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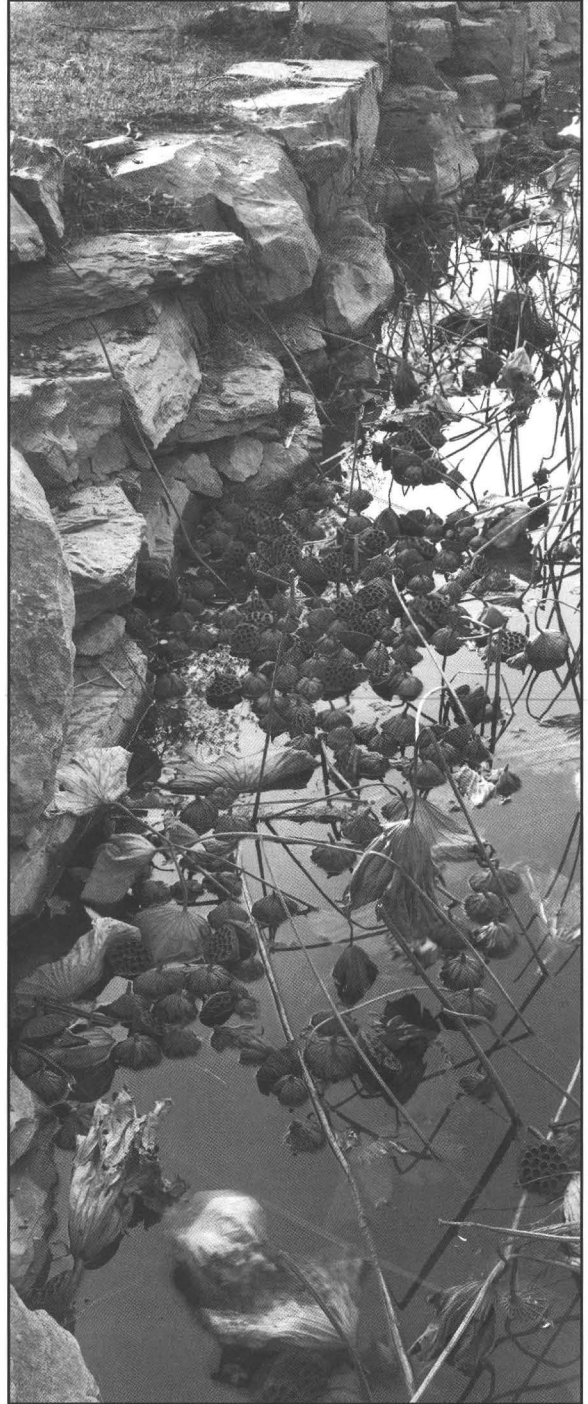
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- Cover illustration Takabatake Kashō, “My skin was like Jade when I left my country”; Yamauchi Hideo, young hero of the “Song of the Mounted Bandit.” Reproduced with permission of Yayoi Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan
- Errata** In recent issues Yan Zhenqing’s 顏真卿 name was mistakenly given as 顏偵卿 due to a change of fonts. We apologise for this error.

In the previous issue of *East Asian History* (No.29), in the article “In Search of Smokers” by Xavier Paulès, the caption on Figure 4, page 120, should read “Occupation of the population of Cantonese adult males in 1928.”

The editor and editorial board of *East Asian History* would like to acknowledge the contribution that two colleagues have made to the creation and evolution of our journal over the years.

Professor Mark Elvin, who took up a position as Professor of Chinese History at The Australian National University in February 1990, was the inspiration behind and instigator of *East Asian History* in its present form. With his encouragement and support we redesigned *Papers on Far Eastern History* and re-launched it as *East Asian History* in 1991. Mark retired from the department in December 2005.

Helen Lo, who began work with us in September 1987, was the designer and editorial assistant of *East Asian History* from its inception until her retirement in June 2005. She was the artist behind the style of the journal and her contribution is sorely missed.



Lotus at the Garden of Perfect Brightness,
Lois Conner, 1998

COMMUNITY AND IDENTITY IN NORTHEAST ASIA: 1930s AND TODAY

 *Gavan McCormack*

East Asian Community: The Unfinished Project of the 1930s

The Manchukuo 滿州国 project concentrated the idealism, imagination and energy of a generation of Japanese intellectuals who wanted a better world. Today, the ideal in whose name Manchukuo was founded remains to be accomplished and again compels attention: how to construct a peaceful, just, cooperative order in East Asia, especially between the three regions of China, Korea and Japan.

