

Japan's Changing Perception of East Asia from Mid-19th Century to Mid-20th Century

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ABSTRACT

The 19th century marked the collapse of the Confucian order in East Asia that had been maintained for centuries ahead. Amongst the chaos stirred by the unconstrained force of Western imperialism, Japan alone secured not only its independence but rose to become the new order of the Eastern hemisphere in the early and mid-20th century. This paper examines the process of Westernization as well as the eventual development of imperialist ideologies in Japan from the mid-19th century until the mid-20th century. The aim is to study the role Asia played in the rise of modern Japanese political ideology, from the opening of Japan in 1854 until the rise of Japanese imperialism in the early 20th century.

Keywords: Japan, Orientalism, modernization, colonialism

1. INTRODUCTION

The 19th and 20th centuries witnessed a process of drastic changes in the Japanese perception of itself, the West, and Asia, which in many ways reflects the efforts in nation-building and empire-building taken by Japan. The Meiji era symbolized Japan's "departure" from Asia, for it proceeded to abandon virtually all institutions and traditions associated with the Confucian world. Yet following Japan's two military campaigns, the Sino-Japanese war (1894-1895) and Russo-Japanese war (1904-1905), the new empire started revisiting the Oriental civilization and claiming itself as Asia's leader. Japanese colonization of Korea and China prior to and during World War II also extensively employed strategies of cultural assimilation and the ideology of East-Asia Co-prosperity to pacify and indoctrinate its subjects. Thus, the theme of Asiatic culture transcended throughout modern Japanese history. Whether it was "leaving Asia" while confronting the spread of Western civilization or "returning to Asia" after having transformed into a modern nation, Japan's relation to Asia remained an inalienable part of its national and cultural identity.

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The 18th and 19th century were a period of revolutionary changes for the human civilization. The first industrial revolution (1750-1850) occurred in Great

Britain and soon industrialization spread to most of Europe as well as the United States. [1,2] These nations, now capable of mass producing not only civic merchandise but also naval vessels and mechanized arms, began extending their influences beyond the Western hemisphere. [3,4,5] In contrast, development in the East remained stagnant due to its isolationist foreign policies. [6] China started becoming increasingly isolationist in the late Ming dynasty (1368-1644) and by the mid-18th century all foreign trade was limited to the Southern port of Canton. Likewise, the Tokugawa shogunate issued the sakoku edict in 1635, isolating Japan from the rest of the world. Thus, for the majority of the Edo period (1603-1867), foreign trade was limited to Nagasaki, where an artificial island Dejima was designated for Dutch and Chinese merchants. The purpose of sakoku was to maintain stability by means of minimizing foreign influences such as Christianity and other Western ideas that might stir disturbances within the country. [7,8,9,10] Tokugawa was successful in attaining this goal, for the Edo period was characterized by peace, economic prosperity, and a stable social order. [11,12] Yet under this veil of apparent stability, tension between classes gradually accumulated. [13] During the warring states period, the samurais were an essential class for each clan. As Japan entered the Edo period, however, the situation began to change. Social class in Japan was based on heredity, meaning that a samurai should always be of a higher status than farmers, artisans, and merchants. [14] Yet the absence of wars and economic prosperity during

the Edo period inevitably led to an impoverished warrior class of supposedly higher status than the merchants flourishing from trade and peace. [15] In addition, taxation in archaic Japan was paid in the form of rice. In times of peace, rice production increased, which inevitably inflated the value of tax rice, further impoverishing the samurais.

