, "it was in Europe, the United States, Latin America, and India that the virus ran out of control" [S 51]. Tooze is particularly critical of the US and British governments; as he sees it, their failure enabled China to claim a historic triumph.

When it comes to the global spread that led to Covid-19 being labelled a pandemic, two sides of the response must be distinguished. The effort to contain the virus was "everywhere, a complex and collective movement" [S 95], not simply a matter of governmental decisions. It involved multiple social actors in varying combinations; this is the reason why Tooze prefers to speak about a shutdown rather than a lockdown. The other side was a broad spectrum of economic measures designed to limit the impact of the pandemic; here governmental actions were of more decisive importance, and once again, Tooze's analysis stresses the contribution of central banks. Their key role was already evident in a brief early episode of the crisis, not much noticed by the broader circle of observers but duly emphasized in Tooze's book. This was the "run out of assets into dollars" [S 116] in March 2020, resulting in a sell-off of US Treasury bonds, contrary to basic assumptions of the economics of safe assets, and for a while in what one prominent participant described as "the strangest market I have ever seen" [S 124]. The steps that the Federal Reserve took to stem this tide were followed by further action as a lender of last resort, and on a world scale.

As in the earlier crisis, the financial initiatives and strategies worked out in different ways in different political settings, and outcomes depended on the vicissitudes of day-to-day politics. On the side of the European Union, the most potentially significant result was the Next-GenEu recovery program, a major step towards

closer economic integration. But it proved difficult to agree on, due to divergent interests and preconceptions of member states, and problems of that kind reappeared when it was to be implemented; the final effect was uncertain when Tooze finished his book, and it still is, not least because of tensions between EU authorities and East Central European member states.

Tooze devotes a whole chapter [S 215–230] to what he calls “America’s national crisis”. As he sees it, a very brief phase of bipartisan action at the beginning was followed by increasing social and political polarization and a breakdown of civic consensus. But when he sums up this analysis with comments on “a polarization between those who affirmed the many transformations America has undergone since the tumultuous 1960s and had done well out of those changes and those who hankered after a return to the 1950s, or at least their vision of that bygone era” [S 225], there are good reasons to disagree. It would be more plausible to say that the crisis pits two heterogeneous coalitions against each other, and that the composition of both sides is still very much a matter of debate. The reactivated left wing of the Democrats is surely not drawing support only from beneficiaries of globalization and deregulation; the hard core of Trumpian Republicans is aiming at a transformation very different from any kind of return to the 1950s.

The last chapter of the book reiterates and accentuates the main points of Tooze’s diagnosis of our times. He continues to stress the scope and impact of state intervention, even more significant in the Covid crisis than in the financial one; but the new interventionism is a matter of specific institutions, and it presupposes a distinctive historical constellation. “The significance of central banking as a domain of modern government is that it is one arena in which the authorities have been forced to grasp the scale of the challenges facing us” [S 293]. This grasp is, however, both enabled and limited by a socio-political context: “What has made central bankers into the exemplar of modern crisis-fighting is the vacuum created by the evisceration of organized labor, the absence of inflationary pressure, and more broadly, the lack of antisystemic challenge” [S 293]. This is

not a perspective for a sustainable future. Tooze describes the managerialism that took centre stage from 2008 to 2020 as “a scrambling effort to preserve a dangerous status quo” [S 294], and argues that it has less in common with postwar Keynesianism than with late nineteenth Bismarckian conservatives.

To sum up, Tooze’s work on the Covid crisis seems to reinforce the concern with parallels to 1914. The message of the two books is disturbing, and in that regard convincing (at least for the present writer); a more detailed discussion than is possible here would no doubt raise more questions about specific issues. But it would in any case be very hard to find a scholar who does contemporary history better than Adam Tooze.

