Asia in Transition

Symposium in Commemoration of the 40th Anniversary of the Institute of Asian Cultural Studies

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Introductory Remarks: Is Japan Part of Asia?

This symposium looks at economic, political, and cultural changes taking place in Asia at the end of the twentieth century. Our title is "Asia in Transition," and we are especially concerned about the nature of cultural change taking place in this important part of the world. We use this theme, now in 1998, to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the Institute of Asian Cultural Studies. Right from its very inception, the International Christian University has been concerned with Asia. The first president of ICU, Yuasa Hachiro, insisted that ICU should be international, inter-racial, inter-cultural, and co-educationial. He encouraged broad exchange relationships with scholars and students in Asia. Cho Takeda Kiyoko was instrumental in setting up a Committee on Asian Studies in 1958 which in 1971 was re-organized as the Institute of Asian Cultural Studies. She served as Director of the Institute for many years. It was her belief that ICU, located in Japan, could serve as an academic and cultural mediator between West and East. The goal of the Institute has been to facilitate research of Asian societies, including Japan, and to understand their historical development in world perspective. Specifically, the Institute of Asian Cultural Studies seeks to: 1) invite scholars from various countries in Asia, and other parts of the world to conduct research on the historical, religious, economic, political, and other aspects of Asian cultures; 2) carry out joint research projects with academic groups and institutes which share a common interest in the study of Asia; 3) collect, organize, and preserve research materials relating to Asia; 4) plan and hold lectures, seminars, and symposia on Asian topics; and 5) publish the results of research in Asian Cultural Studies and in other publications. A brief chronology of the activities of the Institute of Asian Cultural Studies over the past forty years is included at the end of this volume.

We are concerned with the question of Asia in transition. We want to look at Asia today and think about where Asia is heading. Of course this brings up questions about the nature of Asia, Asian identity, and relations between different Asian nations, ethnic groups, religions, and the various competing and often conflicting parts that make up the whole of Asia. We know that there are many problems in Asia today. The end of the cold war and reliance on capitalist economic development strategies have not

produced a new era of peace and democracy in Asia. At one time people looked forward optimistically to the twenty-first century as the century of Asia. I think that this optimism is no more. What do we have to look forward to? The Institute of Asian Cultural Studies has been interested in areas such as culture, values, religion, thought, ethnicity, gender, and environmental problems instead of purely political and economic studies. It has tended to concentrate its study on the so-called "modernization era" of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In looking at "Asia in Transition," the Institute seeks to change its focus to more contemporary issues and together think about the future of Asia, both as a concept or discourse and as the reality in which we live.

Thanks to a generous grant from the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia (UBCHEA) and a grant from the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, we have been able to invite four speakers from different parts of Asia, particularly from Southeast and South Asia. **Pira Sudham**, a novelist active in northeastern Thailand not only in literary pursuits but also in fighting for social and environmental justice for Thai people and Thai land, spoke on the ambivalent nature of change in Thailand, and on his own doubts about his role as an agent of change in the rural community in which he lives. **Patricia Licuanan**, the President of Miriam College in the Philippines, presented a paper on women's issues in Asia, particularly in the Philippines. **John Titaley**, from the Satya Wacana Christina University in Indonesia, examined areas of religious conflict, especially between the Islam and Christian communities in Indonesia. Is accommodation possible, and if not, what consequences does this have for the creation of a pluralistic society in Asia or in the world? **Brij Tankha**, from the University of Delhi in India, spoke about different ways of imagining Asia, both from India and from Japan. The keynote speaker for the symposium was **Takeda Chō Kiyoko**, the founder of the Institute in 1958. She spoke on Japan and Asia in transformation and on the potential for a creative dialogue of plural cultural values in Asia. At the end of the presentations, a panel discussion was held in which participants and members of the audience engaged in a lively debate on Asian culture in transition.

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Although we may be concerned about the future of Asia, we cannot easily cast off the heavy burden of the past. This, of course, is the constant reminder of historians in their attempt to address contemporary issues. Let me offer a few reflections on Japan and Asia at the end of the twentieth century, noting how difficult it is to escape basic patters of interaction established over one hundred years ago.

At a recent G-8 meeting in England, the leading industrialized countries of the world took up the issue of the depressed Asian economies. Japan, as the only Asian nation among the G-8, was urged to take the lead in finding a solution. Clearly the Western countries see Japan as part of the East, but people in Japan are less certain. From a Japanese perspective, Asia is not "us," but "them." Is Japan East or West? How does Japan relate to Asia? This is not simply a question of the 1990s and now of

the 21ˢᵗ century, but a problem that has confronted Japanese foreign policy and indeed Japanese national identity since the middle of the nineteenth century.

Briefly let us look at the roots of this dilemma. We can go back to the 1880s, the middle part of the Meiji period, and examine some ideas advanced by Fukuzawa Yukichi, especially his well-known argument that Japan should "leave Asia and join the West" (*datsu-A nyū-O*). Fukuzawa's argument has often been seen as justifying Japanese imperialism in Asia. I think this view is mistaken, however his 1884 editorial does help to understand the origins of Japan's modern dilemma, caught between East and West.

