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Community and Identity in Northeast Asia: 1930s and Today

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East Asian Community: The Unfinished Project of the 1930s

Japan's 1930s Manchukuo 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 among 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, the smartest and most ambitious bureaucrats flocked to Manchukuo to help to 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, crystallizing the essence of nation state while negating and transcending it. It involved the negation of the west, the negation of colonialism, capitalism, even Marxism, and the reaching for a stage of development beyond capitalism and communism. In the end, however, the heady vision produced instead what Yamamuro called the Chimera, strange, hybrid, monster state that, the moment the sun set, disappeared, like Atlantis.[1]

In the collective dreaming that some of the best imaginations of recent times give us, however, the experience continues to haunt and to disturb. 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 neoconservatives enjoying even less popular support now than did the Kwantung Army and its ideologues then. Pursuing the analogy, it is ominous that Japan's adventures culminating in a fifteen-year war in Manchukuo and China also spelled the death of prospects for democracy at home.

Behind the tatemae of the independence of this ideal state, with its own emperor, flag and anthem, lay the honne of puppet state; beneath the slogan of "harmony between the races" (minzoku kyowa), all institutions bore the distinctive DNA of imperial Japan's family state, its kokutai. Japan was designated "parent country" (shinpo or in Chinese chinbang). Its identity was superior as father, or as "elder brother," and its gods prescribed for worship by the Chinese and Korean and Mongolian people. The symbols of imperial authority -- mirror, sword, and jewel -- were carefully manufactured in Japan, and Pu Yi, its emperor, was designated a descendent of Amaterasu, his inauguration ceremony an exact copy of the Daijosai ceremony of the Japanese imperial accession. He was therefore both emperor of Manchukuo and also younger brother to Japan's Showa emperor -- in his own words he felt "absolute unity of spirit with the Showa emperor."

Manchukuo was provided with its own Yasukuni, the Kenkoku Chureibyo or "Shrine to the Spirits of those who Served in Foundation of the Country." Its mass political party, the Kyowakai (usually known in English as the "Concordia Society"), was a fascist mass party, manipulated and controlled by the Japanese military, mobilizing rather than responding to popular opinion. Students entering the "Great Unity" college charged with training civil servants (Daido Gakuin, founded 1932) or the National Foundation University (Kenkoku Daigaku, founded 1937) discovered inequality entrenched under the name of equality. The reality was that while nominally a sovereign state, the basic principle of this would-be utopia was "direction from within" (naimen shido), 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 Chu, Manchukuo combined "national defense state" and "interracial harmony" just like "Mohammad with Koran and sword."[2] Japan was thus the "mother country" for the neocolonial state as it was developed and refined in the later 20th century.

Former Prime Minister Tojo, 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 (Toa minzoku no honto no kyoryoku o ushinatta koto).[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, actually the Manchukuo design was humbug through and through. This state had no universal message, no message at all for Asia than the demand for its submission.

It is precisely this understanding of Japan's modern history, crystallized in Tojo'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 Tojo came to see as moral and imaginative failure they see as virtue and as 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.

First is the most superficially obvious, the contradiction between Japanese and Chinese nationalism. It is not so much expressed today in direct contest over territory as in the 1930s (with the exception of the contested Diaoyu/Senkaku 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 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, and economic weight to challenge Japan's prescriptions; now it has all three, and a sophisticated diplomatic establishment to pursue its agenda. Second is the contradiction between Asia and the US, i.e. 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, which 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 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 [4] and expects to continue functioning as the dynamo for world economic growth for decades to come. 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, an "East Asian Vision Group" was established, chaired by former South Korean Foreign Minister Han Sung-Joo, 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, in the future, East Asian community will make a positive contribution to the rest of the world." [5]