From the 1920s, as the confrontation between Japanese and Chinese nationalisms intensified, intellectuals in Japan were immensely attracted by the idea of resolving/dissolving the contradictions between nations and peoples in an East Asian community that would transcend the two nation states. Scientists, artists, film makers, town planners, economists, architects, Marxists and the smartest and most ambitious bureaucrats flocked to Manchukuo to help bring this dream to life. The project strove for many grand objectives. Its ideal was encapsulated in the slogans of “interracial harmony,” “harmony of the five races,” and “all the world under one roof.” It would be post-colonial, multiracial and multicultural, even a kind of “post-nation state” state, the first ever, crystallising the essence of nation state while negating and transcending it. It involved the negation of the west, the negation of colonialism, capitalism and Marxism, and the reaching for a stage of development beyond capitalism and communism. In the end, however, the heady vision produced instead what Yamamuro Shin’ichi has called a Chimera, a strange, hybrid, monster state that—as soon as the sun set—disappeared, like Atlantis.¹

In the collective dreaming that some of the best imaginations of recent times gives us, however, the experience continues to haunt and to disturb.

¹ Yamamuro Shin’ichi, *Kimera—Manshukoku no shōzō* [Chimera—portrait of Manchukuo] (Tokyo: Chūkō shinsho, 1993, revised and expanded edition 2004).

² See my essay, “Manchukuo: Constructing the Past,” *East Asian History* 2 (December 1991): 105–24, at 115.

How could such noble ideals have ended in such disaster? Some now see the US crusade in Iraq as the contemporary equivalent: an aggressive war undertaken in defiance of international society in the name of a splendid vision (the liberation of East Asia then, the democratization of the Middle East now) and on the assumption that absolute military superiority would prevail, with today’s Washington neo-conservatives enjoying even less actual popular support now than did the Kwantung Army and its ideologues then. Pursuing the analogy, it is ominous that Japan’s Manchukuo and China adventures also spelled the death of prospects for democracy at home.

Behind the external appearance (*tatema* 建て前) of the independence of this ideal state, with its own emperor, flag and anthem, lay the true intention (*bonne* 本音) of puppet state; beneath the slogan of “harmony between the races” (*minzoku kyōwa* 民族協和), all institutions bore the distinctive DNA of imperial Japan’s family state, its national polity (*kokutai*) 国体. Japan was designated “parent country” (*shinpō* 親邦 or in Chinese *qinbang*). Its identity was superior as father, or else as “elder brother,” and its gods were prescribed for worship by the Chinese, Korean and Mongolian people. The symbols of imperial authority—mirror, sword and jewel—were carefully manufactured in Japan, and Pu Yi 溥儀, its emperor, was designated a descendant of Amaterasu 天照, his inauguration ceremony an exact copy of the *Daijōsai* (大嘗祭 thanksgiving) ceremony of the Japanese imperial accession. He was therefore both emperor of Manchukuo and younger brother to Japan’s Showa 昭和 emperor—in his own words, he felt “absolute unity of spirit with the Showa emperor.”

Manchukuo was provided with its own Yasukuni 靖国, the *Kenkoku Chūreibyo* 建国忠霊廟 a “Shrine to the Spirits of Those Who Served in the Foundation of the Country.” Its mass political party, the *Kyōwakai* 協和会 (usually known in English as the “Concordia Society”), was a fascist mass party, manipulated and controlled by the Japanese military, mobilising rather than responding to popular opinion. Students entering the “Great Unity” college charged with training civil servants (*Daidō Gakuin* 大同学院, founded 1932) or the National Foundation University (*Kenkoku Daigaku* 建国大学, founded 1937) found inequality entrenched under the name of equality. The reality was that Manchukuo was nominally a sovereign state, the basic principle of this would-be utopia was “direction from within” (*naimen shidō* 内面指導), that is to say, it was a puppet state, appearing to be independent but actually directed by the Kwantung Army, for Japanese ends, with Japanese power and privilege entrenched. In the words of the Kwantung Army’s Katakura Chū 片倉忠, Manchukuo combined “national defense state” and “interracial harmony” just like “Mohammad with Koran and sword.”² Japan was thus the “mother country” for the neo-colonial state as it was developed and refined in the later twentieth century.

Former Prime Minister Tōjō Hideki 東条英機, who was intimately involved in the creation and collapse of both Manchukuo and Greater East Asia, wrote

on the eve of his execution in December 1948 that the real cause of Japan's defeat in the "Greater East Asian" war was its loss of the genuine cooperation of East Asian peoples (*Tōa minzoku no hontō no kyōryoku ● ushinatta koto* 東亜民族の本当の協力を失ったこと).³ In other words, rather than any material deficiency, Japan's decisive failure was intellectual, moral and imaginative. Established in the main by men who believed themselves honorable and driven by a sense of justice and desire for a better world, the Manchukuo design was actually humbug through and through. This state had no universal message—no message at all for Asia other than the demand for its submission.

It is precisely this understanding of Japan's modern history, crystallised in Tōjō's wry comment, that contemporary revisionists refuse to accept. For them, the "pure" ideals of Manchukuo's founders are much more easily defended than the record of the actual deeds of the Imperial Japanese forces (whether in Manchuria, elsewhere in China or in East or Southeast Asia), and it is precisely Manchukuo that is a special ground for arguing for a "proud" Japanese modern history in Asia, for a Japanese mission quite distinct from that of European colonialism: nothing less than the liberation of Asia from Western imperialism. What Tōjō saw as moral and imaginative failure they see as virtue and as a matter for pride.