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**Gilles Kepel: *Away from Chaos: The Middle East and the Challenge to the West*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2020, 376 pp.**

Gilles Kepel, a French Arabist and sociologist with Czech roots, specialises in the issue of political Islam and especially its more militant forms, and for decades been a sought-out expert interpreter of events in the wider Middle East. In his latest book, *Away from Chaos: The Middle East and the Challenge to the West* (2020), he shows how a new order has been emerging

out of the chaos in the region in the wake of the Arab Spring. In the first part of the book, titled “The Barrel and the Koran” (pp. 11–102), he ties in with his previous works: *The Prophet and Pharaoh* (1984), the highly successful *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* (2000), and *Beyond Terror and Martyrdom* (2008). To provide a meaningful historical background for the interpretation of current events Kepel recycles some of his earlier theories here. Kepel argues that the secular nationalism to which the post-colonial Arab elites attached themselves – like the elites of Turkey and Persia before them – is an anomaly; a deviation from a tradition that has endured fourteen centuries during which governments in the region used Islam to secure political power. Arab nationalism thus collapsed in the 1970s. The pursuit of “liberation” led only to the former colonial masters being replaced by even more repressive domestic rulers, who were unsuccessful even on the foreign policy front, symbolised by a number of failed wars with Israel (1948, 1956, 1967). What’s more, there was never a total separation of state power from religious institutions, which dictators usually secured influence over and increasingly used to justify their policies. According to Kepel, this became especially apparent during the so-called Ramadan War (1973) with Israel, which pro-regime Syrian and Egyptian clerics declared to be a jihad. Soldiers cried “Allah is great!” as they attacked, and the idea then took hold that the war had been a success because God had come to the aid of the demonstratively pious President Sadat and thanks to the Saudi establishment, which crucially influenced the course of the conflict by levying an oil embargo while describing its oil riches as God’s just reward for practising and promoting the strictest version of Islam. According to Kepel, the vacuum that discredited secular nationalism left in its wake has since the 1970s consequently increasingly been filled by political Islam, which has become the main ideology promoted by both governments and the opposition. This theory is not unique to Kepel and is shared by other French experts on the Middle East, such as Francois Burgat and Olivier Roy. Kepel also argues that since the 1980s the struggle has been heating up over who will

control this new ideological trend: whether it will be revolutionary Shia Iran and conservative Sunni Saudi Arabia. Both these actors moreover have oil money at their disposal with which to spread their variety of Islam across the region and in the suburbs of large European cities, thus destabilising the region and deepening the sectarian divide between the two branches of Islam. The fruits of this are still being reaped today, the most recent manifestation of which has been the anti-Shiite/Iranian Islamic State (ISIS). While in what I feel is Kepel’s best book, *The Revenge of God: The Resurgence of Islam, Christianity and Judaism in the Modern World* (1991), Kepel distinguished between re-Islamisation of a society “from below” (through the educational and charity work of religious movements) and “from above” (a revolutionary movement topples the regime and then Islamises the state and society from a position of state power), in this book he does away with typology and stresses not the role of domestic movements but the influence of international actors. He sees a dangerous combination of three interconnected factors in the region: oil wealth, Islamisation, and armed conflict (p. 48). He highlights the ways in which Shiite and Sunni political Islam have been enhancing themselves, but in his view it is the Persian Shiites who come up with innovations that in Arab Sunni areas then tend to be adopted and taken to extremes: examples include the popularisation of the cult of martyrdom, asymmetric warfare, and a focus on the jihadist use of the media. According to Kepel, the Sunni Arab regimes tried to neutralize the growing influence of the revolutionary Shiite Iran on two fronts: through support for the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan (1979–1989) and for the Iraq of Saddam Hussein in the war with Iran (1980–1988).

Like the resistance to the Israeli occupation of Palestine before, resistance to the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan became an issue of importance for the Sunni masses around the world and led to the globalisation of jihad. Religious opposition to Sunni regimes everywhere from Saudi Arabia to Algeria, despite their support for the Afghani jihad, was ultimately reinforced by the Second Gulf War (1990–1991), during