Beginning in the 1870s, Japan's leaders initiated a series of reforms designed to "catch up with the West." A major goal was to create a "wealthy country and a strong army" (*fukoku kyōhei*) able to guarantee national independence. To this end the Meiji leaders began programs of industrialization and military build-up. The over-riding desire was to get rid of the humiliating unequal treaties. A mission to revise the treaties was dispatched to the United States and to the countries of Europe in 1871 (the Iwakura Mission), but it soon became apparent that treaty revision depended upon radical Westernization. As Inoue Kaoru, the Foreign Minister of Japan in the early 1880s, put it: "Let us change out empire into a European-style empire. Let us change our people into European-style people. Let us create a new European-style Empire on the Eastern Sea. Only thus can our empire achieve a position equal to that of the Western countries with respect to treaties. Only thus can our empire be independent, prosperous, and powerful."

The West served as a model for reform in all areas of Japanese life: from schools, hospitals, factories, weapons and warships, to the food people ate and the clothes people wore. Civilization and enlightenment (*bunmei kaika*) was government policy, pursued by some of the same "men of determination who advocated a policy of "honor the emperor and expel the barbarian" (*sonnō-jōi*) in the years before the Meiji Restoration of 1868. Indeed the energies behind the *sonnō-jōi* movement of the 1860s shared much in common with the devotion to *bunmei kaika* in the 1870s — both aimed to find a way to protect Japanese national independence. Both were expressions of Japanese nationalism.

To draw abreast the countries of the West (*bankoku o taiji suru*) demanded changes in Japan's temporal and spatial orientation. It demanded a repudiation of Japanese history: the pre-1868 period became a dark age of backward practices. It also demanded a repudiation of Japan's geography; hence Fukuzawa's call for Japan to leave Asia and join the West.

Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835–1901) was an important Westernizer in the early Meiji period. He was known for his rejection of "Eastern Confucianism" (*Tōyō no jukyō-shugi*), the morality of the old regime, and his advocacy of "Western civilization" (*Seiyō no bunmei-shugi*). In overcoming the East, Fukuzawa particularly had China in mind; China was a negative symbol of all the traditional Asian customs and values which stood in the path of Japan's advance. (Ou, 74–82)

Was Fukuzawa an imperialist? Certainly he dreamed of the day when Japan would assume leadership in Asia. In 1882, two years before the appearance of his article advocated that Japan "leave Asia" (*datsu-A*), he wrote: "I am a Japanese. I wish that sometime in the future I should be able to glorify the national strength, treating the natives of India and China not only the way the English had been doing, but even taking the power away from the English in East Asia to monopolize it for Japan." And certainly Fukuzawa, in the 1880s, did advocate military build-up, often warning against the specter of Chinese naval expansion in Asia. However, Fukuzawa was not a romantic nationalist; he was a pragmatic thinker with pragmatic goals in mind. Several scholars, including Banno Junji and Sakamoto Takao, have attempted to show that contemporary pragmatic or geopolitical concerns were at the core of Fukuzawa's call to leave Asia. (Ito, 147; Murao, 162)

In his survey of Japanese diplomatic history, Akira Iriye has noted two strands in Japanese foreign policy: a "realist" position that had demanded caution and cooperation with the West and an "idealist" position that Japan should ally itself with its Asian neighbors to seek liberation from the West. (Iriye, 18–20) According to one view, Japan would march side by side with the Western powers; the alternative was for Japan to work on behalf of the awakening and eventual liberation of Asia.

According to this scheme, Fukuzawa was a realist. His policy of "leave Asia" meant that he envisioned a foreign policy defined by 1) the rules and practice of diplomacy; 2) relative military power; and 3) relative capital investment. In 1883, for example, Fukuzawa argued that the best way to "civilize" Korea was through capital investment in the Korean economy in a manner similar to British investments in Egypt. On the one hand, leaving Asia behind did permit Japan to "penetrate" Korea and other Asian countries. According to Peter Duus, "Meiji imperialism was the imperialism of a backward or follower country. It was characterized by a psychology of inferiority vis à vis the West, a desire to catch up with the more advanced economies, limited foreign contacts, dependency on the import of capital goods, a lack of political leverage over the advanced powers, and a high degree of state involvement in economic development." (Duus, 434). Thus, Japan could only achieved independence and equality vis à vis the West through consolidation of a colonial empire in Asia.

On the other hand, leaving Asia meant involvement in international alliances, conventions, and agreements. Fukuzawa rejected a moralistic or an emotional formulation of foreign policy in favor of pragmatic solutions over international problems. Fukuzawa's position in the 1880s led to Japan's participation in the League of Nations in the 1920s and not to the creation of the Great East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere of the 1930s.

Japan's postwar relations with Asia, with Korea, China, and the countries in Southeast Asia, has not been smooth. Memories of Japan's actions in the Second World War, now more than fifty years ago, are still strong. But Japan's inability to assume a more confident role in international politics has deeper roots. I have examined some of the historical origins of Japan's current diplomatic difficulties. I still see Japan

caught between East and West, caught between realism and romanticism, and with little likelihood that it will be able to establish an autonomous position in the near future.

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