East Asia: The Contemporary Project

Almost eight decades later, many contradictions divide the same states and regions, and again the idea of an East Asian or Northeast Asian community is to be heard. As in the 1920s and 1930s, state leaders, intellectuals and representatives of civil society in the post-Cold War era search for the formula to establish a stable, just, peaceful and cooperative new order.

Like their forefathers, contemporary intellectuals are attracted by the idea of "East Asia" or "Northeast Asia" as a solution to multiple contradictions. The question is whether their contemporary proposals are realistic, actually addressing the contradictions, or (like those in the 1930s) fantastic, simply achieving a solution in fancy verbal formulas.

The first contradiction is the most superficially obvious, that between Japanese and Chinese nationalism. It not so much expressed today in direct contest over territory as it was in the 1930s (with the exception of the contested Diao-yu/Senkaku 釣魚/尖閣 islands and their marine surrounds) but rather in the contest for hegemony over, or a helmsman's role in, steering Asia to its future (with both nations subject—albeit in different ways—to the same constraint, the base presence and force projection capacity of the single power that does still seize and hold territory). China in the 1930s lacked the military, political or economic weight to challenge Japan's prescriptions; now it has all three, and a sophisticated diplomatic establishment to pursue

³ Quoted in Terashima Jitsurō, "Shidōsha no ishi kettei sekinin" [The decision-making responsibility of leaders], *Sekai* 734 (December 2004): 33–5, at 33.

⁴ *Asahi Shimbun*, 17 November 2004.

⁵ East Asian Vision Group Report, 2001, "Towards an East Asian Community: Region of Peace, Prosperity and Progress," <<http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/report2001.pdf>> See also Wada Haruki, "From a 'Common House of Northeast Asia' to a 'Greater East Asian Community,'" *Social Science Japan* (March 2004): 19–21.

⁶ "Higashi Ajia kyōdōtai kōsō bunsho zukuri teian e" [Proposal for putting into words the idea of an East Asian community], *Asahi Shimbun*, 26 November 2004.

its agenda. Second is the contradiction between Asia and the USA, that is between any scheme for a *regional* identity for Asia and the US insistence on hegemony over a *global* empire. Third is the classic contradiction embedded in the sense of Japanese national identity. Is Japan Asian or non-Asian? Is it an ordinary or superior country? Is its identity based on blood and ethnicity or on civic values? These contradictions that in the 1930s revolved around the core geopolitical issue of Manchukuo today centre on North Korea. The problematic zone, or "cockpit" as it was sometimes known in the 1930s, has shifted from one side of the Tumen River 圖門江 to the other.

Since the 1990s, in the wake of the Cold War, there has been a plethora of proposals for cooperation in East Asia, a region that accounts for 33 per cent of the world's people and 23 per cent of its trade and is expected to continue functioning as the dynamo for world economic growth for decades to come.⁴ The financial crisis of 1997, the growing sense of shared security, environmental and energy problems, and the mounting sense at least in some quarters of the need to unite to curb the arbitrary and aggressive actions of the single superpower, underlined the desirability of cooperation.

At the Hanoi meeting of ASEAN + 3 in 1998, following the proposal from newly elected South Korean president Kim Dae Jung 金大中, an "East Asian Vision Group" was established, chaired by former South Korean Foreign Minister Han Sung-Joo 韓昇助, which in due course presented its report to the Kuala Lumpur meeting in December 2001, beginning with the following words:

We, the people of East Asia, aspire to create an *East Asian community of peace, prosperity and progress* based on the full development of all peoples in the region. Concurrent with this vision is the goal that the future East Asian community will make a positive contribution to the rest of the world.⁵

Prime Minister Koizumi Jun'ichirō 小泉純一郎 seemed to embrace the idea of East Asian community in the agreement he signed in October 2002 with North Korea's Kim Jong Il 金正日. The "Pyongyang Declaration" was the first use of the term "Northeast Asia" in a Japanese diplomatic document since 1945, and it was surely notable that it came in the context of a joint statement with the leader of North Korea. South Korean president Roh Moo-Hyun 盧武鉉 too, in several key speeches including his inaugural address, refers to this same ideal. In October 2004 "Building the Common House of East Asia" was the theme of a large gathering of religious leaders from the region held in Seoul. In late November 2004, the Japanese government presented proposals towards realisation of an "East Asian Community" at the ASEAN + 3 Summit in Vientiane, and an "East Asian Summit" was to be held in Kuala Lumpur in 2005, bringing together the leaders of ASEAN, China, Japan and South Korea.⁶