which these regimes aligned themselves with the United States against Iraq and enabled the deployment of American troops in the vicinity of holy areas in Saudi Arabia, and the Islamists were split on allowing this. Some of them, front and foremost the Sahwa movement and Osama bin Ladin, recalled a line in the Quran: “expel the Jews and Christians from the Arabian Peninsula” (p. 49). Kepel is attempting on the most general level demonstrate that what has happened is the gradual “radicalisation of Islam”, not the “Islamisation of radicalism”, the theory supported by his academic rival Olivier Roy: and this occurred along the path from the Afghani jihad to the Islamic State. He shows that this is a process that has unfolded across three generations of global jihad, though in doing so he is somewhat uncritically accepting the conceptualisation put forth by a representative of the third generation of jihadists, Abu Musab Al-Suri, the most detailed analysis of whom is provided by Philipp Holtmann in *Abu Musab Al-Suri’s Jihad Concept* (2009). The first generation was drawn to a strategy of hitting out at enemies located close to home, such as their own godless governments, and in the 1990s a jihad was launched on three fronts – in Algeria, Egypt, and Bosnia – in efforts to replicate the success in Afghanistan. These revolts were mostly led by veterans who had returned from fighting against the Soviets who deemed waging jihad against the home government to be the duty of individual believers (pp. 30–67). This strategy was never successful. It never won wider appeal among the local population, and Islamists never managed to seize power by means of jihad. During the 1990s the only successful jihadisation was observed in the case of the protracted Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where, however, Iranian influence gained sway rather than that of Arabs returning from Afghanistan. According to Kepel, the second stage of jihad was, by contrast, characterised by attacks on distant enemies (*al-adou al-ba’id*), as the attention of Afghani Arabs and their new allies turned their attention away from the Soviet Union and domestic regimes and towards the United States. This shift was best exemplified by Al Qaeda, headed by Osama bin Ladin and Ayman

al-Zawahiri (pp. 68–94), and it culminated in the 9/11 attacks, which were followed by the cataclysm of the “global war on terrorism” and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. Kepel’s analysis here reveals most how much it is based on an examination of the key writings of jihadists and the ideas of jihadist intellectuals, and from there he goes on to trace how these ideas spread and became combined and, depending on historical experiences and political texts, then mutate. The intended effect of the 9/11 attacks on a distant enemy did not, however, materialise, despite the fact that, unlike the first stage of jihad, it was a perfect media event for a global television audience. The attacks did not result in a wave of mass uprisings across the Muslim world, which we saw ten years later during the Arab Spring. It did not even result in new recruits flocking to join Al-Qaeda, which Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and Hezbollah managed to attract following their suicide attacks. On the contrary, prominent celebrity figures in the Muslim world condemned the 9/11 attacks. Kepel argues that in response to this failure a third-generation global jihad was born. This jihad generation was influenced by Abu Musab al-Suri, a child of the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan and of accelerating globalisation as well. He wrote his monumental “Call for a Global Islamic Resistance”, which is around two thousand pages long, under difficult security conditions between 2001 and 2005. As well as setting out a positive programme, he criticised the preceding two generations of jihadists. Al-Qaeda especially was in his view a complete fiasco in that it overestimated its influence. While the Muslim masses enthusiastically welcomed the 9/11 attacks because they feared and loathed the arrogant United States, this did not mean that they sympathised with Al-Qaeda, and it most certainly did not mean that they were willing to respond to the call to wage jihad and to take up arms. They did not identify with Al-Qaeda, which offered them nothing of any relevance for their everyday lives. That, according to al-Suri, is what led to the *de facto* destruction of Al-Qaeda Central, as it was built on the outdated model of Leninist political parties, where a narrow leadership at the top issues orders through a pyramidal hierarchical

structure to the lowest segments in the structure at the bottom. Al-Suri's motto, by contrast, was "system, not organisation" (*nizam, la tanzim*) (p. 99). He instead raved about building ties that could form horizontal networks, which would grow organically out of connections to a given place and its context and thus from the ground up. However much al-Suri – who was weaned more in a French university environment than by classical Islam – was inspired in this by the late-modern European philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and his model of a matrix, applied here to the issue of a revolution, his approach can, in my opinion, be summed up as the same strategy that was used by the global environmental movement – think globally, act locally. Al-Suri called on Jihadists to respond to local issues of relevance to people in a given place and time. At the same time, however, they were supposed to keep their eye on global trends relating to jihad, so that within the scope of their own possibilities they could imitate successful attacks and thereby replicate acts of terrorism in different places. Nevertheless, in the same spirit of Hegelian dialects, Al-Suri's Westernised thinking rejected the endless debates that went on among Islamic militants about whether the forces of jihad should focus its attacks on a near enemy or a distant one. The first stage of jihad thus introduced a theory, the second a counter-theory, and the third offered a synthesis of the two ostensible opposites and thereby transcends them. In this perspective, there are no near or distant enemies. There is just one space in which to wage a legitimate jihad, and that space is on the two banks of the Mediterranean Sea and in the neighbouring regions. In other words, here a link is formed between the Middle East and Western Europe.

