

# Turning Western, turning Asian: a study of Japanese ‘identity’ from a Gramscian perspective

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**Abstract** Cultural analysis, an increasingly popular approach, contributes to our understanding of comparative and global politics by drawing needed attention to non-material factors. In some forms, however, this approach may also strip political actors of agency, treating norms and ideas as external, independent and deterministic. Gramsci offers a useful corrective, highlighting the elusive link between material and non-material factors. I invoke Gramscian analysis to explain the otherwise confounding volatility in Japanese norms of identity, norms that over the past 150 years have appeared to flip-flop between “Western” and “Asian” poles. This case study reveals that dominant forces in Japan have used these competing social constructs to consolidate their hegemony or advance their particular interests at different historical moments.

**Keywords** Japan; Western; Asian; Gramsci; hegemony; culture; identity.

## Introduction

The two dozen Japanese opinion-leaders who gathered at a swanky Tokyo hotel in the spring of 1999 were not debating interest rate policy, administrative reform, deregulation, or any of the other hot issues of the moment. Instead, these academics, business executives and government officials were pondering a deeper, more durable question about the nature of Japanese identity: is it fundamentally Asian or essentially Western? Some, like Aoki Tamotsu of Tokyo University, argued that Japan is, like all nations, a creature of time and space, and thus is undeniably Asian. It developed its own unique culture ‘under the influence of two great civilizations in Asia, namely those in China and India.’ Others, however, argued

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*The Pacific Review*

ISSN 0951-2748 print/ISSN 1470-1332 online © 2010 Taylor & Francis

<http://www.informaworld.com/journals>

DOI: 10.1080/09512748.2010.481048

that Japan became unalterably Western after it adopted democratic institutions, achieved industrialization, and joined the ranks of the world's imperial powers.<sup>1</sup>

To many observers, this longstanding debate reflects an identity conflict, an existential dilemma embedded in Japan's collective psyche. For example, Funabashi (1995: 11), a prominent journalist and social critic, suggests that Japan, an economic but not a military superpower located near but not in continental Asia, is torn between its regional and its global orientations:

For nearly one and a half centuries, the nation has struggled with an apparent choice between East and West. Today, it ranks as a thoroughly modern member of the advanced nations, but at the same time, it feels a powerful pull toward its Asian roots culturally.

Likewise, Hirakawa (2005), a literary critic, has documented both 'Japan's love-hate relationship with China' as well as its 'love-hate relationship with the West.' And Oba (2004), an international relations scholar, has argued that Japan invented a meta-region called 'the Asia-Pacific' because it could not stand to choose between its Asian identity and its Western identity. In creating APEC (Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation, a 21-member organization that includes China and the US), it split the difference.

These views flow into and out of an increasingly popular stream in political science, a culturalist or constructivist approach that uses ideas and values (in the aggregate, norms) as independent variables to explain the behavior of individuals, groups, and even nation-states.<sup>2</sup> In the field of comparative politics, culturalists such as Dobbin (1997) completely reject the utilitarian assumption that individual actors are rational utility-maximizers who generally share the same set of preferences from one society to the next. And in the field of international relations, constructivists such as Wendt (1992) reject a neo-realist assumption that states are hard-shelled (unitary) actors motivated always by the same set of material interests. The culturalist or constructivist approach treats individuals and states as creatures of social exchange as well as intersubjective understandings that yield identity and meaning.

Katzenstein (1996: 18), for example, focuses on the so-called 'constitutive' norms (to be distinguished from 'regulatory' norms) that shape the collective identity of any particular society and that 'define interests and thus shape behavior'. He consciously seeks to avoid the tautology of some cultural analysis by acknowledging that norms arise out of political contests, and even change as a result of such contests. But he nonetheless suggests that they acquire a measure of staying power by operating in historical (or iterative, rather than instant or once-and-for-all) time, and by attaching themselves to institutions, where they 'crystallize.' This leads Katzenstein (1996: 21) to assert that constitutive norms are 'collectively held and exist external to actors'. In other words, they become involuntary or 'taken for

granted', and thus become capable of conditioning a society's expectations and interpretations of events.

There is much to praise in the so-called 'cultural turn'. For too long, political scientists seemed eager to imitate economists, dismissing intangible factors such as ideas and norms as unmeasurable or – worse – unimportant. (Ironically, they have done this at the same time as more and more economists have begun to question their discipline's heavy reliance on mathematical models that cannot adequately explore some of the most interesting questions of individual and collective behavior. Thus, Temin (1997), an economic historian, asks plaintively, 'Is it Kosher to talk about culture?') Those driving this 'cultural turn' are correct in noting that interests and preferences are not universal, and that consumers in Beijing do not behave just like consumers in Boston, or that bureaucrats in Tokyo do not act just like their counterparts in Washington. They are right to encourage us to dig more deeply, to investigate the underlying factors behind the outcomes we hope to explain.

So this new approach pushes political analysis in a positive (if not positivist) direction. At the same time, however, it occasionally goes too far by reifying ideas and values, stripping norms of human agency, and thereby ignoring the actual source of dominant systems of thought and belief.

I argue that actors with shared interests, grounded in a historically specific system of production, promote particular ideas and values that reflect their material interests. Because they often do this without strategic calculation or carefully orchestrated collaboration, these actors are not 'rational' in the utilitarian sense. But they are 'purposeful' in that they have hopes and fears (positive and negative goals) that shape their ideas and values. When these purposeful if not always rational actors achieve a position of domination in a society (that is, when they become 'elites'), they are able to propagate their own ideas and values, which over time are adopted by others and eventually become norms of collective identity. More precisely, elites use their privileged positions as opinion-makers (government officials, business leaders, educators, and editors) to foster and defend particular norms that legitimate their political authority and consolidate their material interests. Elite-dominated institutions thus serve as the conduit through which certain tales, such as the distinctively American narratives by and about Horatio Alger, the 'self-made man', become public myths that are endlessly told and re-told.<sup>3</sup> This is not to say that privileged actors can simply snap their fingers and make particular norms magically appear or disappear. Instead, norms become reinforced or 'materialized' in daily life, through discourse and practice, acquiring the stamp of legitimacy ('common sense') over time.

But these norms are not eternal. Other groups with competing ideas and beliefs may rise to prominence in society; if they are able to muster enough support to challenge existing elites, their heterodox norms could become the prevailing orthodoxy. The 1980s 'Reagan revolution' in the US was

an example of such a radical shift in norms of collective identity. Government came to be viewed widely as the enemy, not the representative, of the people.

Gramsci, writing from prison in fascist Italy between 1929 and 1935, provides a solid analytical foundation for this argument.<sup>4</sup> (His works were translated into English as *The Prison Notebooks*, and published in 1971.) Instead of what I refer to as ‘common sense’ Gramsci, (1971: 169–70) introduces the concept of ‘hegemony’, which is domination – but not in its most widely understood form (coercion). Rather, it is domination via contrived consent. It comes about when powerful social forces are able to secure the acquiescence of weaker forces by making concessions and buttressing their authority with ideas and institutions that appear universal rather than particular. Gramsci cites the example of Western Europe in the nineteenth century, when bourgeois hegemony became entrenched. There, the dominant class acquired authority by granting benefits (limited political rights in the form of suffrage and limited economic rights in the form of welfare) to subordinate classes, who ultimately came to view the hierarchy implied by capitalism as the proper or natural order of things.

Hegemony leads to what Gramsci (1971: 366) refers to as a ‘historic bloc’ (*blocco storico*), a set of social relations based on a dialectical merger of material conditions and ideology (structure and superstructure). The state, which uses its power to defend this bloc, consists not merely of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government; it also includes the leading institutions of civil society – from media outlets to social clubs, from the church to the education system. The intelligentsia is thus not a class unto itself; rather, it is a diverse group of individuals who are linked organically to one class or another, and who play a critical role in generating the norms reflecting the interests of that particular class.

A historic bloc will retain its hegemony until it is challenged by new social forces. This may happen a couple different ways: (a) through a ‘passive revolution’, in which a different configuration of elites emerges with a different set of interests; or (b) through a social revolution led by popular forces. In both cases, though, Gramsci (1971: 271) suggests that insurgent forces will use a new set of ‘subversive’ or counter-hegemonic ideas, norms, and values to contest the status quo. Ideational constructs thus change whenever a new set of social forces emerges to effectively challenge the existing historic bloc.