In the same time period, the Western world experienced a series of social changes that revolutionized its societies as well as ideologies. [16,17] The event which eventually led to the clash between the East and the West, however, was the Industrial Revolution and the rise of Industrial Capitalism. For centuries Britain had been in an inferior position in its trade with China, for Chinese goods such as porcelain and tea were widely popular among Europeans, while China remained disinterested in Western goods. [18,19] The imperial court saw foreign traders as a potential “destabilizing factor,” and as a result limited trade was limited only to Southern Canton. By the late 18th century, Britain had become the largest trading partner to China, but still ran an immense trade deficit. Each year millions of pounds of silver flew into China in exchange for tea—a product widely popular among the British—while Britain received no economic gains. In 1792, Britain lost North America, a major source of its national income, besides spending millions for the Revolutionary War. [20] No longer able to sustain its demand for tea, Britain turned to the Chinese market in hopes of rejuvenating its economy. In 1793, Britain sent its first official diplomatic mission to China for a more lenient trade policy as well as several other requests, all of which were rejected by emperor Qianlong (1711-1799) of the Qing dynasty. As a result of the diplomatic failure in China as well as the inflation of cotton prices (which Britain hoped to be a lucrative consequence of its Indian conquests), Britain turned towards Opium in its efforts to open the Chinese market. [21,22,23] After imperial official Lin Zexu engaged in an aggressive anti-Opium campaign in Canton and Chinese junks opened fires on a British ship sailing from Hong Kong in 1839, the 1st Opium War began. Although China did stay somewhat stable under the closed-door policy of the emperor, centuries of isolation led China to be technologically and militarily incompatible with the West. While the Chinese society and technology remained somewhat stagnant, the 18th century marked the beginning of modernity in Europe, and as a result the Chinese junks were no match to British battleships and superior firearms. [24,25] Thus, Britain strokes a decisive victory and the two powers signed the Treaty of Nanking which forced the opening of China to Opium and other British goods, the ceding of Hong Kong to Britain, British extraterritoriality, etc.

Also pursuing imperialist interests in Asia was the U.S., which decided to force the opening of Japan. On July 8th, 1853, officer Commodore Matthew Perry led four ships into Edo Bay requesting greater scope of

commercial activities in Japan. [26,27] In the following year he returned with a greater fleet, utilizing what is known as gunboat diplomacy to force the opening of the island nation. Having learned China’s fate in the first Opium War, the Tokugawa bakufu was aware that Japan was in no position to resist the West. [28,29] The resulting treaties were similar to that which Britain imposed on China: the opening of additional trading ports, the establishment of a permanent U.S. embassy, and American extraterritoriality. Westerners could now freely trade and live in Japan, while being exempt from Japanese jurisdiction.

Albeit this was a direct violation of Japanese sovereignty as well as international law, the U.S. justified extraterritoriality with American exceptionalism. The narrative of the West reveals a condescending attitude towards the political and legal systems of the East, for both the Qing dynasty and Japan retained torture as an official penalty. Thus, the West perceived Japan to be a savage, lawless society ought to be inspired by Western civilization. [30] In every respect, the opening of Japan was perceived as shameful and humiliating, as Japan was by no means treated as an equal throughout this incident. The inability of the bakufu to guard its subjects against foreign influence had resulted in its own decline, as civic discontent and revolutionary sentiment accumulated throughout the country. The Boshin War (1868-1869) marked the eventual fall of Tokugawa, as revolutionaries of Satsuma and Choshu successfully defeated the bakufu with their modernized forces and placed emperor Meiji into power.

3. LEAVING ASIA

The early Meiji period witnessed Japan’s struggle to maintain its independence and secure a prosperous future in a world dominated by Western hegemony. It was also an era of uncertainty and clash between domestic conservatism and Western expansion. Albeit the Meiji Restoration later proved to be an immense success, the early reform endeavours had faced considerable opposition from the conservative side. Throughout the Edo period, Japan held the belief that members of the Confucian world—China, Japan, and Korea were the civilized, while the West was deemed barbarian. Yet 19th century Japan was confronted with the reality that the East had now become the uncivilized one. China’s defeat in the First Opium War was the beginning of the fall of the Confucian order. At this point, a number of Japanese scholars saw the inevitability of total westernization and began to promote total westernization to resolve this survival crisis. They associated Japan’s decline with Confucianism and domestic conservatism, to support the establishment of a new, westernized society. Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835-1901), a Japanese author and educator, was among the most influential figures advocating for westernization. In his article *On Leaving Asia* published

by Japanese press Jiji Shimpo, he discusses the spread of western civilization in Asia and Japan:

The Chinese and Koreans are more like each other and together they do not show as much similarity to the Japanese. These two peoples do not know how to progress either personally or as a nation. In this day and age with transportation becoming so convenient, they cannot be blind to the manifestations of Western civilization. But they say that what is seen or heard cannot influence the disposition of their minds. Their love affairs with ancient ways and old customs remain as strong as they were centuries ago. In this new and vibrant theatre of civilization when we speak of education, they only refer back to Confucianism. As for school education, they can only cite [Mencius's] precepts of humanity, righteousness, decorum, and knowledge. While professing their abhorrence to ostentation, in reality they show their ignorance of truth and principles. As for their morality, one only has to observe their unspeakable acts of cruelty and shamelessness. Yet they remain arrogant and show no sign of self-examination.

The purpose of this essay—as evident from its title—is to encourage a complete break with Asia. Therefore, Fukuzawa deliberately emphasizes the resemblance between Japan's two neighbours: China and Korea, as opposed to the differences between themselves and Japan. The conservative argument against westernization targeted capitalism, consumerism, and the dangers of economic globalization. Fukuzawa therefore recognized the need to inspect Japan's international status in regard to its relations with Asia, as how the West would see it. He refers to the civilizations of China and Korea represented by China as “they,” who embody the ignorance, cruelty, and most importantly inferiority of the Orient, in contrast with Japan which he refers to as “we”. Similar to the European invention of Orientalism, Fukuzawa establishes a dualistic opposition in which Asia is perceived as an underdeveloped, primitive civilization separated from the West as well as Japan itself. Because both China and Korea had failed to “progress either personally or as a nation,” there should be no reason for Japan to associate itself with them. Instead, it would be proper for Japan, soon to be a member of the developed world, to treat its neighbours like how the West has dealt with them.

As a son of a low-ranking samurai family from Nakatsu as well as a member of the first Japanese embassy visiting the U.S. and Europe after Sakoku, Fukuzawa Yukichi had witnessed the immense disparity between Confucian and Western civilizations, between antiquity and modernity. Born into a family which revered the Chinese tradition, Fukuzawa was highly educated in the Chinese language as well as literature. After Tokugawa Japan was forced to open its doors by the U.S. through gunboats diplomacy, Fukuzawa who was 19 at the time began to pursue Rangaku (Dutch

studies). Japan at this point remained anti-foreign and anything associated with the West was to be despised, while Confucian scholars were regarded with much prestige and honour. Under such atmosphere Fukuzawa nonetheless decided to pursue the more difficult path. During the course of his study, along with his fellow students of the Ogata School he developed a “hostility against Chinese learning” as written in his autobiography:

The only subject that bore our constant attack was Chinese medicine. And by hating Chinese medicine so thoroughly, we came to dislike everything that had any connection with Chinese culture. Our general opinion was that we should rid our country of the influences of the Chinese altogether. Whenever we met a young student of Chinese literature, we simply felt sorry for him.