I consider the high point of Kepel's book to be its second part, "From Arab Spring to Jihadist Caliphate" (pp. 103–229). This part does not recycle as much from past publications as the first part does, though it does draw on the ideas and observations Kepel published in his reportage-like *Passion arabe, Journal 2011–2013* (2016). Kepel also demonstrates in this part of the book that he is a master of condensation and simplification, as he is always able to summarise

complex and closely analysed issues into a number of propositions and effective concepts in the form of neologisms and summary typologies. In his view the Arab Spring uprisings ushered in potential new alternative paths of future development for the Middle East. Local societies found themselves at the crossroads between democratisation, a drift towards even harsher dictatorships, and a decline into the chaos of civil war, militarisation, and jihad. By Kepel's account, it was the university-educated, liberal-minded urban middle class, somewhat cut off from the rest of society, who ignited the revolutions in the region that weakened or sometimes even toppled the ruling regimes. The ensuing revolutions were, however, "hijacked" by Islamists, in most cases ones with close ties to the Muslim Brotherhood. Although the Brotherhood's attempts to ignite a revolution for decades had been futile, they were well positioned to take good advantage of the opportunities that arose as a result of the sudden opening created by revolutionary dynamism, whether they did so by gaining success in elections or through armed jihad. According to Kepel, this *brotherising* of the revolutions was possible because of the Muslim brothers' solid anchoring in their home societies and because of support from abroad, most notably Qatar and Turkey. An additional bolster was the fact that initially the United States sympathised with the Brotherhood and did not therefore interfere with their ascent. Regional forces of counterrevolution, however, also soon became involved in the region's revolutions. There were two rival forces in this: Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates on one side and Iran on the other. According to Kepel, as well as its "brotherisation" the Arab Spring thus also underwent "Salafisation" under the influence of the conservative monarchies in the Gulf, and the Salafisation of Sunni Arab societies then led to the emergence of two unusually tense lines of conflict: one dividing the Muslim Brothers and the Salafists (resulting in two competing versions of political Islam poised against each other), and the other dividing Sunnis and Shias (two historical branches of Islam set opposite to each other). The counterrevolutionary thrust of Salafism derives from the fact that, unlike the Muslim Brothers, Salafists are

opposed to the idea that any human institution along the lines of a parliament should be able to make laws. In their view, people have already received their laws, and these laws are the word of God, which people should obey. A related idea that they embrace is that there is no such thing as a sovereign people, which is what revolutionaries from Tunisia to Damascus were calling for when they shouted “the people (*ash-sha’b*) want the regime (*nizam*) to fall!” According to Salafists, however, there is no such thing as “a people” or “a nation”, there is only the community of all Muslims (*ummah*). That community is then divided into those who follow Islam in a correct and devout manner and are committed to the idea that Sharia law is the only system of law, and those who do not fit these criteria. Although Salafists oppose the West and are especially against the non-believers (*kafir*) in Europe, they locate their chief enemies among the ranks of other Muslims. Alongside their criticism of the Muslim Brothers and the Brothers’ openness to democratic politics, Shiites are the Salafists’ chief fixation. Their view is that Sunni Muslims are oppressed by Shiites and are increasingly being subjugated by Shiites, and most strikingly so in Iraq (2003) and Syria (2011). They thus want Sunni Muslims in the Middle East and Europe to wage jihad, but they are asking them to do so against a heresy that the majority of Muslims in Western Europe and northern Africa have never encountered personally or in some cases even heard of. Another enemy whom the Salafists similarly loathe is a mystical version of Islam that enjoys mass popularity – Sufism. Salafists deem mystical Islam to be heretical as well, and they take pleasure in destroying the tombs of venerated Sufi saints. They couple the notion that “their” Salafism is the only correct version of the faith with an obsession about purifying Islam and a tendency to declare other Muslims to be heretics and to seek to destroy them. This drive to purify Muslim society is also aimed at non-Muslims who have been living alongside them for centuries, such as the Yezidis in Iraq, who were attacked by the Islamic State. This fanaticism, coupled with a desire to purify Muslim society, means that ultimately the Salafists turn on everyone, and this sets in motion a spiral

of violence and leads in the end to their isolation. They are ultimately left without any allies and are in a fight with everyone, which is what happened to the Islamic State.