This Gramscian perspective sheds much-needed light on the ongoing debate over Japanese identity. Rather than revealing an existential conflict or a normative tug-of-war in Japan’s collective psyche, the debate reflects the shifting priorities of Japanese social forces (in most cases, the shifting priorities of different constellations of elites) that have found it useful at times to promote ‘Western’ values and at other times to promote ‘Asian’ values. Gramsci shows us that, in Japan as in all societies, norms are not external to

actors. Far from it. Norms are linked tightly to the dominant or rising forces in a society.

I propose to test this argument by carefully examining not only the political and economic history of Japan, but also its discursive history, since about 1850. In the next five sections, which explore successive periods of history, I show that norms of identity in Japan are far from fixed; rather, they have undergone rather dramatic change over the past 160 years. Although competing identities are never completely vanquished, a fact that implies greater continuity and ambiguity across historical periods than my admittedly arbitrary account allows, my retrospective analysis supports the proposition that different periods reflect the ascendance of different social forces that are able to produce and (due to their hegemony) disseminate different Japanese norms of identity.

In the late nineteenth century, as they locked their sights on the goal of industrialization, liberal but chauvinist forces, many of them from the former samurai class, assumed command and tried to mobilize Japan to 'escape from Asia' by adopting Western-style ideas and institutions; then, in the 1930s and first half of the 1940s, frustrated militarists – many of them from the countryside – seized power and imagined Japan as the 'Light of Asia' that would rescue the region from corrupt Western influences; then, during the first half of the Cold War, when they focused (almost obsessively) on economic redevelopment, Japanese capitalists and pro-growth bureaucrats reasserted authority, identifying themselves with the West and signaling that Japan was a committed member of the liberal international order; then, beginning in the late 1960s and culminating in the late 1990s, Japanese manufacturers and their allies in government catapulted to power, envisioning Japan as the technological center, the 'brain' of a developmentalist (non-liberal) Asia; today, in this new millennium, different elite groups inside Japan are engaged in a vigorous contest over Japanese identity. The outcome is uncertain.

The highly transitory and plastic quality of these norms of collective identity confirms a Gramscian view that, while they may assume a 'taken for granted' quality over time, they are not disarticulated artifacts of culture; rather, they are embedded constructs of power and purpose. Indeed, these norms have reflected the economic and/or security interests of dominant or rising social forces.

### **'Escaping' Asia (1868–1930)**

Hamashita (1997) notes that Japan was, for centuries, a member of the Sinocentric tributary system of Northeast Asia. But Japanese elites did not begin to think of the region as a discrete entity – one they could choose or not choose to identify with – until they found themselves nose to nose with

Western gunships. As Koschman (1997: 83) reminds us, ‘The Occident’ invented ‘The Orient’ as its Other – a hermeneutical space that helps define the West through its non-Western referent.

In the 1850s, Western powers led by the US began challenging Japan’s policy of *sakoku*, or ‘closed country’, a policy that had been in effect for more than two centuries. They eventually managed to persuade Japan, then a relatively underdeveloped nation, to open five major ports to foreign trade, give up the right to freely impose tariffs and duties, and accept a system of extraterritoriality that placed foreigners living in Japan under the authority of their own consular courts – instead of Japanese law.

These concessions galvanized younger and lower-level members of the ruling samurai class who blamed the shogun in Tokyo for their nation’s weakness. Chanting *sonnō-jōi* (‘revere the emperor and expel the barbarians’), they mounted a revolt and seized power in 1868 (Dower 1975: 156). They achieved what Gramsci would call a ‘passive revolution’, removing the established warrior elite and installing the Emperor Meiji on the throne in Tokyo – but primarily as a symbol of national unity. In power, the new Meiji leaders dedicated themselves to the repeal of the ignominious treaties, but quickly recognized they could achieve this goal after only Japan had acquired international respect as an *ittōkoku*, a first-class nation on a par with the West. Piece by piece, then, they began to remove the legacies of the ancient regime – the semi-feudal political structure, the four-tiered class system, the efficiency-impeding restrictions on commerce.

The ex-samurai who now led Japan adopted a new slogan, *fukoku kyōhei*, or ‘rich country, strong military’, to rally weaker social forces behind their effort to build a modern state and industrialized economy with all the trappings of the West: a national army of conscripted troops, a bicameral legislative body, a national military, stock exchange, railroad and telegraph lines, a commercial code, a central bank, and an insurance system. They even opened four major arsenals and three government shipyards that served as the pilot plants for Japan’s steel and machine tool industries, importing thousands of foreign experts (barbarians!) to help run them. Those government-owned plants did not turn a profit until the 1880s, when they were sold for next to nothing to the emerging *zaibatsu*, the ‘financial cliques’ of pre-war Japan. But they provided a conduit for the absorption and diffusion of relatively advanced Western technology (Yamamura 1977: 114–20).

In the early years of the restoration, Meiji elites or ‘oligarchs’ were guided chiefly by the philosophy of the late Sakuma Shozan, a samurai intellectual who had urged his fellow warriors to adopt Western military and industrial technology while adhering to traditional Confucian values: ‘Eastern ethics and Western science’. This was a workable formula (Debary *et al.* 2003: 631–2) that provided social stability by combining what appeared to be the best of the old world with the best of the new world. By the mid-1870s, however, more and more Japanese intellectuals began to reject this prescription.

Led by Fukuzawa Yukichi, a newspaper publisher who founded Keio University, these liberals formed the *bunmei-kaika* ('civilization and enlightenment') movement that called for a *cultural* revolution, not just a political or industrial one. To become a genuine *ittōkoku*, they argued, Japan must adopt Western values and customs, not just Western science. Using the same logic, these liberals argued that Japan must destroy all remnants of its Confucian heritage. It must, in the words of Fukuzawa (1960: 238–40), 'escape from Asia' (*datsu-A*).

Until a conservative backlash took hold in the 1880s, the liberals prevailed in what then was mostly an intra-elite skirmish. In Tokyo, Westernization was nearly ubiquitous in new haircuts, new clothes, and new architecture – like the Rokumeikan, a two-story Victorian hall built by the government as a meeting place for the elite, complete with an elegant ballroom for evening waltzes. But outside the major urban centers, the *bunmei-kaika* movement did not penetrate deeply. Most Japanese continued to till the soil, and they were just struggling to survive under harsh conditions; Western values offered little solace.

As the century came to an end, however, Japanese industrialization began to yield impressive economic growth, which in turn produced a national pride that united not only liberal and conservative elites, but also weaker social forces in the countryside. The Meiji oligarchs were able to consolidate their hegemony by implementing the 1889 Constitution, which turned Emperor Meiji into 'the head of the Empire, combining in himself the rights of sovereignty', and by promulgating the 1890 Imperial Rescript on Education, which transformed Shinto into a state religion with the emperor as a divine leader of the *kokutai* (national body). In Gramscian terms, Japan's bureaucratic-industrial complex and its unifying ideology of emperor worship (*tennō-sei*) now represented an 'historic bloc'.

Nationalism swelled, and the quest to transcend Asia evolved naturally into a drive to dominate it. In 1882, Fukuzawa wrote an editorial about a recent trip he had taken across the Indian Ocean on an English vessel. He described the 'arrogant' and 'brazen' manner with which the officers and crew members treated the people of Asia.

In seeing all of this, my reaction was a mixture of pity for the natives and of envy for the English. Even now, I cannot forget the promise I made secretly in my heart. We are Japanese and we shall someday raise the national power of Japan so that not only shall we control the natives of China and India as the English do today, but also we shall possess in our hands the power to rebuke the English and to rule Asia by ourselves.<sup>5</sup>

Japanese intellectuals like Fukuzawa were influenced heavily at that time by a theory of social evolution that had become popular in the West. Herbert Spencer, the British scholar, argued that civilization marched forward

in a straight line – from the most primitive to the most advanced societies. Status-conscious Japanese elites knew their nation's place in this presumed hierarchy; it ranked behind the West, but well ahead of the rest of Asia. And they desperately wanted the rest of the world to know what they knew.

In 1894, Meiji leaders, backed by ordinary Japanese, found an opportunity to express their cultural chauvinism. Japan declared war on China, which – like Japan – was meddling in political affairs on the Korean peninsula. At home, many opinion-leaders viewed the war as an almost Manichaean clash of civilizations: Japan's modern, liberal society versus China's backwards, Confucian society; or, in the words of Uchimura Kanzo, 'the champion of progress in the East' versus 'the incorrigible hater of progress'.<sup>6</sup> Others viewed the war as an act of *noblesse oblige*, a chore required of an advanced society (Japan) to 'liberate' a less fortunate one (Korea) caught in the hoary hold of tradition (China). Such views were reflected clearly in the art produced during the Sino-Japanese war. For example, *nishikie*, or colored woodblock prints, portrayed the Japanese as modern, Western-style heroes and the Chinese as primitive warriors. 'No two peoples ever seemed more strikingly dissimilar than the Japanese and Chinese of these prints', says Keene (1971: 264). While the former wear dark, respectable uniforms, the latter are dressed in what he calls 'screaming reds, blues, purples and greens'. While the Japanese appear thoroughly European with their military moustaches and carefully trimmed haircuts, the Chinese have 'jutting cheekbones, broad noses, gaping mouths, slanting eyes and, of course, pigtails'.