In the 1930s, the key role in promoting Asian integration was played by the intellectuals of the South Manchuria Railway Company (*Mantetsu*

満鉄) the Concordia Society, and especially the Showa Research Society (*Shōwa Kenkyūkai* 昭和研究会, established in 1933). In the 1990s, intellectuals, this time with a generally independent and critical stance, together with some in positions close to state power, especially in South Korea but also in Japan, returned to the same task. Wada Haruki 和田春樹, as early as 1990, seems to have been the first to articulate the idea of a post-Cold War East Asian order in terms of such a community, in which the legacies of almost 200 years of war and confrontation would be healed and transcended by a community along something like European lines, which he dubbed the “Common House” (*kyōdō no ie* 共同の家) of East Asia.⁷ His design was in turn refined by his Tokyo University colleague Kang Sang-Jung 姜尚中 in his 2001 book (originally evidence presented to the Japanese Diet’s Constitutional Reform Commission) as a multicultural, multiethnic, multilingual community, full of creative diversity, in which identity would be defined by civic categories of the “public” (*kōkyōsei* 公共性) rather than by race or nation. In Kang’s vision, the problem of Korea would be resolved within this larger entity in part by granting a united Korea a central role as a permanently neutral host for key institutions, somewhat like Luxemburg in Europe.⁸

These proposals, it must be said, are somewhat more radical and idealistic than most of the schemes for Asian commonwealth that now circulate at the behest of states and international institutions, whose “bottom line” tends to be the neo-liberal insistence on removing barriers to the free flow of capital and goods. The dynamic of the process is best evident in the ASEAN and ASEAN + 3 (or plus eight, as India, Pakistan, Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and others are gradually incorporated in various free trade agreements) formulas for tariff reduction, economic integration and ultimately a single market. The lesson of Europe, however, is that “Common Market” leads inexorably towards comprehensive “Community” and “Union,” that is to political and cultural integration, and Wada and Kang are undoubtedly right to insist on that long-term focus.

As moves toward economic integration gather momentum, however, the tension between Japan and China over the leading role surfaces, especially as China has emerged as the driving force for negotiations in both Southeast and Northeast Asia, with Japan struggling to find appropriate means to regain the initiative. Chinese proposals in 2003 for a free trade zone with the ASEAN countries pushed Japan to come up with a similar proposal, but it was hard-put to match the Chinese role as host and centre for the Beijing-based “Six-Sided” talks on North Korea. Japanese bureaucratic concern was plain.⁹ As Gregory Noble put it, “China’s central role in the effort to deal with the instability on the Korean peninsula, and its increasingly active participation in the ASEAN Regional Forum and ASEAN + 3 and its bold trade proposals have made it impossible for Japan simply to block or contain China.”¹⁰ When a “Network of East Asian Think Tanks” (NEAT) was set up in Beijing in September 2003, Japan responded by setting up its own group of scholars and think tanks to

⁷ Wada, “From a ‘Common House of North-east Asia,’” p.20.

⁸ Wada Haruki, *Tōhoku Ajia kyōdō no ie* [Common House of Northeast Asia] (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 2003). Kang Sang-Jung, *Tōhoku Ajia kyōdō no ie o mezashite* [Towards a Common House of Northeast Asia] (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 2001).

⁹ Itō Ken’ichi, “Kasoku suru Higashi Ajia no chiiki tōgō kōsō” [Accelerating plans for East Asian regional integration], “Seiron,” *Sankei Shimbun*, 15 April 2004 (English translation at <http://www.sankei.co.jp/databox/e_seiron/2004/040415.html>).

¹⁰ Gregory W. Noble, “Japanese political economy and Asian economic cooperation,” *Social Science Japan Journal* 28 (April 2004): 12–15, at 14.

¹¹ Shioya Takafusa, "The Grand Design for Northeast Asia," NIRA, 2004 (<<http://www.nira.go.jp>>).

¹² Wada, "From a 'Common House of North-east Asia'," p.20.

¹³ The Japanese media reported that Koizumi in late 2004 had begged President Bush to agree to meet with North Korean leader Kim Jong Il and to declare his support for Japan's bid for a seat on the UN Security Council, meeting stony silence on the former occasion and a long lecture on the need for Japan to ease its restrictions on the import of American beef on the latter.

push for the establishment of a "Council on East Asian Community" (CEAC). The semi-governmental National Institute for Research Advancement (NIRA) set about drawing up a "North East Asian Grand Design," a twenty-year perspective for a region that would comprise Japan, the two Koreas, the three Northeast China provinces, (Inner) Mongolia and the North China region (Henan 河南, Hebei 河北, Shanxi 山西, Shandong 山東, Tianjin 天津 and Beijing 北京), with Far-Eastern Russia comprising a "Basic Area," and with the USA and EU classified as related regions.¹¹ It bore remarkable similarity in purely geographical terms to the old Japanese empire in Northeast Asia, although its substance was undoubtedly very different.