Kepel’s approach underlines the specifics of the individual countries that were involved in the Arab Spring and their post-revolution trajectories. He nevertheless also identifies some general features they have in common that led to their revolutions: dynastic tendencies (attempts to transfer power to relatives), a labour market that, especially in the public sector, is unable to absorb waves of unemployed secondary-school and university graduates, and an approximately twofold increase in the price of basic foods and propane and butane for cooking (2009–2011). Unafraid to draw historical parallels, this French author reminds us that the French Revolution broke out also at a time when the majority of the population had to spend more than half their income on food. The most general problem of the regimes in Arab population who were ruled over believed that there was a chance that their standard of living could gradually improve, but then this fragile social contract collapsed. In another analysis Kepel identifies two types of geographically localised revolutionary situations: the first and less precarious of the two is in northern Africa (Tunisia, Egypt, Libya) and the second and far more problematic one is in the Levant (Bahrain, Yemen, Syria). In Sunni Arab northern Africa societies tend to be more homogeneous, and identity politics that would pit Sunnis and Shiites against each other can gain little footing here. The different social classes in these societies were therefore able to at least temporarily set aside their disputes and unite against the dictatorship in a single revolutionary coalition and think of themselves as “a people” (*ash-sha’b*). This made it easier to overthrow dictatorships more quickly and mostly without bloodshed. In Kepel’s view, there is an analogy to be made here with the European Springtime of the Peoples (1848), a mass continent-wide uprisings of people who had democratic demands. And the outcome both back then and today was disappointment, because, contrary to great expectations, no direct changes ensued. Everywhere Islamist terrorism intensified. And

everywhere the fall of the dictatorship led to earlier historical dynamics being brought back into play. However much the revolutions' leaders tried at first to reproduce the success of the revolutions in Egypt and especially Tunisia and even in the Levant and tried to topple dictatorships by appealing to national unity, over the course of the revolutions the societies involved became increasingly polarised into Sunni and Shiite segments, which resulted in sectarian revolts. In these places, social classes never had a chance to unite even temporarily to form a single revolutionary coalition, because class divisions overlapped with sectarian ones.

The third and final part of the book, titled "After ISIS: Disintegration and Regrouping" (pp. 231–317), is by contrast more of a disappointment. Here Kepel focuses on describing the transformation of international relations that occurred in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. According to Kepel, the basic contours of what tomorrow will bring are gradually emerging out of the chaos. In other words, the defeat of the Islamic State has been followed, especially in the Levant, by the biggest reconfiguration of Middle East politics since the First World War, when the Ottoman Empire collapsed. Even now, however, what we are witnessing is nothing less than the most visible manifestation of the birth of a new global order, this time amidst the decline of American international hegemony. The main problem with the third part of this book, however, is that Kepel is describing an anomic situation. He is presenting a detailed picture of the disintegration of the old order and the established rules, but, despite his proclamations, this order and these rules are being replaced not by the birth of new and lasting alliances but by ad hoc coalitions. What Kepel's description of international relations in the Levant most resembles is thus the war of all against all. Kepel's book can nevertheless be recommended as a reference for everyone with an interest in understanding current events in the Middle East and one that considers the historical roots of the dramatic processes that are going on today.

Karel Černý

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**Jóhann Páll Árnason: *The Labyrinth of Modernity. Horizons, Pathways and Mutations*. Lanham – Boulder – New York – London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2020, 230 pp.**

The present review focuses on a very important book, *The Labyrinth of Modernity*, through a fundamental reflection on the value and diversity of the modern world. As the title suggests, the book is about bringing together current debates on the approach to modernity, which it links to the context of civilization. Professor Árnason approaches the idea of modernity as a new civilizational specificity combined with the social imaginary, thus analysing and deepening view of civilizational features and specificities of different cultures. The social imaginary in this case is understood as targeting a strong vision of human autonomy yet remaining open to differentiation at both the ideological and institutional levels, even in changing historical contexts. The introduction of the book also introduces this perspective as a corresponding framework of social theory that focuses on the differentiation of the economic, political and cultural spheres. The chapters describing the Soviet model as an alternative conception of modernity and the issues of East Asian politics form undoubtedly essential parts of the book. The book concludes with reflections on the theory of globalization and ways of formulating it in the light of the civilizational approach.