Thus, the thought of “leaving Asia” and “joining Europe” had borne its seeds within his mind even when most of Japan was dismissive of the West. After serving as an interpreter in the Japanese embassy to San Francisco in 1859 and the embassy to Europe in 1862, he began the effort to educate Japanese people regarding Western civilization. The series of works *Seiyō Jijō* (Things Western) which he published in the beginning of the Meiji era (1867-1870) became widely popular among the Japanese public, leading him to become an influential figure within the Meiji reforms. Fukuzawa proceeded to start a newspaper *Jiji Shinpo* (Current Events) through which he was able to consult his ideals as well as information about multiple aspects of the Western society. By publishing articles as *Datsu a Ron* he urged the Japanese public to support the radical changes brought about by the Meiji government and to break away from Eastern traditions. He came to believe that education was a crucial part of constructing a powerful civilization, and thus became a major proponent in establishing modern, western universities, including Keio University—one of the most prestigious universities in Japan today. He also advocated for women's education, in emulation of western women who were at the time more educated and had a higher social status. Therefore, it is evident that most of Fukuzawa's life was devoted to the westernization of Japan. The central point of his argument is the inevitability of westernization, for it was the global trend of the 19th century. Although 20 years had passed since the Meiji Restoration, Japan had yet any substantial proof of its abilities, thus placing the nation in a position of uncertainty. The Unequal Treaties violating Japanese sovereignty were not to be abolished until the 1890s, further suggesting that Japan at this point did not have the privilege to assert its own values against the West...China's refusal to open its doors to the West had resulted in catastrophic consequences, and according to Fukuzawa the reason for China's failures was the Qing government's insistence in clinging to the old, uncivilized customs. This was an irrational decision to make, for the “epidemic” of Western civilization was impossible to resist.

Fukuzawa's perspective was shared by statesmen of the era, most of whom were middle- and lower-class samurais from the domains of Choshu, Satsuma, Tosa, and Hizen. Although these men were initially fuelled by strong sentiments of xenophobia and nationalism (revere the emperor, expel the barbarians), their views and objectives were quickly changed after founding the new government. From 1871 to 1873, Japan deployed a diplomatic expedition known as the Iwakura Mission to the United States and Europe in hopes of revising the unequal treaties. Albeit the negotiation did not have a successful outcome, members of this mission—after witnessing the wealth and power possessed by Western societies—realized that only by means of modernization could Japan free itself from the unequal treaties. Kido Takayoshi, a leader of the mission and later regarded one of the three great nobles of the Meiji restoration, became an active proponent for the constitutional movement, for he was aware that the Japanese jurisdiction would always be deemed “outmoded” and “cruel” by the West. Similarly, he was also a principal architect of Japan's new county system which replaced the feudal domains.

Accordant to Fukuzawa's political ideologies, voices from the more conservative factions at this period were also powerful, for the Meiji reforms were in fact deemed radical by many intellectuals of important positions. Tani Tateki (1837-1911), head of the Army Academy, advocated for the integration of Confucian principles into the government. In *Onkyurei Kaisei no Iken* (Opinion on Reform of Army Pension Law), criticizes they who “fawn upon the fashions of the day, only imitating Western ways, denigrate and diminish even those sterling qualities of our mind and nature in which we excel and the foreigners fall short...” (768) Similar to other conservative forces in the Meiji government, he emphasizes Confucian ideals of “loyalty and filial piety,” which are “obligations implied in the human condition.” Motoda Eifu (1818-1891), court advisor and tutor to emperor Meiji, remarks that the Japanese “take unto themselves a foreign civilization whose only values are fact-gathering and technique, thus violating the rules of good manner and bringing harm to our customary ways,” and “the danger of indiscriminate emulation of Western ways is that in the end our people will forget the great principles governing the relations between ruler and subject, and father and son.” His critiques later became influential in establishing an ultranationalist state in which the emperor was revered as deity. Yet to reformists as Fukuzawa Yukichi, conservative commentaries directly threatened the success of the Meiji reforms, which would in turn affect the independence of Japan.

The progressive ideology was eventually proven efficient by the outcomes of the Meiji restoration. In the period from 1867 to 1890, Meiji Japan had replaced virtually every aspect of its society—government, education, fashion, etc.—with their Western equivalence. The feudal system was replaced with a county system

under a constitutional monarchy, and a unified tax structure was introduced to finance the centralized government. Compulsory education was implemented to prepare Japanese citizens for greater involvement in politics as well as the construction of a constitution in the future. With the aid from foreign advisors the Meiji leaders also undertook the task to industrialize Japan, to progress from an agricultural economy to a capitalist economy. Yet the centre of Japan's crisis—the unequal treaties—were not to be entirely abolished until Japan demonstrated its military advancements in the Sino-Japanese war (1894-95).