Prime Minister Koizumi seemed to embrace the idea of East Asian community in the agreement he signed in October 2002 with North Korea's Kim Jong Il. The "Pyongyang Declaration" was the first use of the very 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 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. At the end of November 2004, the Japanese government presented proposals towards realization of an "East Asian Community" at the ASEAN+3 Summit in Vientiane, and an "East Asian Summit" is to be held in Kuala Lumpur during 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), the Concordia Society (Kyowakai), and especially the Showa Research Society (Showa Kenkyukai, established 1933). In the 1990s, intellectuals, this time from a generally independent and critical stance, together with some in positions close to state power, especially in South Korea but also in Japan, return to the same task. Wada Haruki, as early as 1990, seems to have been the first to articulate the idea of a post-Cold War East Asian order 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" of East Asia.[7] His design was in turn refined by his Tokyo University colleague Kang Sang Jung 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 "public" (kokyosei) 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 most evident in the ASEAN and ASEAN + 3 (or plus 8, since gradually India, Pakistan, Australia and New Zealand, Papua New Guinea etc are gradually being 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", i.e. to political and cultural integration, and Wada and Kang are undoubtedly right to insist on that long-term focus.

As moves towards economic integration gather momentum, however, the tension between Japan and China over the lead role surfaces, especially as China 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 FTZ with the ASEAN counties 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 manifest.[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 push for establishment of a "Council on East Asian Community" (CEAC). The semi-governmental NIRA (National Institute for Research Advancement) 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, Hebei, Shanxi, Shandong, Tianjin and Beijing), 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 US) to sit around the same table to negotiate the future of the region. The position of the US, 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. Wada's formulations also include the US, although in the ambiguous fashion of including Hawaii, 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 US to be included and if so how, where are boundaries within the region to be drawn, and indeed how are the relative merits of "Northeast" as against "East" Asia to be addressed?

For Japan, identity is the fundamental unresolved question of its modern history. At present, loyalty to the US 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 in the dispatch of Japanese Self Defense Forces to Iraq)

and even when Bush seems to feel no such obligation to reciprocate.[13] Such dependence 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,[15] 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. 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 US'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 U.S. 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 as the classic text by Ruth Benedict, The Chrysanthemum and the Sword.{17} Nothing so perfectly confirmed and gave official American sanction to the idea of Japan as non-Asian, exotic and ineffable, that is, 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, 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/civilization, 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 significant numbers of 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 try 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. In this way it has extended 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 its incorporating it into its frame of regional and global hegemony, from being "protective" to being "subjugative." Just over twenty years ago, a major crisis erupted 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, 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, 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 must "continue to rely on US protection," and any attempt to substitute for it an entente with China would "deal a fatal blow to U.S. 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, 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, Kyuma Fumio, 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, Gotoda Masaharu, in September 2004 referred to Japan as a "vassal state" (zokkoku) of the US.[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 datsu-A (escape from, sloughing off, or denial of Asia), 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 19th century Western imperialist expansion and to build a national economy. In the 20th century, however, the tennosei, 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 Tojo 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 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 20th 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's answer (June 2000) was: "a country of the gods centred on the emperor" General Tojo would have put it in exactly the same terms. While Japan is superior and a land of the gods, Asians are "third country" people (as Tokyo Governor Ishihara puts it explicitly). Over two hundred members of the Diet belong to the "Shinto Seiji Renmei" (established 1970), officially rendered into English as "Shinto Association of Spiritual leadership," or SAS, many more to the "Dietmembers League for the Passing on of a Correct History," (established 1995) and well over one hundred to the "Association of Dietmembers for a Bright Japan" (established 1996), while outside the Diet powerful organizations such as "Japan

Conference" (Nihon Kaigi) 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 preparation of special textbooks to instill a sense of national pride and to a sense of "correct" history 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]

Mass-mobilizing 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 realized since around the 1990s, with the adoption of the symbols of the prewar empire, the flag and 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 (2000).[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 mobilization and control, and in today's Japan exercise considerable influence. The "Tsukurukai" movement ("Association for New History Textbooks," established 1996) promotes history text revision to restore national pride and a "correct" sense of history. The "Motomerukai" ("Association for Revision of the Fundamental Law of Education," established 2000), stresses morality, patriotism, tradition, 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. Tsukurukai, Motomerukai and Sukuukai, together with the constitutional reform movement and Nihon Kaigi, 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 strong attraction and their ethos, with its stress on ethnic and cultural distinctiveness, is close to that of the neo-fascist and ultra-right of other parts of the world.