After reading, this book seemed to me to combine theoretical arguments with case studies that aim to map the new functioning of the formation of modernity on a global scale. In this respect, it is a detailed elaboration of historical sociology that analyses the major historical variables with respect to modernity. The book is also a kind of culmination of the journal *Social Imaginaries*, which is also a project of Árnason and associated colleagues. For where the journal connects cultural and social phenomena, the book uses particular insights from the theory of civilization to clarify the use of social imaginaries in creating a new world. In the book, Árnason argues that the contemporary social era is not a given object to theorize about. Rather, it

is a set of interconnected clusters that are variable in relation to their development and possibilities. This is a new approach to social theory that overlaps with comparative sociology. At the same time, it is a lucid interpretation of 20th century history that can be used as a textbook for students, as it details the historical-sociological perspective of Soviet communism, contrasting it systematically with Western capitalism. Moreover, the author puts communism itself in the context of the historical period and does not take it out of context, which, from my point of view, is a great positive that is lacking today.

However, communism and capitalism are not the only concepts Árnason associates with modernity. A substantial part of the book is also devoted to democracy, which the author relates to modernity in its various forms. Since Árnason specializes in the civilizational analysis, it is not surprising that he provides a view of state development and ideological contestation of such a nature as to purposefully generate a new analysis of civilizational modernity.

Árnason relies on a distinction between the economic, political and cultural spheres, understood as a conceptual framework. This is a version of the tripartite paradigm now widely used in the social sciences, so widely that Gianfranco Poggi describes it as an orthodoxy. Árnason suggests specific aspects according to which the tripartite model provides an exhaustive description of differentiation in modern societies. Using this model, the author maps the differences between the three spheres to analyse the defining features of modernity as a new civilization. Right at the beginning of the book, through an analysis of the range of variation in each domain, he linked the civilizational concept of modernity to the insufficiently developed concept of multiple modernities. Árnason thus analyses the varying modern socio-cultural patterns as juxtapositions of political, cultural and economic components. At the same time he moves from plurality to unity and back again, examining the umbrella patterns of civilization in detail and subsequently focusing on case-oriented interpretations.

The book is divided into four parts, with the first part introducing the issue of modernity and

anchoring it in various aspects, in particular, the political aspect, where the author frequently returns to the theories of Max Weber, building on his approaches and practically deriving the principle of modernity from them. "In the political sphere, there is no unifying force or formative centre comparable to capitalism in economic life. Max Weber tended to portray bureaucracy as both complement and a counterpole to capitalism (...). This emphasis reflected observable trends of the times. Later authors, also responding to historical experience, became more interested in the variously interpreted relationship between more capitalism and democracy. Bureaucracy and democracy are aspects of modern statehood, and the plurality of states implies geopolitics, including empire building and warfare. It is therefore an obvious choice to begin with the problematic of the modern state. But given the general emphasis on the imaginary of autonomy, a focus on the state may seem inappropriate. A very influential ideological current, drawing one-sidedly on Weber's analyses, has portrayed the modern bureaucratic state as a threat to individual freedom" (p. 29).

Árnason distinguishes primary affinities between wealth, power and meaning on the one hand and the economic, political and cultural spheres on the other. For this reason, he adds a twist to his theory by suggesting that within each sphere there are specific manifestations of all three basic categories. According to Árnason, the modern transformation involves a turn in the history of ideological power that is so significant that it is associated with the opening up of alternative perspectives and possible rivalries.

The second part of the book focuses on the notion of modernity within the Soviet model, and hence communism. Árnason approaches this issue very cautiously. It is clear that he wants to keep as much objective distance as possible from the historical facts in order to analyse them scientifically. Therefore, there are not too many pejorative expressions in the text, nor too many subjective evaluations and assessments. The author points to the controversy surrounding the notion of periodization of history, which, although contextual and inevitable, runs the risk of being based on subjectivity. Árnason

therefore argues against a premature definition of successive modernities and, in place of outdated traditions in historical-sociological research, wants to grasp world history in a programmatically conceived global perspective. In the same way that he tries to maintain an objective distance from the notion of periodization, Árnason approaches the problem of communism. He describes communism briefly as “an extreme case among multiple modernities; in view of its total social scope, broad impact, and global aspirations, it represents the clearest example of an alternative modernity” (p. 99). He attributes the emergence of communism to a violent break with pre-existing patterns, and because of the explosion of violence that occurred, the dominant order of the then modern world was destroyed. The violence that the author is referring to is the First World War, which represents a fundamental destructive crisis of the entire social order. And it was this crisis that gave rise to new ideologies and political orders, in the arc of which, among other things, communism was born. The idea that the experience and interpretation of revolutions is central to the problem of modernity is very much in evidence in the book. However, Árnason goes further in this section and argues that the communist variation in relation to modernity, led to a more complex identification of modern and revolutionary perspectives. “A revolutionary transformation was supposed to overcome the contradictions and realize the promises inherent in existing modernity” (p. 99).