Japan won a quick, decisive and profitable victory. Not only did China recognize Korea's 'independence', it also ceded Taiwan and agreed to lease the Liaodong Peninsula to its former adversary. Ultimately, however, Japan was prodded by Russia, Germany and France to return its favorite war spoil, Liaodong, 'for the peace of Asia'. This incident, known as 'The Triple Intervention', shocked and angered Japanese elites. It reminded them that, despite their best efforts, Japan still had not attained the status of an *ittōkoku* – at least not in Western eyes. Tokutomi Soho, a journalist who earlier had advocated pacifism, became a born-again believer in the raw religion of power politics. He called on Japan to redouble its efforts to wow the world.

The Japanese were previously considered superior to black peoples but inferior to Chinese. Now that has changed, and the Japanese are regarded as superior to the Chinese. But we should not be content until we have been recognized as equal to the white race.<sup>7</sup>

In 1904, fortified by a military alliance with Great Britain, Japan went to war against Russia to defend what it viewed as its strategic interests in Korea and Manchuria. A year later, the imperial navy routed the Russian fleet in a pivotal battle. This marked the first time in the modern era that

a non-Western nation had defeated a Western power. Asian nationalists, rebelling against European and American colonialism, were ecstatic. Sun Yat-sen, the Chinese revolutionary who was in Japan at that time soliciting and securing Japanese financial and political assistance, said later he and his colleagues viewed it as nothing less than 'the defeat of the West by the East'.<sup>8</sup>

But it was the West, not the East, that Japanese elites had wanted to impress the most. So they were quite pleased to hear US President Theodore Roosevelt call Japan's naval victory 'the greatest phenomenon the world has ever seen'.<sup>9</sup> Roosevelt later agreed to help negotiate an end to what had been, for both sides, an especially bloody war. Through the Portsmouth Treaty, Japan gained substantial concessions from Russia: the southern half of Sakhalin, the recognition of its interests in Korea, control of the Liaodong Peninsula, and railway rights in southern Manchuria. But it received no indemnity – a diplomatic slight that caused 30,000 angry and patriotic citizens to riot in the streets of Tokyo.

In the early decades of the new century, Japan merely consolidated its fledgling empire. It annexed Korea in 1910. And it used World War I as an excuse to seize control of China's Shandong Peninsula, then a German concession, across the water from Liaodong. In the main, Japanese political elites renewed the Meiji-era pledge to build a strong state and a prosperous economy – both in their mental image of 'the West'.

### **'Liberating' Asia (1931–45)**

By the 1920s, Japan had come to possess all the important institutions of an *ittōkoku*, including a large army and navy equipped with weapons and warships on a par with those in the West. As if to confirm its status, Japan joined hands with the most powerful nations of the world in a series of treaties, known as the Washington Conference System, which sought to maintain the status quo in the Asia-Pacific region, especially China. As Pyle (2007: 165) puts it, aristocratic statesmen like Shidehara 'steered Japanese foreign policy toward the American vision of a liberal capitalist world order that emphasized economic interdependence'. But other political leaders, more nationalist in ideology, more modest in class background, began to bristle as they pondered the actual meaning of this new security regime. It did *not*, after all, undermine the empires of Great Britain, the United States or any of the other Western powers. It did, however, explicitly challenge Japanese expansionism in China.

In the past, Japanese leaders had put up with Western interference. They had, for example, reluctantly accepted the verdict of the Triple Intervention and the terms of the Portsmouth Treaty. Likewise, in 1915, they had yielded to the United States, which had ordered Japan to modify its 21 demands on China. But in the increasingly troubled times of the late 1920s and early 1930s, more and more Japanese elites, especially younger members of

the military, became unwilling to roll with such diplomatic punches. Even a prominent historian like Shiratori Kurakichi, who had argued that Japan was the West's equal in virtually all measurable areas, became increasingly disheartened as the US enacted racist restrictions on Japanese immigrants in the US and as the League of Nations rejected a Japanese proposal to include a clause on racial equality in its preamble. 'The Caucasians of Europe and America have total contempt for Orientals, who, they believe, are inferior people and cannot compare with themselves', Shiratori wrote with obvious frustration in 1929 (Shiratori 1929: 210).

Hard times also inflamed weaker segments of the population. After soaring during World War I, Japan's economy slumped through the 1920s and all but sank in 1930. Small financial institutions collapsed, factory workers went on strike and tenant farmers organized petition drives. Desperation fueled the ideology of national socialism and beefed up the ranks of far-right secret societies. Outraged ideologues complained about sleazy ties between liberal Diet members and zaibatsu leaders. Intellectuals dissatisfied with modern conceptions of modernity, particularly civic nationalism, emerged to form the Japan Romantic School, promoting an ethnic nationalism that viewed Asia as an uncorrupted counterpoint to a corrupt West, and Japan as the leader of Asia. Yasuda Yōjūro, a leader of the Japan Romantic School, put it this way: 'Japan resisted the invasion of the West; preserved its dignity as the only independent, civilized country in Asia; prevented the complete destruction of Asia; and is now a unique island-Empire nation that preserves Asia's hopes, history, and bloodline.'<sup>10</sup>

As the 1930s wore on, a new generation of leaders emerged in Japan. Many but certainly not all of them were, according to Smethurst (1974), the sons of rural landlords and peasants, recruited by the Army to serve in reservists' associations (*zaigō gunjinkai*) and young men's organizations (*seinendan*). They never fully gained hegemony; instead, they toppled the status quo through force and intimidation, carrying out another 'passive revolution' that undermined civilian authority and ushered in military rule. Indeed, ultra-nationalists such as Kita Ikki conspired to kill a string of prime ministers and bureaucrats, giving Army generals and Navy admirals a chance to fill their shoes. A *New York Times* correspondent characterized Japan during this period as 'government by assassination'.

Before long, the hard times eased. Indeed, Japan began to recover from the global depression in 1932, much earlier than the US and European economies. This was due in no small part to two factors: the growth of increasingly sophisticated and large-scale manufacturing (30 per cent of GDP), including new industrial production for the military; and the development of new export markets, especially 'embraced' or even captive markets in East Asia.<sup>11</sup> Of the annual average export volume for the 1929–31 period, 24.6 per cent went to existing colonies in the Japanese empire (Taiwan, Korea and Manchuria); another 30.9 per cent went to China (outside Manchuria) and other Asian nations.<sup>12</sup> The region thus emerged more and

more as a buffer against what appeared to be the capriciousness, the whimsical violence, of global capitalism.

For the emerging military elite in Japan, it was time to cut ties with the West, to embrace 'Pan-Asianism', a vague ideology of resistance. The first, and perhaps most critical, break came in 1931, when Japan's Kwantung Army seized Manchuria and established a puppet state, Manchukuo. The area had strategic significance, for it presumably extended Japan's perimeter of defense against a possible Soviet incursion. But it also had economic significance; Manchukuo, whose managed currency (the yuan) was firmly tethered to the Japanese yen, became the cornerstone of a regional trade and investment bloc as well as a laboratory for decidedly interventionist (not *laissez faire*) policies.<sup>13</sup>

Condemned roundly by the West for its move into Manchuria, Japan withdrew from the League of Nations and began to move outside the boundaries of the Washington Conference System. In 1934, for example, the military government issued what came to be called an 'Asian Monroe Doctrine', pledging to assume responsibility for the maintenance of peace and order in the region. In 1937, it mounted an all-out campaign to crush Chinese nationalism. And in late 1940, as the United States moved to staunch the flow of oil and other strategic goods, Japan began stationing troops in French Indochina (present day Vietnam) as part of its plan to build a Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.

As they had during the Sino-Japanese war, Japanese elites justified the Pacific War as a crusade to liberate their unenlightened neighbors from oppression. Only this time, the oppressor was the West. 'It is Japan's mission', railed Yasuda, the romanticist, 'to pulverize Chiang Kai-shek's New Life Movement, which is the last holdout of Anglo-American culture in China'.<sup>14</sup> Japanese militarists pledged to restore Asia to the Asians. They would build a harmonious, self-sufficient bloc, the co-prosperity sphere, based on what Matsui (1938: 250) described as a well-coordinated regional division of labor. Northeast Asia – Manchukuo, Korea, and Taiwan – would provide new industries; Southeast Asia would provide raw materials; Japan itself would provide technocratic and military supervision.