From 2003, the "Six-Sided" Beijing conference marks the first time for the leaders of North East Asia (minus Taiwan and Mongolia and plus the USA) to sit around the same table to negotiate the future of the region. The position of the USA, however, creates a certain ambiguity. What precisely is its stake? Is it a Pacific and Asian power and equal partner, or is it global hegemon and therefore in a position to dictate terms? The NIRA vision for the future adopted the vague concept of "related regions," presumably to avoid either exclusion or inclusion of the United States, and Wada's formulations also include the USA, although in the ambiguous fashion of including Hawai'i as a "big island" along with other "big islands" such as Taiwan, Okinawa, Sakhalin and the Kuriles.¹² It was indicative of the central problems faced in defining any such community: is the USA to be included, and if so how? where are boundaries within the region to be drawn? and indeed how the relative merits of "Northeast" as against "East" Asia should be addressed.

For Japan, identity is the fundamental unresolved question of its modern history. At present, loyalty to the USA has become the single, definitive and unambiguous commitment of the Koizumi government. Where Koizumi seems careless of the offence he gives China's leaders by his visits to Yasukuni and shows little interest in repairing the relationship or in pursuing a regional Sino-Japanese—or broader—accord, there seems virtually no limit to what he is prepared to do to oblige his "friend," President Bush (even when it involves acting against the clear consensus of Japanese society, as on the dispatch of Japanese Self Defense Forces to Iraq) and even when Bush seems to feel no obligation to reciprocate.¹³ Such dependence upon and priority to the US over the Asia relationship is, however, best seen not just as a quirk of Koizumi's infatuation with George W. Bush but as a natural extension of a dependency deeply structured in Japan's postwar and occupation settlement.

US insistence on Japan's national uniqueness and fundamental difference from Asia, and implacable opposition to any moves towards Japanese involvement in an East Asian community, have been fundamental to US policy since the occupation. When it came to drawing up a constitution for Japan in 1946, it is well known that MacArthur made retention of the emperor system his central, non-negotiable demand: "Emperor is at the head of the

state” as he put it in his order of 3 February.¹⁴ It is not so well known that the decision to do this had been adopted after extensive deliberations at the highest levels of policy and intelligence communities in Washington in 1942, leading to the decision to retain the emperor system as a linchpin of a conservative order and the emperor himself as the servant of US purpose.¹⁵ Edwin Reischauer, then a young Harvard lecturer (and later ambassador to Japan under Kennedy and doyen of Japan scholars in the US), in his 1942 memo for the State Department went so far as to call for the conversion of Japan into the USA’s Manchukuo, with Hirohito its Pu Yi.¹⁶

The myths of Japanese uniqueness were functional to the end of achieving Japan’s structural subordination to US aims. In one of the greatest propaganda coups of the century, these myths were codified and refined by the US War Department and circulated world-wide in the classic text by Ruth Benedict, *The Crysanthemum and the Sword*.¹⁷ Nothing so perfectly confirmed and gave official American sanction to the idea of Japan as non-Asian, exotic and ineffable, to *kokutai* in the version that suited US policy. While the emperor’s divinity was renounced, this core prewar *kokutai* notion was retained; over time it would be transformed by conservative Japanese and American intellectuals into *Nihonjin-ron* theory 日本人論, thence to reverberate East and West. In one of its most recent formulations, it surfaces in Samuel Huntington’s idea of Japan as the world’s sole nation-state/civilisation, unique and separate from East Asia. The same separateness that in the 1930s was the intellectual and philosophical barrier to the construction of any East Asian or Greater East Asian community continues to function in the same way today. It has remained the *leitmotif* of both Western scholarship and much of Japanese self-perception. So long as enough Japanese people continue to believe it, they will be reluctant to embrace any regional community that might warrant its dilution or even dissolution. Japanese efforts to regain the initiative from China on regional integration are a desperate ploy to do the impossible: to square Japan’s emperor-centred superiority with membership of a regional community.

In recent years, Japan’s Regional Contingency Law, the various components of “Emergency” legislation, the Afghanistan and Iraq “Special Measures” laws, and the National Defense Program Outline (December 2004) have tied Japan closely into the US military-strategic embrace and deepened its subordinate role throughout the “Arc of Crisis,” extending its reach from the Korean peninsula to Iraq and the Middle East, cumulatively transforming the relationship from one of the US “protecting” Japan to one of the former incorporating the latter into its frame of regional and global hegemony, from “protective” to “subjugative.” Just over twenty years ago, it was a major crisis when a prime minister let slip the words “alliance relationship” to refer to the Japan-US relationship; now the Prime Minister exults in proclaiming Japan’s position as America’s Asian ally. Under the Bush administration, this means that Japan commits itself, *de facto*, to policies of preemptive war, nuclear intimidation,

¹⁴ Memorandum headed “Secret,” “Copy of Pencil Notes of C-in-Chanded me on Sunday 3 Feb ’46 to be basis of draft constitution” (initialed by Colonel Charles Kades of SCAP Government Section), Library, University of Maryland, College Park, MD. See the discussion in John Dower, *Embracing Defeat—Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), pp.360ff.