4. THE SINO-JAPANESE WAR AND RUSSO JAPANESE WAR

Over the course of 20 years, however, Japan's shift in position granted it the privilege to revisit its traditions as well as its national identity. On April 17th, 1895, Japan had successfully defeated China in the first Sino-Japanese war. The war symbolized a change in power dynamics within East Asia, as China could no longer maintain military superiority even in the Confucian world. As for Japan, the war was undeniable proof to the successes of the Meiji reforms, as for the first time it defeated a major world power with far more territories and resources. The war had restored Japan its sovereignty, given it Taiwan as a colony and Korea under its sphere of influence, setting the course for the rise of a new empire. Albeit a wave of nationalism was triggered, the war in many ways strengthened the Japanese disdain and contempt for the Orient, and such mentality is demonstrated through pictorials of the Sino-Japanese War.

In the collection of pictorials by artist Yonetaka Kubota published in 1894 was a distinctive depiction of the Chinese in contrast to the Japanese soldiers. The Qing soldiers that appear in his works are dressed in traditional Manchurian clothing and are of very small and hunched over stature, establishing a sharp contrast with the built, European-like physiques Japanese soldiers in military uniforms. The former's bent over posture suggests a cowardly nature of the East, while the latter are sitting straight on their horses, appearing heroic and victorious. Such was Japan's self-portrayal relative to the concept of the Orient, albeit it was unrealistic for the Japanese to attain this type of physiques in mere decades. Since the 6th century, eating meat was considered a taboo for all Japanese citizens, including the emperor and the aristocracy. In 1872, the Meiji government officially ended the ban on meat, announcing that “Although beef is a wonderfully nutritious food, there are still a great number of people barring our attempt at westernization by clinging to conventional customs ...” Meat eating, therefore, represented modernity as opposed to those who chose to persist archaic practices. While this did prove effective in improving public health, it was still

practically impossible for the average Japanese to achieve the same levels of height and physical strength as the average Europeans or Americans. Yet the portrayals of the two sides demonstrate disdain for the Orient and admiration for the Occident, for the world at this point was still under Western hegemony.

In 1905 Japan proceeded to defeat Russia. It became the first Oriental nation to defeat a Western empire in modern history, thus elevating Japan's status to a legitimate world power. In the years following 1905 Japan rose to international spotlight, as European and American press continued to express marvel for the rising empire, yet in many ways these appreciations were still established on the premise of Western superiority... While the West praised Japan for its speed and efficiency in modernizing, it saw the successes of Japan as merely the result of imitation. After all, Meiji Japan established new systems of government, law, and education based on existing blueprints of European nations. In an article *A Nation of Braves* published in South African newspaper *Gold Coast Leader*, the author praises the "extraordinary and rapid advance of the Japanese, a race which in thirty-five or forty years has advanced from a state almost of barbarism and semi-savagery to a civilization in great measure equal to that of the most advanced nations of the earth [...]." The author of this passage, although holding a praising attitude towards the modernization of Japan, saw no value in Japanese traditions and cultures. At the end of this article, he celebrates that Japan was beginning to "cast away its senseless idols, and to accept the Christian religion which teaches that the Son of God [...]," demonstrating a condescending attitude towards traditional Japanese or Eastern religions. Thus, even after defeating a major Western power Japan failed to be seen as equal in the eyes of the West, for it still bore the stigma as one of the "Orient," as one of the uncivilized.