To the delight of local nationalists, Japanese troops swept through Southeast Asia with breathtaking speed and ease in the first 10 weeks of 1942, expelling white colonial rulers who had spent centuries consolidating power. Manila fell on 2 January, Kuala Lumpur on 11 January, Singapore on 15 February, Rangoon on 7 March, and the entire Dutch East Indies on 9 March.

But Asia's new overlord was not satisfied with territory alone. Japanese military leaders also wanted to control the hearts and minds of fellow Asians. To do so, they first had to 'purify' them, removing all traces of Western influence. In Indonesia, for example, Dutch was outlawed and Indonesian was established as the official language; textbooks written by Dutch educators were scrapped in favor of new ones extolling the virtues

of a glorious pre-colonial past and assailing the dark days of Dutch colonial rule; anti-Western films and plays were produced and shown throughout the archipelago; and statues of colonial 'heroes', such as Jan Pieterszoon Coen, were ritually smashed.<sup>15</sup>

Having demystified the West, Japanese military elites turned to their next task. They sought to build a new, Japan-centered mythology based on two concepts: *hakko ichiu* (eight corners of the world under one roof), a lofty, romantic ideal inextricably linked to the more down-to-earth, more geo-political notion of the Co-Prosperity Sphere; and *Nippon seishin*, the 'Japanese spirit' of sacrifice, discipline and obedience. Both of these concepts reflect what Tanaka (1993) has described as Japanese 'Orientalism', an effort to essentialize diverse peoples, to conjure up a regional community, a kind of state-less family united by an ineffable set of non-universal, non-international 'Asian values' under Japan's emperor system.<sup>16</sup> As with all good myth-making, the purpose here was to imbue political authority with moral authority, to assert that Japan's occupation of Southeast Asia – by virtue of the vaunted spiritual, economic and military prowess of the occupiers – was both just and proper.<sup>17</sup> In a nutshell, the new myth promised salvation. It promised that Japan, the so-called 'light of Asia', would liberate Southeast Asians not only from Western exploitation, but also from Western values of materialism and individualism.

But Southeast Asians soon learned what Koreans and Chinese – victims of a much longer, more brutal occupation – had known for years: The Japanese were no less domineering than the Westerners they succeeded. As Saipan and other pieces of Japan's far-flung empire began to fall, the new overlords demonstrated this quite dramatically by torturing and killing dissidents, exploiting native labor, and confiscating property.<sup>18</sup>

For all of the new-fangled rhetoric about 'brotherhood' and 'co-prosperity,' elite Japan's view of its relationship with Asia had come full circle in the 50 years since the Sino-Japanese war. Just as wood-block prints from the 1890s had depicted Japanese soldiers as more 'Caucasian' than their Chinese foes, cartoons drawn in the 1940s showed light-skinned Japanese soldiers mingling among dark-skinned Southeast Asians. And a government report drafted in 1943 echoed an old theme that Japan was strong because its core values reflected the best that Asia and Europe could offer: 'purified Orientalism plus the merits of Western civilization'.<sup>19</sup>

### **'Leaving' Asia redux (1946–65)**

Most Japanese were humbled, even chastened by the country's devastating defeat in World War II. Naturally, the new civilian leadership sought redemption in the eyes of the West, especially the United States, the occupying power, which enthusiastically assumed the role of preacher, teacher and big brother. The Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP, represented in flesh and blood by US General Douglas MacArthur) initially

sought to rehabilitate, if not punish, what it viewed as an undemocratic, militaristic society. But later, as it hustled to erect a solid line of defense against Soviet expansionism in Asia, the US reversed course. It resolved to patiently nurse Japan back to economic health, transforming it over time into a 'bulwark against communism'. MacArthur pointed in this new direction when he decided to ban the 1 February 1947 general strike, an economic revolt planned by labor unions he had helped unleash. Big business and the pro-growth bureaucracy prospered the most under American tutelage.

During the 1950s and much of the 1960s, the United States tolerated a grossly unbalanced economic relationship with Japan. While it kept its own markets relatively open to Japanese goods, Japan jealously protected its own. At the same time, the US eased Japan's entry into important multilateral, but Western-dominated organizations such as GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade), IMF (International Monetary Fund), and OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development). Until the early 1970s, the American government continued to view Japan's economy as a fragile flower that, for strategic reasons, must be nurtured with great care.

In this period of rapid growth, Japanese business and bureaucratic elites again opted to 'leave' Asia – politically, economically, and even culturally. As strong supporters of *Pax Americana*, they dutifully followed US Cold War policy and severed diplomatic ties with the People's Republic of China (PRC). And they maintained this stance until 1972, despite a fierce campaign of 'people's diplomacy' by the PRC to mobilize pro-China groups in Japan. Likewise, with the exception of Kishi Nobusuke, who made a celebrated visit to Southeast Asia in 1957, political leaders paid only minimal attention to that region.<sup>20</sup>

It is true, of course, that Japan spent \$1.9 billion to compensate 17 Asian nations for the devastation and misery it caused during World War II. But Japanese firms, themselves, turned out to be the biggest beneficiaries of the nation's reparations program, which consisted largely of loans tied to the purchase of Japanese goods and services.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, most Japanese firms steered clear of Asia. When they invested at all, they typically invested in projects to extract Southeast Asia's rich natural resources – oil in Indonesia, rubber in Malaysia, copper in the Philippines, and so on.

In short, Japanese elites were preoccupied. More than anything else, they hoped to foster rapid economic growth, allowing Japan to catch up with, or even surpass, the West. And they believed this was possible only if Japan allied itself with those very same Western powers, particularly the United States and the United Kingdom. Yoshida Shigeru (1957: 23–5), Japan's prime minister from 1946 to 1947, and from 1948 to 1954, expressed this view in the most pragmatic terms:

Japan is an island country and an ocean country. It has, by world standards, an exceptionally dense population in a small territory. In order to feed this population, the promotion of international trade is absolutely necessary. In order to pursue constant economic growth, the introduction of capital and technology from the advanced countries is indispensable. For either international trade or introduction of capital, Japan should associate itself with the countries that are the richest economically and the most advanced technologically in the world. It is not a question of 'ism' or ideology, but the most convenient way to the most net profits. From this point of view, the US and Britain deserve the most respect in the world from Japan.

But Yoshida and the bureaucratic-industrial complex that backed him wanted more than just Western capital and technology; they also coveted ongoing US military protection. The US–Japan Security Treaty, signed in 1951 and revised in 1960, helped pro-capitalist politicians cling to power for most of the postwar period. Without the treaty, which committed the US to defend Japan against any foreign threat, the Japanese state might have felt compelled to build up a strong military – and that would have upset pacifists, thereby strengthening the leftist opposition. One must recall that moderate and radical socialists had quit feuding in 1955, forming a unified Japan Socialist Party that frightened both business interests and CIA operatives inside the country. They pushed the two pro-capitalist parties of the time to merge, an act of political anxiety that launched the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and more than a half century of nearly uninterrupted one-party domination. With only a couple exceptions (Kishi, prime minister of Japan from 1957 to 1960; and Nakasone Yasuhiro, prime minister from 1982 to 1987), the LDP wholeheartedly embraced what Pyle (2007: 405, fn 32) came to call 'the Yoshida Doctrine', a grand strategy of leaving Japanese security in the hands of the US (just as SCAP had initially envisioned it) and focusing instead on economic development. Japan positioned itself firmly under the US nuclear umbrella, played host to 45,000 American troops, and invested in rapidly growing civilian industries.

From a Gramscian perspective, the Yoshida Doctrine always had more to do with material interests – bureaucratic turf and business profits – than grand strategy. It enabled Japanese bureaucrats to adopt pro-growth policies, such as subsidies and credit rationing for export-oriented manufacturing firms, and emboldened Japanese capitalists to implement worker-friendly practices, such as lifetime employment. The result was that the national economy boomed, strategic industries grew bigger and stronger, and workers enjoyed increased job security. In other words, weaker social forces in Japan came to endorse a pro-Western, pro-capitalist status quo, and the most powerful forces acquired almost complete hegemony.