¹⁵ Katō Tetsurō, “1942 nen rokugatsu Beikoku ‘Nihon puran’ to shōchō tennōsei” [The American “Japan Plan” of June 1942 and the symbolic emperor system], *Sekai* (December 2004): 132-43. The basic “Japan Plan” document of 1942 that Katō discusses is reproduced on the web at: <<http://homepage3.nifty.com/JapanPlan.html>>.

¹⁶ Fujitani Tadashi, “Shin shiryō hakken—Raishawa moto Beikoku taishi no kairai tennōsei kōsō” [New materials on the puppet emperor system idea of Ambassador Reischauer], *Sekai* 672 (March 2000): 137-46 (subsequent English version in “The Reischauer Memo: Mr. Moto, Hirohito, and Japanese American Soldiers,” *Critical Asian Studies* 33.3, 2001).

¹⁷ For recent thoughts in this vein, see Sonia Ryang, “Crysanthemum’s Strange Life: Ruth Benedict in Postwar Japan,” *Asian Anthropology* 1 (2002) and *Japan and National Anthropology: A Critique* (London: RoutledgeCurzon/Asian Studies Association of Australia East Asia Series, 2004).

¹⁸ Zalmay Khalilzad et al., “The United States and Asia: Toward a New U.S. Strategy and Force Posture” (the “Rand Report”), June, 2001, at <<http://www.rand.org/publications/MR/MR1315/>>, p.15.

¹⁹ Institute for National Strategic Studies, “The United States and Japan: Advancing toward a Mature Partnership,” Washington, National Defense University, 11 October 2000, commonly known as the “Armitage Report” (<http://www.ndu.edu/ndu/sr_japan.html>). Subsequently, Recommendation 3 of the Rand Report of June 2001 reads: “Support efforts in Japan to revise its constitution, to expand its horizon beyond territorial defense, and to acquire capabilities for supporting coalition operations” (Khalilzad et al., “The United States and Asia”). Armitage and others were explicit on this point throughout 2004.

²⁰ Yoichi Nishimura, “Armitage expects ‘generous’ Japanese assistance to rebuild Iraq,” *Asahi Shimbun*, 26 September 2003.

²¹ Interview, *Asahi Shimbun*, 21 September 2004.

defiance of international law and treaty, sidelining of the United Nations, defiance of the rules and customs of war including the Geneva Conventions, and pursuit of a space-based, earth-orbiting weapons system designed to enforce US will preemptively worldwide. It is an astonishing transformation for Tokyo, but politicians there are inclined to shrug their shoulders and say that so great is the menace of North Korea, there is no choice but total support for whatever Washington does.

For Washington, the imperative of maintaining the Japan alliance, and now of drastically overhauling and tightening it, is plain. Throughout the Cold War it was the case that Japan had to “continue to rely on US protection,” and that any attempt to substitute for it an *entente* with China would “deal a fatal blow to US political and military influence in East Asia.”¹⁸ In the post-Cold War, and especially the post-September 11 world, however, a much more active commitment on Japan’s part is required. Washington therefore applies relentless pressure on Japan to revise its constitution, to expand the hitherto-understood defense horizon in order to support “coalition” operations as a fully-fledged NATO-style partner, a strategic hub in East Asia, the “Britain of the Far East” (as suggested in the Armitage report),¹⁹ to integrate the SDF with US forces by hosting major US command and intelligence functions, and to proceed with a hugely expensive and unproven missile defense system.

Koizumi’s embrace of a cooperative and obedient role within the global empire seems to have astonished and delighted Washington as much as Seoul’s hesitation outraged it. Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage speaks with evident satisfaction—indeed he is even “thrilled”—at Japan’s coming out of the stands “as a player on the playing field” while leaving no doubt as to who is the captain and coach of its team.²⁰ Under Koizumi, the nightmare thought that Japan might one day begin to “walk its own walk,” intent on becoming the “Japan” rather than the “Britain” of the Far East, has receded. The head of the LDP’s Policy Research Council, Kyūma Fumio 久間章生, asked in February 2003 about Japan’s position as war with Iraq loomed, said, “I think it [Japan] has no choice. After all, it is like an American state.” In similar vein, the grand old man of the LDP, Gotōda Masaharu 後藤田正晴, in September 2004 referred to Japan as a “vassal state” (*zokkoku* 属国) of the USA.²¹

Faced with China’s rise, Japan under Koizumi pursues contradictory, even schizophrenic, strategies: fleetingly (as on his occasional visits to Pyongyang) as a partner in the construction of a regional community based on phenomenal economic growth and democratic institutions, but also, and with greater frequency and consequence, as a dependent and subordinate deputy in a militarized global US empire.