As such, Japan progressed into a period of imperial expansion in a world predominated by Western civilizations, who continued to disapprove of the Orient. Because the Meiji Restoration promoted an agenda of total Westernization, Japan itself in the early 20th century was accustomed to Western high culture. Not only did it adopt Western technology and infrastructure, but the Japanese lifestyle was also entirely replaced by its Western counterpart. Traditional Japanese hairstyles (*nihongami*) as well as fashion were replaced with Western ones, and Japanese art during the Meiji period were also heavily influenced by West. For instance, in the realm of painting Japanese artists developed a new art style known as *nihonga* (Japanese painting) as a divergence of *yoga* (Oil painting). A representative work of *nihonga* would be *Lakeside* by Kuroda Seiki—one of the founders of *nihonga*—depicts a Japanese woman along the riverside dressed in traditional kimono. This painting was completed using oil on canvas, and the style as well as techniques employed clearly adopt the Western method of pictorial realism.

In countering the cultural dominance of the West, certain Japanese intellectuals figured that a reinvention of the Oriental civilization should be the most legitimate solution. Okakura Tenshin (1862-1913), an influential Japanese scholar in the arts, reasserts the significance and influences of Eastern literature, art, and culture in a world dominated by the West in multiple works written in English. Having received a Western education since adolescence and developed a passion for art, Okakura became one of the founders of the Tokyo School of Fine Arts (*Tokyo Bijutsu Gakko*) and the Japan Art Institute. In 1904 he became a curator to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Okakura was thorough in his understanding of Western traditions as well as its perception of the East, as he had travelled to Europe, the U.S., China, and India. Most of his career was occupied by the endeavour to elevate the international status of Eastern values and arts, in order to elevate Japan's status as an Oriental country. In his book *The Ideals of the East*, Okakura appraises the spiritual nature of Asian cultures and religions as opposed to materialism of the West:

ASIA is one. The Himalayas divide, only to accentuate, two mighty civilisations, the Chinese with its communism of Confucius, and the Indian with its individualism of the Vedas. But not even the snowy barriers can interrupt for one moment that broad expanse of love for the Ultimate and Universal, which is the common thought-inheritance of every Asiatic race, enabling them to produce all the great religions of the world, and distinguishing them from those maritime peoples of the Mediterranean and the Baltic, who love to dwell on the Particular, and to search out the means, not the end, of life.

This book was published in the context of the Russo-Japanese war, by means of which Japan rose to become a major power. In merely 20 years, the Japanese intellectual had changed its perception of Asia from criticizing back to a praising attitude. Having fought and won two nations far greater than itself, Japan's anxiety for survival in the late 19th century was replaced by a sense of national pride in the early 20th century. Through combat had Japan proved its might as a military power capable of safeguarding itself and potentially the rest of Asia:

Thus, Japan is a museum of Asiatic civilisation; and yet more than a museum, because the singular genius of the race leads it to dwell on all phases of the ideals of the past, in that spirit of living Advaitism which welcomes the new without losing the old. The Shinto still adheres to his pre-Buddhistic rites of ancestor-worship; and the Buddhists themselves cling to each various school of religious development which has come in its natural order to enrich the soil.

Albeit Okakura and Fukuzawa differ dramatically in respect to their attitudes towards Eastern civilizations, Asia remained a central topic in both discourses. Rather

than focusing only on Japan itself, when inspecting the circumstances of the country or defining a Japanese national identity it seems that the involvement of Asia is inevitable. To Japanese intellectuals, Japan would always be the “Orient” in the eyes of the West regardless of how well it imitates Western institutions and technology... Therefore Asia, whether it was departure or reunion, was always incorporated into the Japanese ideology. During the mid-18th century when Japan’s sole purpose was to ensure its survival, it was helpful to develop a sentiment of contempt towards the outmoded ways of the East as opposed to the West. When Japan had proven itself to be a global power, however, Asiatic traditions became a convenient tool to re-establish a national identity and to justify for its future ambitions. Furthermore, in a world dominated by Western powers, the rise of the Oriental civilizations as an equal opposition would further elevate Japan’s status as a “protector” of the Eastern culture and thus is more justified than Europe and America to colonize other parts of Asia...

