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.

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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 s 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 it 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 tin that vein, inteeresting 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 foresign 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.

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DOI: 10.14712/23363525.2021.14

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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.