Although the book opposes subjectivism and conventional thinking on historical aspects, it does not avoid, as the author himself admits, an approach that is in line with the widespread view of the historicization of communism. In fact, the author completely refuses to reduce communism to a kind of ideological affair that had certain coercive means and was ruined by internal contradictions. According to Árnason, it is not possible to work with vague evaluations that work with very strong ideological assumptions, or, on the contrary, to exaggerate the notion of communism as a peculiar continuation of the history of the Russian empire. Therefore, the author approaches the issue with

different frames of reference in mind, developing the argument that the Soviet trajectory, and its branches in other states, are examples of the formative role of ideas in the process of history, even though they may illustrate the paradoxical situation that can sometimes occur through the interaction between ideas and power. There are two main historical constellations within communism, namely Russian communism and Chinese communism. The year 1917 brought the revolution, the murder of the Romanovs and the establishment of communism. Communism in Russia became somewhat specific because of its geographical and geopolitical location. Hence, we will not see communism as it is practiced here anywhere else in the world. It has quite special civilisational characteristics. However, its basic idea is applicable practically anywhere. It depends only on the possibilities of the magnitude of spread and the extent to which coercive means can be used. The book thus examines in detail the revolutionary year and the gradual developments that took place in Russia. It discusses Marx’s thought and looks in detail at the emergence of the Soviet Union and its place within global modernity. If we compare Russia’s communist transformation with those of other states such as China, we find that the continuities between tradition and modernity are always selective, more or less formative, and often accompanied by spectacular ruptures on yet other levels.

The third part focuses on the East Asian geopolitical situation, with an emphasis on Chinese communism, which here plays a largely comparative role to the Soviet model, concluding that while in Russia communism entered history because of a civilizational catastrophe called the First World War, in China, it occurred after a series of catastrophes spanning centuries. The book works entirely with the time-tested premise, which is both theoretically and empirically verified, that China, Korea and Japan represent an ongoing geopolitical constellation, a pattern that historically and historiographically cannot be found in any other region. It describes the interconnection and the rivalry between these three state formations, with imperial China most of the time having primacy and political

dominance and an edge over the other regions. Thus, Árnason focuses largely on modern China and its reform and revolutionary efforts that were to lead to the revival of Chinese power in the 20th century. Due to civil wars and wars with Western powers as well as Japan, China had lost its regional primacy, and the revolutionary changes were as much about restoring that primacy as about China's modernization. The author puts this issue in context with the civilizational background, not only because civilizational specifics are neglected in the literature, but as far as modernity and especially modern state formation is concerned, they are the key issue to decipher it. Árnason therefore proceeds on the theory that Chinese history reflects an extraordinary continuity of civilization that relies on key institutions, a pattern of governance and a cultural framework that, although variously modified and altered over the centuries, has never been fundamentally interrupted.

This part of the book is meant to focus on East Asia, yet it is China that "usurps" the largest portion of the text. As far as Japan is concerned, the author puts it in context with China rather than with historical events, and it serves as a supplement to the interpretation regarding China. The Chinese historical-sociological-political theme only benefits from it, but we learn less about, for example, the Japanese Meiji reforms, which are limited to a brief introduction: "The Japanese turn to imperial expansion was, on the one hand, an easily drawn consequence of the exalted dynastic sovereignty that the Meiji restoration had reinforced and perpetuated on a new basis; conquest and colonization strengthened the image of a uniquely sacred centre" (p. 161). It is somewhat unfortunate that the author does not go into a closer study of these fundamental reforms, as they were a revolutionary change

that *de facto* transformed feudal Japan into a modern industrial state based on the European model in the 19th century.

In the final section, the author discusses modernity in a global context, articulating the view that modernity as a new civilization is defined by new cultural orientations that have great global overlap. The key to understanding this globalizing modernity "is to be found in the dynamics and paradoxes of an internally contested, multidimensional and historically enmeshed cultural vision of human autonomy" (p. 184). The author places great emphasis on the distinction between global, national and regional civilisational modernity, stressing that the structural and processual interconnections between these levels must always be taken into account, and the context in which each modernity occurs is equally important.