This was nowhere more evident than in 1964, when Tokyo hosted the Summer Olympic Games. The event provided an opportunity for Japan

to show off its technological prowess – from the new *shinkansen* (bullet train) and YS-11 passenger jet for those visiting the country, to the new color-filled and satellite-fed TV images for those watching from home. To symbolize Japan's return to a US-dominated community of nations, the local Olympic committee chose Sakai Yoshinori, a long-distance runner, to light the torch. Sakai was born in Hiroshima on 6 August 1945, the day of the atomic bombing. But the sporting event was in fact for domestic as much as international consumption. Enthusiastically supporting their government's decision to host the Games, Japanese citizens exhibited national pride. They never felt more 'modern', never more 'Western'. Those who designed the event's architecture and artwork made sure to represent this new hegemonic identity, this new 'historic bloc,' shunning all 'traditional' images of things like temples, shrines, or even Mt. Fuji. For them, writes Traganou (2008), 'the new status of the country appeared encoded in signs, geometries, and abstract patterns, rather than in the exoticized or feminized metaphors of Japan that had contributed to its subordination to the West.'

### **'Rediscovering' Asia (1966–97)**

One cannot say with any precision when Japanese elites began to 'return' (ideationally) to Asia, or to re-identify with it, but Suehiro (1999: 101–2) points to two events in 1966 that seemed to signal a new and more attentive approach. One was the creation of the Asian Development Bank with a heavy dose of Japanese financing and management expertise. The other was Tokyo's hosting of the Southeast Asia Ministerial Conference for Development, a high-level meeting that focused on the need to strengthen economic ties among the region's non-communist countries. In both cases, Japan demonstrated that it was – after a long absence – willing to reassert a leadership role in the region, and not content to serve merely as a junior partner in *Pax Americana*.

From my perspective, however, Japan's 'New Asianism' did not really begin to take shape until 1971, when US President Richard Nixon delivered his two 'shocks' to the bilateral relationship. The first was his announcement that the United States had secretly negotiated with the People's Republic of China to re-establish diplomatic ties. For more than two decades, Japanese elites had faithfully enlisted in America's Cold War, its cold shoulder policy toward China, stubbornly resisting intense pressure not only from the PRC and its supporters on the political left in Japan, but also from many Japanese with complicated but somewhat sentimental emotions about a civilization that had supplied them with an alphabet, a religion, and other cherished sources of tradition. Then, without bothering to consult its closest ally in Asia, Washington suddenly reversed its policy toward Beijing. Japanese elites were stunned, and even embarrassed. The second shock was Nixon's announcement, a month later, that the US would unilaterally devalue the dollar, thereby forcing up the value of the yen, and that it would impose

a 10 per cent surcharge on imports from Japan.<sup>22</sup> Since 1955, when its patron, the US, ushered it into the GATT, Japan had enjoyed remarkably rapid growth as it benefited from the mutually accepted asymmetry of a relatively open international economic order and a relatively closed domestic market. Suddenly, however, Japanese elites found themselves on the economic defensive in a world increasingly characterized by trade conflict.

The timing of this second shock, while not coincidental, could not have been worse. Japan had nearly exhausted the technological gains from catch-up industrialization; its red-hot economy was thus beginning to cool. Capital investment was outstripping domestic demand, creating excess capacity. Wage inflation, land use restrictions, and new environmental regulations were conspiring to boost production costs.

Reluctantly, then, Japanese manufacturers of such products as textiles and electronics began to explore alternative sites for large-scale, labor-intensive production that sometimes generated pollution. Asia, with its relatively cheap labor, plentiful land, and weak regulatory environment, was an obvious target. Although they may have been motivated solely by a desire to protect domestic industries, host governments in the region invited foreign investment by erecting higher and higher tariffs on imported goods. Only foreign direct investment (FDI) could circumvent such barriers. So the volume of Japanese direct investment to the region jumped by a factor of nearly seven between 1970 and 1975.<sup>23</sup>

Residents throughout Southeast Asia began to grumble about a second Japanese occupation – this one by businessmen, not soldiers. In Jakarta, angry students burned Japanese cars and looted Japanese department stores during Prime Minister's Tanaka Kakuei's goodwill mission to the region. In Bangkok, where students also staged loud protests, Thammadaa, a popular folk group, crooned about Japan's economic penetration of daily life in Thailand: 'Wake up with Seiko [the Japanese clockmaker], brush your teeth with Lion [a Japanese tooth paste manufacturer].' The song ended in existential confusion: 'There's something strange here. Am I Thai?'<sup>24</sup>

Political elites in Japan, prodded by multinational corporations, responded by reassuring their counterparts in Asia that they had no interest in remilitarization, and by promising to build cultural and diplomatic linkages on top of the already thick web of business ties. In 1977, Prime Minister Fukuda Takeo visited Southeast Asia and called for 'heart to heart dialogue' with member nations in the region. Although it used new and subtler language, the so-called Fukuda Doctrine reaffirmed a century-old theme of regional hegemony. 'It is the duty of Japan as an advanced country in Asia to stabilize the area and establish a constructive order', explained the foreign minister.<sup>25</sup>

In the 1980s, Japanese business interests, especially manufacturers, heard increasingly shrill criticism from both the United States and Europe over Japan's mounting trade surplus. Tokyo tried to accommodate new demands to restrain exports, buy more foreign products, relax regulations, and end

pro-saving policies. And under the 1985 Plaza Accord, it agreed to push up the value of the yen, thereby jeopardizing the competitiveness of Japanese exports. Squeezed by the West, business interests in Japan – particularly export-oriented manufacturers – began to turn more and more to Asia.<sup>26</sup> What they saw, at first, was an economic oasis, a regional zone of robust production into which Japanese industry could expand.<sup>27</sup> The Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI)<sup>28</sup> set up an advisory group that called for public and private efforts to more thoroughly integrate the economies of Asia. 'The globalization of economic activity has made it impossible to push ahead with economic development within the limited framework of a country defined by strict national boundaries', this group concluded.<sup>29</sup> Likewise, the Ministry of Finance (MOF) created its own think tank – the Foundation for Advanced Information and Research, or FAIR (1989: v) to ponder ways to promote the emergence of Asia as 'one large economic zone and center of growth'.

Almost invariably, these reports trumpeted the dawn of a regional division of labor, a 'flying geese pattern' of development in which technology originated in Japan and diffused to the newly industrialized economies (NIEs) of Asia and then to China and the members of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The most detailed description of this new division of labor was embodied in a report carried out by the Japan Research Institute (1988: 126–7) for the government's Economic Planning Agency. The report, 'Promoting Comprehensive Economic Cooperation in an International Economic Environment Undergoing Dramatic Change: Toward the Construction of an Asian Network', identified Japan, the NIEs, and ASEAN as upper, mid, and lower grade economies that eventually could and should function together as one organic unit. To achieve that end, it called for a regional organization, 'The Asian Brain' (i.e. Japan), to coordinate the aid, investment, and trade policies of member countries.

In time, however, Japanese elites began to describe the region not only in economic terms, but also in cultural terms. For example, Prime Minister Takeshita Noboru referred to Asia as Japan's *furusato*, or native (home) land.<sup>30</sup> Ogura Kazuo (1993: 60–73), director general of the economic affairs bureau of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, called on fellow Japanese to reclaim an 'Asian spirit' of social harmony and individual discipline, while Kobayashi Yotarô (1991: 44), president of Fuji Xerox, encouraged his country to undergo 'Re-Asianization.' Meanwhile, the Culture and Society Research Group of FAIR (1991: 128) proposed that Japan use the 'soft power' of its foreign aid and communications technology 'to create one organic culture zone in Asia', a fascinating characterization that deliberately blurs the customary boundary, immortalized by Tonnies, between *Gesellschaft* and *Gemeinschaft*.<sup>31</sup> And more recently, the Hashimoto cabinet established the 'ASEAN-Japan Multinational Cultural Mission' designed, according to one participant, 'to create a contemporary Asian culture' and to 'make a new and common history in the future'.<sup>32</sup>

Ordinary Japanese embraced the 'New Asianism' in a variety of ways – traveling across the region as tourists, visiting local restaurants featuring Thai and Indonesian cuisine, buying pop music produced in Taiwan and Korea, and – most importantly – thinking of themselves as part of a regional phenomenon, an Asian cultural and economic boom that might ultimately reshape the world. Okamoto Yuko, a former diplomat turned business consultant, summarized the trend in this way: 'People are saying, "Let's rediscover ourselves and find ourselves again in Asia".'<sup>33</sup> By the 1990s, then, a new collective identity was beginning to emerge in Japan – but it was not yet a 'historic bloc'.