Cumulatively, he agenda of these organizations is an agenda to wind the clock back to the days of the family and emperor-centered, disciplined, loyal Japan of 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 US. 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. Such movements are therefore best seen not as nationalistic but as forms of neo-nationalism, because of this comprador, parasite, or dependent character.[25]

East Asia or Northeast Asia are generally seen as facing no greater problem 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 the tentative moves in the direction of a (North) East Asian community, such as already 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 US strives to impose and maintain its position of primacy in the region. Absent the "North Korean threat," Japanese people would have little interest in the "global war on terror" and 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 embrace 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 once 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, economic ramifications. In other words, to the extent that the US 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 US 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 neoconservative 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 by admitting the US as either a full member of the new community or, somewhat ambiguously, admitting parts of it (Hawaii and Alaska). However, it seems unlikely that the contradiction between US global empire (the "New American Century") and "East Asian Common House" can be resolved simply by offering the US two small rooms, marked Hawaii and Alaska, in this house, and unlikely 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 realized in 1930s Manchukuo because the Japanese sense of self-identity contradicted it.

Since the Koizumi visit to Pyongyang in September 2002, Japan has teetered on the brink of making peace with Asia and at last ending the "datsu-A" distortion of the past century, but to actually accomplish such a reconciliation it will have to finally liquidate its colonial legacy with Korea, re-cast its sense of its own identity, and re-negotiate 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 (zokkoku) -- cannot remain stable for long.

Notes

1. Yamamuro Shin'ichi, Kimera -- Manshukoku no shozo, Chuko shinsho, 1993, revised and expanded edition, 2004.

2. See my essay, "Manchukuo: Constructing the Past," East Asian History, No 2, December 1991, pp. 105-124, at p. 115.

3. Quoted in Terashima Jitsuro, "Shidosha no ishi kettei sekinin," Sekai, December 2004, pp. 33-35, at p. 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.co.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, pp. 19-21

6. "Higashi Ajia kyodotai koso bunsho zukuri teian e," Asahi shimbun, 26 November 2004.

7. Wada, "From a 'Common House of Northeast Asia'," p. 20.

8. Wada Haruki, Tohoku Ajia kyodo no ie, Tokyo, Heibonsha, 2003; Kang Sang-Jung, Tohoku Ajia kyodo no ie o mezashite, Heibonsha, 2001.

9. Ito Ken'ichi, "Kasoku suru Higashi Ajia no chiiki togo koso," 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, No 28, April 2004, pp. 12-15, at p. 14.

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

12. Wada, "From a Common House of Northeast Asia."

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.

14. Memorandum headed "Secret," "Copy of Penciled Notes of C-in-C handed 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 discussion in John Dower, Embracing defeat -- Japan in the Wake of World War 11, New York, W.W. Norton, 1999, pp. 360ff.

15. Kato Tetsuro, "1942 nen rokugatsu Beikoku 'Nihon puran' to shocho tennosei," Sekai, December 2004, pp. 132-143. (The basic "Japan Plan" document of 1942 that Kato discusses is reproduced on the web at: http://homepage3.nifty.com/JapanPlan.html)

16. Fujitani Tadashi, "Shin shiryo hakken -- Raishawa moto Beikoku taishi no kairai tennosei koso," Sekai, March 2000, pp. (subsequent English version in "The Reischauer Memo: Mr. Moto, Hirohito, and Japanese American Soldiers," Critical Asian Studies, vol 33, 3, 2001)

17. For recent thoughts in this vein, Sonia Ryang, "Crysanthemum's Strange Life: Ruth Benedict in Postwar Japan," Asian Anthropology, Vol. 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 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, cit). 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.

22. Gavan McCormack, "New tunes for an old song: Nationalism and identity in post-Cold War Japan," Roy Starrs, ed, Nations under Siege: Globalization and Nationalism in Asia, Palgrave 2002, pp. 137-168.

23. Glenn Hook and Gavan McCormack, Japan's Contested Constitution, London, Routledge, 2001.

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25. See Gavan McCormack, "Introduction" to Second Revised edition, The Emptiness of Japanese Affluence, New York, ME Sharpe, 2001. Also Ishida Hidenari, Ukai Satoshi, Komori Yoichi, Takahashi Tetsuya, "21 seiki no manifesuto -- datsu 'parasaito nashonarizumu'," Sekai, August 2000, pp. 189-208.

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