Overall, the book covers a large range of historical questions and themes, to which it is largely able to provide convincing answers. The historical-sociological approach is a great positive of this book, as well as the focus on the civilizational specifics that are put in context with modernity in the countries in question, which I think is the greatest contribution of *The Labyrinth of Modernity*.

In conclusion, this is one of the best books on contemporary history that I have read in a very long time, as it explores lines, approaches, and variously combines historical, political, cultural, and even economic spheres and puts them in the context of modernity, which thus gains a new dimension and understanding in a little more than 200 pages. This gives the book a truly unique character.

Markéta Minářová

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## Editorial Board Member František Znebežánek Has Passed away

We very much regret having to announce the death in August 2021 of Dr. František Znebežánek, assistant professor at the Department of Sociology, Andragogy and Cultural Anthropology, Faculty of Arts, Palacký University in Olomouc. He was a member of the Czech Sociological Association and a member of the Editorial Board of the Historical Sociology Journal.

František Znebežánek was born in Teplice in 1950. In 1974 he graduated from the Faculty of Arts in Olomouc, majoring in Andragogy with a focus on sociology of work and industrial enterprise. In 1995 he obtained a doctorate in sociology. His thesis with the title *Social movement: Theory, concepts and perspectives* was published by the SLON Publishers in 1997. He is the author of three textbooks, and a number of articles dealing mainly with sociological theory.

He devoted all his professional life to sociology. Starting his career in the Socio-Psychological Centre of the General Management of the Ostrava-Karvina Mines, he went on to be engaged in research in the Fuel and Energy Research Institutes in Ostrava. In 1990, he entered the academe, starting to teach at the Faculty of Arts of Palacký University in Olomouc. In addition, he became a member of the Adult Education and Social Change Committee of the Council of Europe. For a number of years, he was an academic coordinator of the Czech Program for the Associated Colleges of the Midwest, U.S.A. He enriched his professional experience by study stays abroad (University of London, Birkbeck College, UK, University of East Anglia, UK, University of Chicago, U.S.A.). Between 2002 and 2005, he was a member of the Editorial Board of the Czech Sociological Review. Between 2000 and 2005 he was a member of the Evaluation Panel on Sociology of the Czech Science Foundation. In the period between 2013 and 2015, he participated in the solution of the research project *Changes in the Way of Life in the Hlučín Region and Modernization Processes*.

Dr. Znebežánek was extremely modest. He did not strive for titles or positions, fame or wealth meant nothing to him. He always asked questions and diligently pursued the answers. In the centre of his attention was the methodology of humanities. In the core of his interest was sociological theory. He was opened to all sociological theories and paradigms, but pragmatism interested him most. He found inspiration in the philosophy of William James and Richard Rorty, and was also influenced by Georg Simmel and symbolic interactionism. At the heart of his long-term scientific interest was the analysis of the possibility of changes in social behaviour from conflicting to cooperative, and from cooperative to conflicting. This resulted in an inspiring monograph *Between Conflict and Cooperation: Unified Theory of Conflict and Cooperation* published by SLON in 2013. In it, his scientific honesty is apparent: At the very beginning he formulated four requirements

which should be applied to all unified theories of divergent and convergent social processes. He did so to mainly avoid some possible misinterpretation concerning success or failure of what he offered as a unified theory of opposites. It enables the readers to see how the four requirements he proposed apply to his own writing.

František Znebežánek was a wise man. All of those meeting him felt inspired by him. He was a wonderful colleague, a reliable and witty friend, an accomplished sociologist, and a demanding, but well-liked and charismatic teacher. He spoke little, but accurately, clearly and intelligibly. He was an attentive listener, it was refreshing to have a polemic with him. He was kind and even when intellectually much stronger than his opponents, he would never humiliate them. His sense of humour was unmatched, and his readiness to make fun of himself admirable.

He was concerned not only with the development of the Department, but also in general with sociology as a science, which he so loved. He tried to organize sociological and interdisciplinary discussion groups. We could always rely on his unselfish help and advice. He was a moral authority to us. He will be missed dearly.

*Helena Kubátová and Ivana Marková*  
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