Unlike the 'Pan-Asianism' of the 1930s, the emerging 'New Asianism' faced resistance from security-minded elites in Japan. This became painfully evident in 1990, when the Japanese government opposed and the Japanese business community supported a proposal by Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad to create an East Asian Economic Group (EAEG), an ethnically Asian regional trading arrangement led by Japan and including all the members of its World War II-era Co-Prospersity Sphere. While Japanese diplomats were eager to mollify the US, which bristled over what it deemed an exclusive and even racist proposal, Japanese business executives hailed the proposal as an overdue formal acknowledgment of *de facto* regional integration.<sup>34</sup>

In several other ways, however, the 'New Asianism' was quite similar to the 'Pan-Asianism' of an earlier time. For one thing, it continued to overlook cultural, political and economic differences between members of this imagined community, choosing instead to lump them all together into a vaguely defined 'Asian family' or 'Asian community'. Thus, for example, Nagano (1992: 142–9) wrote about 'Asian management', arguing that Japanese practices such as lifetime employment actually represent a much broader cultural tradition. Such unitary analysis was possible only because Asia came to function in the 1980s and early 1990s, much as it had in the late 1930s and early 1940s, as an ideational counterpoint to – or perhaps even the antithesis of – the West. Many Japanese elites rallied defiantly behind this Asian 'Other'.<sup>35</sup> 'The talk is still vague and ill-defined', according to Watanabe Toshio, an economist at the Tokyo Institute of Technology, 'but Japan's new nationalism is real, and it is intimately linked with Asianism.'<sup>36</sup>

Nervous about appearing to justify authoritarian or non-liberal policies, a number of Japanese elites nonetheless cautiously adopted the regionalist and relativist rhetoric of Malaysia's Mahathir and Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew, advocates of 'Asian values' (as opposed to Western values of human rights). Thus, a commission established by Japan's Economic Planning Agency (EPA) (1989: 17) offered the following statement about the cultural divide:

While Asian countries appreciate the role that the United States and the European countries have assigned to Asia, we fully recognize that

Western values have negative aspects, and thus we strongly desire a role based on Asian concepts. For Japan, a member of Asia, to forfeit an Asian viewpoint and behave in a manner based on a Western belief system, causes a variety of uneasy responses from other Asian countries.

The report was far less timid, however, when it moved from culture to economics. Using a term with deep, historical resonance, the EPA commission called for a *kyōchō-teki han'ei kankei* (a cooperative prosperity relationship) between Japan and the rest of Asia.

Over and over, Japanese elites highlighted this presumed divide between East and West on economic matters. Tominaga (1995), for example, identified two competing systems: an Asian model of capitalism, which emerges from the *Gemeinschaft*-like community; and a Western model, which revolves around individuals in atomistic markets. Likewise, Nukuzawa Kazuo (1992), managing director of the *Keidanren*, the big business federation in Japan, delivered a speech to a group of Japanese and Korean scholars in which he forecast an ideological competition between Eastern and Western economic 'systems'.

In the years to come, we can expect to see a battle among alternate systems of capitalism. People will be asking, for instance, if the Japanese and Korean models can be applied to development in Asia and elsewhere, including the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. At the same time, the kinds of efforts being made in Japan to humanize capitalism and make it a better system for international co-existence and co-prosperity will undoubtedly go forward in a variety of forms.

In the late 1980s, Japanese elites pursued this idea into the global policy arena. For example, they asked the World Bank to reconsider its neo-classical orthodoxy and take a closer look at an 'Asian model' of economic development, a model characterized by what one official in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs called 'selective government intervention'.<sup>37</sup> This initiative, along with a contribution of several million dollars from the government of Japan, led to the 1993 report by the World Bank entitled, 'The East Asia Miracle'. At the same time, Japanese elites urged their counterparts in developing economies to learn the 'Lessons from the East Asian Development Experience' and to listen to 'The Voice of Asia' by adopting what they presented as a regionally tested model of capitalism based, more or less, on strong, durable and mutually reinforcing ties between government and business, between nominally independent firms, and between management and labor within the firm.<sup>38</sup>

As time went on, Japanese political and bureaucratic elites increasingly took it upon themselves to represent the economic interests of Northeast

and Southeast Asian countries at G-7 meetings. Much as they did in the 1930s and early 1940s, they justified these and similar outreach efforts in the language of *noblesse oblige*.<sup>39</sup> For example, Furukawa Eiichi (1993:76), a former official in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and founder of the Japan International Strategy Center, compared the ASEAN to a 'lost child' and a 'small ship' that fears it will be swamped in an ocean of regional trading blocs. 'When they look around, the only country that they can rely on is Japan. They are thinking that a small ship called ASEAN can overcome the angry waves of the world [economy] only by tying itself to a large ship, Japan.'

Likewise, Japanese manufacturers operating in Asia routinely characterized themselves as mature and benevolent providers, bringing capital and technical resources to growing members of a regional family. In a 1993 interview, the general manager of a Tokyo-based autoparts producer with factories in Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines confided that he felt 'a kind of obligation toward the less developed countries of Asia.'

I feel like an older brother who must help a younger brother. We in Japan must share our prosperity with those who are less fortunate.<sup>40</sup>

### **'Reassessing' Asia (1997–)**

In 1997, the Thai baht collapsed and a severe financial crisis spread like a virus through much of East Asia. Economic bureaucrats in Japan, still steeped in the 'New Asianism', responded predictably. For example, the Ministry of Finance pushed for a regional alternative to the International Monetary Fund, which had been criticized for responding slowly to the crisis and then for implementing 'cookie cutter' policies that ultimately made the hardship even worse in countries like Indonesia.<sup>41</sup> Although it abandoned its own proposal for an Asian Monetary Fund after encountering stiff opposition from the US, the ministry used the \$30 billion 'New Miyazawa Plan' as a vehicle to explore other options through the 'AEAN + 3' forum, a reincarnation of Mahathir's EAEG. As Hughes (2000) shows, this led, in May 2000, to the Chiang Mai Initiative to establish a network of bilateral currency swapping agreements.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry pushed to transform part of its foreign aid program into a kind of region-wide industrial policy designed to deepen economic integration in Asia. In a policy brief commissioned by the ministry, Ohno (2001), blasted what he called the 'Western way' of Official Development Assistance, in which grants are provided for social welfare programs in the poorest countries of the world, and instead encouraged the Japanese state to regain its 'Asian dynamism' by using yen loans to strengthen regional production networks dominated by Japanese multinational corporations.

As the new millennium dawned, however, Japan's economy remained far from dynamic. Indeed, it was stagnant; a decade of slow or no growth seemed to require new policies. Koizumi Jun'ichiro, an ally of domestic financial interests who became prime minister in 2001, called for structural reform of the economy and the adoption of 'global standards' of capitalism, such as flexible and only loosely regulated capital and labor markets. He and his successor, Abe Shinzo, who governed for only a year (2006–07), not only implemented more liberal economic policies; they also adopted defense policies that challenged the longstanding Yoshida Doctrine. Japan, they argued, must become a 'normal country' that participates actively in international peacekeeping (and anti-terrorism) campaigns led by its Western allies, a more engaged country that stands up to neighbors such as North Korea who defy norms of the US-dominated international system. Abe went so far as to propose (unsuccessfully) a change to the 1947 constitution by which Japan pledged to 'forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation.'

Many Japanese intellectuals share the perspective that Japan has become an oddball, an outlier in the international system. These gung-ho 'globalists' want their nation to abandon its quest to lead a unified region, reclaim its Western identity, and return to what they view as the mainstream. 'Instead of searching for what can be done within Asia, isn't it quicker to join and take an active part in institutions already set up in the West?' asks Iriye Akira, who teaches modern Japanese history at Harvard University. 'This means increasing Asian representation in organizations traditionally dominated by Europeans and Americans.'<sup>42</sup>

Other opinion leaders, though, say Japan must assert its Asian identity. But one must note that, as in the previous period, 'Asia' is for most of them a rather fuzzy image, a loose construct that is best defined by its oppositional status, its 'otherness'; above all else, it is *not* the West, *not* the United States. Thus, Onuma Yasuaki, a political scientist at the University of Tokyo, has called for embracing a Japanese identity that resists 'American hegemony in the name of globalization.'<sup>43</sup> And Fujiwara Masahiko (2005), a well-known essayist and mathematician, has written a polemical attack on Western 'logic and rationality', encouraging fellow Japanese to return instead to a system of 'emotion and form'. These ardent 'regionalists' blame the Asian financial crisis, as well as Japan's longstanding economic woes, on an Anglo-American model of capitalism that promotes high capital mobility and deregulated markets, a model that is therefore as volatile in the long run as it is efficient in the short run. Rather than 'structural reform', they call for reinforcement of embattled institutions such as administrative guidance, keiretsu, and lifetime employment, institutions, which they believe reflect deeply rooted cultural norms of communalism in stark contrast

to Western norms of individualism. For example, Saeki Keishi (2000: 38) argues that Japan must resist outside pressure to adopt American-style policies and practices, and must instead embrace policies and practices that 'fit' its culture.