Overcoming Datsu-A?

So long as the formulas of integration and community, whether in “East Asia” or “Northeast Asia,” imply that the boundaries of the nation state are to be transcended and a new identity forged, no country faces greater difficulty than Japan. Modernity for Japan has been a process of escape from, sloughing off, or denial of Asia (*datsu-A* 脱ア): a blend of Japanese uniqueness and non-Asian-ness, often superiority to Asia, together with Westernization. However contradictory and fragile, such a way of imagining and representing Japaneseness was functional in the process of consolidating a modern nation state to withstand the threat of nineteenth-century Western imperialist expansion and to build a national economy. In the twentieth century, however, the emperor system (*tennōsei* 天皇制)/“national polity” *kokutai* kind of unique and privileged Japanese identity became a stumbling block to efforts to establish regional community, and the cause of the failure that Tōjō belatedly recognized. Neither Japan’s emperor and gods nor the militarized state could compel Asian allegiance, either in Manchukuo, in China, or in Southeast Asia. Much of the frame of mind about Asia that formed between Meiji 明治 and early Showa in the 1930s survived, albeit in somewhat transmuted form, after 1945. It continued to be predicated on Japanese superiority and non-Asian-ness, on discrimination and prejudice, and to block any attempt to build an East Asia or Northeast Asia today. The “Japan Problem” in twentieth-century Asia is commonly seen as one of what Japan *did*, its aggression against and control over Asia. It may be, however, that that problem was secondary to how Japan imagined itself, its identity: what it *was*.

What is Japan? 55 years after the end of the war, Prime Minister Mori Yoshirō’s 森喜郎 answer (June 2000) was: “a country of the gods centred on the emperor.” General Tōjō would have put it in exactly the same terms. While Japan is superior and a land of the gods, Asians are “third country” people *Sankokujin* 三国人, as Tokyo Governor Ishihara Shintarō 石原慎太郎 puts it explicitly. Over two hundred members of the Diet belong to the “Shintō Seiji Renmei” 神道政治連盟 (established 1970), officially rendered into English as “Shinto Association of Spiritual leadership” or SAS, many more to the “Diet-members League for the Passing on of a Correct History” (established 1995) and well over a hundred to the “Association of Diet-members for a Bright Japan” (established 1996), while outside the Diet powerful organizations such as “Japan Conference” (*Nihon Kaigi* 日本会議) lament the loss of a distinctive Japanese historical consciousness, oppose what they see as a “masochistic” view of history, and campaign for a return to the values of the Imperial Rescripts, or for the preparation of special textbooks to instill a sense of national pride, and to a sense of “correct” history with a return to a pure, bright, superior Japanese identity of yesteryear. The shared sense of Japanese identity that informs these organizations is that of a chosen people, distinct and united around the emperor as the semi-divine racial essence.²²

²² Gavan McCormack, “New Tunes for an Old Song: Nationalism and Identity in Post-Cold War Japan,” in *Nations under Siege: Globalisation and Nationalism in Asia*, ed. Roy Starrs (London: Palgrave, 2002), pp.137–68.

²³ See Glenn Hook and Gavan McCormack, *Japan's Contested Constitution* (London: Routledge, 2001).

²⁴ Gavan McCormack, "The Japanese Movement to 'Correct' History," in *Censoring History: Citizenship and Memory in Japan, Germany and the United States*, ed. Laura Hein and Mark Selden (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2000), pp.55–73.

²⁵ See Gavan McCormack, "Introduction," *The Emptiness of Japanese Affluence*, 2nd rev. ed. (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2001). Also Ishida Hidenari, Ukai Satoshi, Komori Yōichi and Takahashi Tetsuya, "21 seiki no manifestō —datsu 'parasaito nashonarizumu' [21st-Century Manifesto—beyond "parasite nationalism"]", *Sekai* (August 2000): 189–208.

Mass-mobilising organizations over the past decade or so speak essentially the same language of ethnicity, culturalism and racial cleansing as the ultra-nationalists in Europe, Central Asia and elsewhere. They see educational and constitutional reform, often in explicit terms of return to the values of the Meiji model, as especially necessary in order to recover the true Japanese spirit. Their agenda has been steadily realised since around the 1990s, with the adoption of the symbols of the prewar empire, the flag and the anthem, as legally-sanctioned national symbols in 1999, the establishment in 2000 of Constitutional Research Councils to open debate on constitutional revision in the Diet, and the establishment of the National Commission on Educational Reform in the same year.²³