[W]hat our country requires is the strengthening of its comparative advantage as a Japanese-style society based on the formation of organizations at various levels and the establishment of an order centered on collective activities and personal relationships. The areas where the Japanese economy has an advantage are in manufacturing with local ties rather than global finance, in the technology of the artisan rather than the management of information as data, in local co-existence rather than global competition, in the human economy rather than the cyber-economy.

Those advocating resistance to Westernization occasionally have sounded shrill. In 1997, for example, Shibata Yasuhiko, a senior fellow at the Yomiuri Research Institute, forecast the coming Armageddon: 'If the laissez-faire capitalism of the United States and Britain is left unchecked, the world's economic system is bound to disintegrate sooner or later.'<sup>44</sup> So one cannot blame such critics for feeling a wee bit vindicated by the global financial crisis that began in the United States in 2008 with sub-prime housing loans and collateralized debt obligations. Iwai Katsuhito, a University of Tokyo economist, tries to resist the urge to say 'I told you so', but does note that markets are inherently unstable, and – without proper guidance – are bound to run off the rails: 'Capitalism has to be freed from the capitalistic ideology of laissez-faire, and we have to reassert the old-fashioned idea that government controls are needed to curb the high leverage and excessive speculation in financial markets.'<sup>45</sup>

But the crisis has not led Japanese elites to rally in unison behind the 'New Asianism'. Political leaders have tended to cooperate with their allies in the United States and Europe on efforts to stimulate the global economy and modestly regulate financial markets. And in promoting regional cooperation, Japanese officials have sounded positively 'Western' as they push 'universal values' such as democracy and human rights.<sup>46</sup> In 2007, the Foreign Ministry called for an 'Arc of Freedom and Prosperity' that encompasses Asia and encircles China. Even the Democratic Party of Japan, which swept into power in 2009, has muffled its criticism of the US as it promises to forge closer ties with China and other neighbors in Asia.

All of this suggests that Japanese identity in the current period remains fiercely contested. There is no cultural hegemony. Social forces are sharply divided over how to translate or define 'Asia', and 'the West', let alone whether to affiliate with one over the other. Perhaps this is because, as Hijiya-Kirschner (2007: 347) argues, 'we have learned to see and describe things in a more complex fashion ... the once familiar images of a one-way

traffic between a larger and more powerful unit ('China', 'continental culture', or 'the West') and a passively receptive smaller entity named Japan no longer suffice.' Or perhaps we are suffering from a measurement problem; as living occupants of this historical period, we may simply be unable to view current events clearly or dispassionately.

## **Conclusion**

This analysis of modern Japanese history suggests rather clearly that Japanese identity is unfixed; it has been created and recreated over the past century and a half by Japanese elites with different objectives at different times. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, leading Japanese liberals 'escaped' from Asia and identified themselves and their political-economic institutions with the West. In the 1930s and the first half of the 1940s, insurgent military elites wrapped themselves in an Asian identity – while also trying to dominate the region. In the early postwar period, business and bureaucratic interests turned again from Asia – but not for long. Led by dominant manufacturers, they 'returned' to Asia in the period between 1967 and 1997. And now, in the wake of two financial crises, one that began in Thailand and the other that began in the US, they are reassessing their affiliations with both the region and the world.

If the culturalist or constructivist approach were correct, we would expect to find a much more stable set of norms of collective identity, a set of norms that would adhere to the Japanese body politic as it moves from one period of time to the next. But we do not; instead, we find a rather fluid environment of normative flip-flopping. This suggests we need a different way to think about ideas and values.

I am not the first to offer such a critique. Many others have noted that culturalist or constructive approaches, because they assume continuity, are unable to account for change. Berman (2001: 234), who is otherwise sympathetic, nonetheless complains that

... a comprehensive research program cannot afford to take ideas, norms, and culture as given without investigating how political actors produce them. Such an imbalance has led, moreover, to an emphasis on continuities in political life. Most work in the field discusses how relatively static ideas, norms, or cultural attributes produce stable patterns of behavior over time. This kind of work has been quite successful in helping us understand why political actors often remain stubbornly attached to traditional behavioral or decision-making patterns even when confronted with powerful (material) incentives to change. Yet political life is not always stable, and ideational scholars must be able to account for both continuity and change.

Ideas and values change because they are malleable. They are social constructs of human beings, not exogenous factors entirely outside the control of those human beings. They shape the behavior of people, but are in turn shaped by people. Our analytical challenge is not only to dig below the surface to examine the non-material factors that motivate political behavior, but to identify the material source or sources of such ideas and values. Some culturalist or constructivist scholars do this better than others. David Spiro (1999), for example, does a brilliant job of showing how US officials used the normatively loaded discourse of 'markets' to cover up their own active role in recycling petrodollars in the 1970s. In that case, markets did not magically 'work', as officials claimed; rather, the powerful used an accepted norm to carry out a program for the benefit of the powerful.

I think Gramsci does the best job of showing how we might think more clearly about cultural norms. He links 'superstructure' and 'structure' by arguing that social forces construct particular ideas and values that reflect their particular interests. They do not always do so strategically or instrumentally. That is, ideas and values are not merely weapons deployed at will by rational actors. But cultural norms of collective identity tend to be products of power and purpose. When social forces are able to gain hegemony in society, the ideas and values they have promoted 'stick'. They become 'common sense'.

In the case of Japanese identity, I think Gramsci would note that Meiji liberals and conservatives united in the late nineteenth century to forge a hegemonic alliance that used ethnic nationalism to justify state-led industrialization and imperialism. In an international system characterized by cultural, political, and economic hierarchy, Japan was an 'advanced' nation and Asia was a 'backwards' region; the former had a right and obligation to dominate the latter. These powerful elites constituted a historic bloc as weaker social forces joined them in rallying behind the emperor and his empire. Gramsci would note, further, that frustrated military elites carried out a 'passive revolution' in the 1930s, rejecting Western values as bourgeois and corrupt, and embracing a romantic vision of Asia as a damsel in distress, waiting to be rescued by a pure, uncorrupted Japan. The militarists ruled more through force than they did through consent, and thus never enjoyed real hegemony. In the wake of World War II, Gramsci probably would focus on the bureaucratic-industrial complex, a new historical structure or bloc, that emerged to dominate Japanese society (including the state). Japan reclaimed its role as a member of the family of Western nations, he might argue, because ruling bureaucrats and industrialists in the 1950s and 1960s wanted to use that norm to justify their single-minded commitment to economic redevelopment. However, once the West, especially the United States, became openly critical of Japan's developmentalist policies, resentment resurfaced in Japan. Business leaders, especially manufacturers hoping to use East Asia as a new and more effective platform for production and export, mounted a successful 'Re-Asianization' campaign

to deflect international criticism and advance their own commercial interests in the region. In the current period, however, Gramsci would find no historic bloc, no united hegemony among political and economic elites. Images of Asia and the West compete in the public's imagination.

Gramsci's work is most valuable because it carefully avoids reductionism. It refuses to attribute political behavior to either material or ideational factors alone; both matter, and each impacts the other. Under his approach, 'ideas and material conditions are always bound together, mutually influencing one another, and not reducible one to the other', writes Cox (1983: 168). 'Ideas have to be understood in relation to material circumstances.' This strikes me as an extremely useful way to think about cultural norms, and helps us understand Japan's changing definitions of national identity.

## Notes

- 1 The Japan Forum on International Relations, which organized the conference, took a decidedly middle-of-the-road position reflected in the conference title: 'Nihon no Aidentiti: Seiyō de mo Tōyō de mo nai Nihon' (Japanese Identity: Neither Western nor Eastern). See *Daily Yomiuri*, 3 March 1999, p. 12.
- 2 This is no longer a 'fringe' movement in political science. For a survey assembled by a pair of mainstream scholars, see Goldstein and Keohane (1993). For a critique of the new theorizing about ideas, a critique that is similar to the one presented here, see Jacobsen (1995).
- 3 See Nackenoff (1994).
- 4 I have relied heavily on Robert Cox's interpretation of Gramsci. See especially his 1983 and 1981 essays in *Millennium* (Cox 1981, 1983).
- 5 This comes from the *Jiji Shinpō*, 1 December 1882 as quoted in Takahashi (1973: 23).
- 6 Quoted in Keene (1971: 264).
- 7 Tokutomi Soho, 'By-products of the Russo-Japanese War,' May 1904. Quoted in Mayo (1970: 66–7).
- 8 Quoted in Jansen (1954). Years later, in his autobiography, India's Jawaharlal Nehru would refer to Japan's victory as 'a great pick-me-up for Asia'.
- 9 Quoted in Okamoto (1970: 119).
- 10 Yasuda Yojūrō, 'Nihon rōman-teki jidai,' Yasuda Yojūrō Zenshū, Vol. 9, pp. 265–266, as quoted in Doak (1996: 98).
- 11 The concept of 'embraced' markets is spelled out in Hatch and Yamamura (1996).
- 12 These statistics were derived from data presented in Nakamura (1989: 10).
- 13 See Kobayashi (1972: 196–206).
- 14 Yasuda Yojūrō, 'Nihon rōman-teki jidai,' Yasuda Yojūrō Zenshū, Vol. 9, p. 267, as quoted in Doak (1996: 99).
- 15 See Reid (1980: 23–6) and Elsbree (1953: 121–5).
- 16 These concepts were formulated most clearly by members of the Showa Kenkyūkai, or the Showa Research Association, including Miki Kiyoshi and Royama Masamichi.
- 17 See, for example, Maehara (1942).
- 18 Ba Maw (1968: 185), former prime minister of Burma, later described Japanese military officers as racists who believed 'there was only one way to do a thing, the Japanese way; only one goal and interest, the Japanese interest; only one

- destiny for the East Asian countries, to become so many Manchukuoos or Koreans tied forever to Japan.'
- 19 The eight volume report, *Minzoku Jinko Seisaku Kenkyū Shiryō: Senjika ni okeru Kōseishō Kenkyūbu Jinko Minzokubu Shiryō* (Research Documents on Race and Population Policy: Wartime Documents of the Population and Race Section of the Research Bureau of the Ministry of Health and Welfare), is stored in the Ministry of Health and Welfare's archives in Tokyo. Dower (1986: 270) quotes from this report.
  - 20 This exception is, however, a very significant one. In his 1957 trip to the region, Kishi pushed an initiative to set up a new fund to promote industrial development in Southeast Asia. And he later recounted that he visited Southeast Asia before visiting the United States 'so that I could come to the negotiating table with the US, making pleas for Japan not as an isolated country but as a representative of all of Asia'. See Kishi, Yatsugi, and Itō (1981: 167).
  - 21 This, of course, was by design – not by accident. Tanishiki Hiroshi, then chief of the Reparations Office in the enterprise bureau of the Ministry of International Trade and Industry, noted that Japanese firms, hoping for a piece of Japan's 'economic cooperation' with Southeast Asia, had pushed hard for such a trade-off. 'The newly emerging countries of Southeast Asia are extremely attractive virgin lands offering much promise to those interested in economic cooperation. Raging over these lands, however, is a storm of extreme nationalism and apprehension about a Japanese invasion. Can there be a better way for businesses to ride safely into the storm than to justify their advance there in the name of reparation payments?' Japanese Official Development Assistance (ODA) was, then, a kind of Trojan Horse for private investment in the region. See Tanishiki (1957: 57).
  - 22 The devaluation was part of a broader plan to reshape the Bretton Woods system. The US actually suspended the convertibility of the dollar into gold, and introduced a floating exchange rate system.
  - 23 Ministry of Finance (Japan), *Zaisei Kin'yū Tōkei Geppō* (MOF Statistics Monthly), various months, various years.
  - 24 Quoted in Manglapus (1976: 45).
  - 25 *Straits Times*, 13 December 1977.
  - 26 In a survey conducted in the early 1990s by *Sankei Shinbun*, a conservative newspaper, 64 per cent of business leaders said Japanese foreign policy should focus more on Asia and less on the United States; only 25 per cent said Japan should strengthen its ties with the US. Survey results were reported in the *Asian Wall Street Journal*, 7 January 1993, p. 5.
  - 27 And expand it did. In 1995, Asia accounted for 66.9 per cent of all overseas factories set up by Japanese manufacturers. See Jetro (1998: 4).
  - 28 MITI is now METI (Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry).
  - 29 MITI (1988) *Nihon no Sentaku: Nyū Gurōbarizumu e no Kōken to 'Shin-Sangyō Bunka Kokka' no Sentaku* [Japan's Choices: Options for a Nation with a New Corporate Culture and Contributions Toward a New Globalism] (Tokyo: Tsūshō Chōsakai), quoted in Masataka (1989: 6).
  - 30 FAIR, 7 July 1992, p. 40. See his speech, 'Japan and ASEAN: A New Partnership Toward Peace and Prosperity,' December 1987, Manila.
  - 31 What does it mean for the state to promote an 'organic culture zone?' We get a hint in an earlier report ('Urgent Proposals for the Development of Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific Region') from FAIR's Culture and Society Research Group. See FAIR (1989: 231–3). In that report, FAIR proposed, among other things, the creation of 'Japanese Cultural Centers' (tentatively called 'Asia-Pacific Cultural Centers') in all of the region's major cities. These centers would

- distribute information about Japan and host cultural exchanges. The 'culture zone' also might include a Smithsonian-like museum in Japan to educate the people of Asia, as well as the Japanese, about the nation's drive over the past century and a half to modernize and industrialize. The museum would double as the headquarters of all the Japanese Cultural Centers throughout Asia. Japanese ODA actually did finance the design and construction of a Thai Cultural Center in Bangkok in the late 1980s. But the buildings ignited controversy among critics, who said they looked more Japanese than Thai.
- 32 Aoki Tamotsu, a professor at the University of Tokyo, in a public presentation at the German Institute for Japanese Studies, Tokyo, 25 February 1999.
- 33 Quoted in Bruce Stokes, 'Tilting toward Asia', *National Journal*, 11 July 1992, p. 1624.
- 34 The Keidanren, Japan's big business lobby, was said to be pushing the Japanese government to endorse Mahathir's proposal. Although Keidanren officially denied this, it later issued a statement encouraging the government to work with EAEG member states to make the proposal more acceptable to the rest of the world. See 'Nikkei Weekly,' December 19, 1994. One should also note that some present and former government officials, such as Ishiyama Yoshihide of the MOF (1991: 226–35), did endorse the proposal. In an interview with the author (Tokyo, 3 July 1992), Sakakibara Eisuke of the MOF did the same. FAIR, the MOF think-tank, was mobilizing public support for the proposal in 1993 (see Hatch and Yamamura 1996: 201).
- 35 To appreciate this, one need look no further than the collected works of Ishihara Shintarō, the author of *The Japan That Can Say No* and, with Malaysia's Mahathir, *The Asia That Can Say No*. In the latter, he writes: 'We are an Asian people, ethnically and culturally ... Mindful of our ancestry, we should deepen our ties with this region. We can accomplish far more with other Asians than in a "partnership" with Americans' (see Ishihara 1995: 158–9). In the late 1980s, one could hear examples of defiant Asianism in popular Japanese newspapers and magazines, which routinely carried stories about unilateralism or even mercantilism on the part of the US. In one such story ('No More Japans! Japan and the US Policy of Beating Up on South Korea and Taiwan!' *Tōyō Keizai*, 18 July 1987, pp. 4–7), the author suggests that the United States, unlike Japan, acts unfairly toward the region.
- 36 *Business Week*, 10 April 1989, p. 44.
- 37 Otsuka Seiichi is quoted in Terry (1995).
- 38 See Yasuda and Shimomura (1997), and Kagami (1995).
- 39 Eto Shinkichi, president of Asia University, actually invoked this concept in his call for Japan to 'fulfill greater responsibilities' in Asia and the rest of the world. See *Economic Eye* 13(2), Summer 1992, p. 32.
- 40 Author interview, Tokyo, 7 April 1993.
- 41 Sakakibara Eisuke (1999: 21), then head of international finance at MOF, complained that American policy-makers 'regarded the Asian financial crisis as something stemming from structural problems and wanted to use it as an opportunity to alter the structure of the region's economies.'
- 42 Iriye was joined by Matsumoto Ken'ichi and Onuma Yasuaki in a roundtable discussion entitled, 'Higashi Ajia wa Hitotsu na no ka?' [Is East Asia Really A Single Identity?], in *Ronza*, October 2000, pp. 138–51.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 *Daily Yomiuri*, 26 November 1997.
- 45 *Asahi Shinbun*, 17 October 2008.
- 46 Author interview with Suzuki Yoichi, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 21 February 2008. Also see Yoshimatsu (2009: 84–5).

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