These rightist mass movements of today are distinct from the Concordia Society of Manchukuo in that they are not the direct agent of government, but they still function as instruments of mobilisation and control, and in today's Japan they exercise considerable influence. The Association for New History Textbooks (*Tsukurukai* 作る会) movement, established in 1996, promotes history text revision to restore national pride and a "correct" sense of history. The Association for Revision of the Fundamental Law of Education (*Motomerukai* 求める会), established in 2000, stresses morality, patriotism, tradition and community service as values to be incorporated into a revision of the 1948 Fundamental Law of Education. These organizations are headed by many of the same people, and share the same nationalist and tradition-centred values and the same stress on national virtue and national pride.²⁴ They are also closely related to the various organizations acting on behalf of the families of Japanese abducted to North Korea in the late 1970s and early 1980s, commonly known as *Sukuukai* 救う会. *Tsukurukai*, *Motomerukai* and *Sukuukai*, together with the constitutional reform movement and *Nihon Kaigi* 日本会議, backed by powerful corporate and media sponsors, and with the LDP as their political organ, steadily push Japan in neo-nationalist directions, isolating and negating dissent while deepening the submission to US global designs. The authoritarian, militarist, colonial past exercises a strong attraction and their ethos, with its stress on ethnic and cultural distinctiveness, is close to that of neo-fascist and ultra-right organizations in other parts of the world.

Cumulatively, the agenda of these organizations is an agenda to wind the clock back to the days of the family and emperor-centred, disciplined, loyal Japan of the Meiji and of the 1930s and 1940s, to focus anger, frustration and resentment on North Korea (for which the only satisfactory outcome can be "regime change"), and to require unequivocal support for the USA. Paradoxically, therefore, while stressing the symbols of national identity and brandishing them as sacred or indivisible markers of identity, they positively embrace deepening military and strategic national subordination. Because of this comprador, parasite, or dependent character, such movements are best seen not as nationalistic but as forms of neo-nationalism.²⁵

East Asia or Northeast Asia is generally seen as facing no problem greater than North Korea; but this Japan problem—how to reconcile traditional and deeply embedded notions of “Japaneseness” with the requirement to share an East Asian or Northeast Asian identity for the future—may be no less difficult to resolve.

Conclusion

Today, the Beijing “six-sided” conference table is the site for direct confrontation between two alternative agendas for East Asia: the US hegemonic project that calls on all parties to submit and on North Korea to surrender unconditionally on the one hand, and on the other the tentative moves in the direction of a (North) East Asian community, such as have already been fervently embraced by South Korea, supported in principle by China and Russia, and confirmed in their joint statement by Japan and North Korea.

Where Manchukuo was the axis of Japan’s 1930s new order in East Asia, in the 21st century North Korea constitutes the lever, the axis, by which the USA strives to impose and maintain its position of primacy in the region. Were it not for the “North Korean threat,” Japanese people would have little interest in the “global war on terror” and would be much less likely to bow to US demands for contributions (military and financial) to support the establishment of a client regime in Iraq. Fear and hatred of North Korea dictates support for the US vision, even though its embracing of subordination undermines its credibility and might in the long run actually jeopardize the supply of oil on which its economy depends. However, the US project in Asia, to the extent that it rests on the axis of North Korea, is—for that very reason—also unstable. If the “North Korean threat” were to be resolved (by whatever means), Washington strategists would have to think of some other justification for US bases in Japan and South Korea (and for the Missile Defense system justified by the threat), much as they had to scramble in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union. East Asia would be likely to move quickly in a “European” direction, with large political, social and economic ramifications. In other words, to the extent that the USA accomplishes its short-term goal (change of either policy or regime in North Korea) it undermines its long-term goal (incorporation of the region in its empire). To the extent that it wishes to maintain its East Asian (and global) empire, the USA benefits from keeping Kim Jong Il in power.

While US regional and global policy offers negative priorities—*anti*-terror, *anti*-evil—to justify the promised imperial regime, from within East Asia an alternative, non-imperial vision of a future “European-type” concert has a much more positive hue. Ultimately the contradiction is between the “New American Century” project—as the neo-conservative global project articulated in the late 1990s by those who then became central figures in the first Bush

administration was described—and the “New Asian Century” project. Wada and Kang suggest resolution of this contradiction either by admitting the USA as a full member of the new community or, somewhat ambiguously, by admitting parts of it (Hawai'i and Alaska). However, it seems unlikely that the contradiction between US global empire (the “New American Century”) and the “East Asian Common House” can be resolved simply by offering the USA two small rooms, marked Hawai'i and Alaska, in this house, and unlikely also that Japan's assumption of non-Asian particularity can be adapted to Northeast Asian universalism without a huge transformation in Japan—just as interracial harmony could not be realised in 1930s Manchukuo because the Japanese sense of self-identity contradicted it.

Since Koizumi's visit to Pyongyang in September 2002, Japan has teetered on the brink of making peace with Asia and at last ending the “denying Asia” distortion of the past century, but actually to accomplish such a reconciliation it will have to finally liquidate its colonial legacy with Korea, recast its sense of its own identity, and renegotiate its relationship to the global superpower. What is clear is that the formula apparently chosen by Koizumi—Japan as America's Manchukuo or “vassal state”—cannot remain stable for long.

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