Culture and art thus would continue to play a major role in Japan’s attempt to establish new order in a world dominated by the Western society. Beginning with the annexation of Taiwan in 1895, Japan asserted its dominion over East and later Southeast Asia by establishing spheres of influence as well as puppet regimes. During this process, the discourse of Pan-Asianism and cultural assimilation—the core ideals of Okakura Tenshin—materialized into actual structures and procedures. The aesthetic approach also proved to be an efficient tool for the Meiji government to rule—both domestically and abroad. In addition to military suppression, a series of cultural propaganda advocating for unity and mutual understanding before and during World War II demonstrated the Japanese effort to maintain its new empire. In addition, the implementation of such ideologies was essential to the perpetual existence and glory of the Japanese empire, for its inherent disadvantage in population and resources meant that Japan ought not to merely secure over its colonial populations, but also mold them into willing subjects of the empire...

5. KOREA

In 1910 Japan formally annexed Korea, which since the conclusion of the first Sino-Japanese war had been under Japan’s sphere of influence. While the early years of the Korean empire witnessed blatant atrocities committed by the Japanese authority against the revolting Koreans, beginning in the 1920s Japanese officials began taking a seemingly more lenient approach—cultural assimilation. A similar attempt was made by the West in the 19th century in order to establish peaceful relations with the East, but Japan secured an advantage in this

approach as a country of similar traditions and of the same ethnicity.

In the 1920s a cultural movement known as Mingei (folk art) was founded by an artist and philosopher, Yanagi Muneyoshi. Similar to Okakura Tenshin, Yanagi too received a Western style education and utilized the Western perception of the East to rediscover Eastern values and aesthetics. In 1914 Yanagi was first introduced to Korean ceramics of the Choson period and Yi dynasty by Asakawa Noritaka, a Japanese schoolteacher in the Korean empire, and was fascinated by the purity and simplicity of Korean ceramics. Between 1916 and 1940, Yanagi made as many as 21 travels to Korea, and obtained collections of Korean craftworks. He was convinced that such form of art was deserving of honour and appreciation from not only aesthetes but also the general public as well as the authority; such thoughts he frequently published in newspaper articles, books, and lectures given in both Korea and Japan. As a result, Yanagi’s movement gained considerable exposure and support from the Japanese during an era when Western culture was still dominant in the country and the world. Appreciation for the spirituality brought about by the plain and utilitarian features of Korean crafts, the direct opposite of the sophistication and complexity represented by works of industrialized countries including Japan and the West, was therefore a suitable way to launch a trend of cultural revival in the East.

Yanagi’s ideologies extended beyond the aesthetic boundary, as he continued to advocate for the preservation of Korean identity, as well as a more lenient approach in governing the Korean empire... Uprisings were regular since the annexation of Korea in 1910. Resistance efforts peaked by March 1st, 1919, during when hundreds of demonstrations occurred over the country, all of which were suppressed by the Japanese military. Following the conclusion of the March 1st Movement with thousands of casualties, Yanagi further criticized the colonial government under General Hasegawa Yoshimichi and expressed sympathy for the Korean civilians. The restless violence in Korea also brought the potential problems with colonial policies into public discussion in the Japanese press. Eventually Tokyo was pressured to review the policies of General Hasegawa, (24) and replaced him with Admiral Saito Makoto in 1919, who adopted Yanagi’s ideal of “cultural” rule (1919-1931) in Korea. In post-colonial Japan, Yanagi Muneyoshi was often celebrated as a heroic figure who stood firm against the tyranny of the Meiji government, for he was among the minority who restlessly criticized Japanese brutality in colonial Korea in news articles and essays. His arguments however were not at all anti-imperialist. The emphasis on love and sympathy rather than “sword” and “abuse”, as well as union through art rather than science as a way to resolve the “Korean problem” presented a Romantic and humanitarian narrative. In reality, the period of “cultural

rule” under Admiral Saito in the 1920s further legitimized the Japanese authority in Korea to both the world and Japan itself. Meanwhile Yanagi continued to publish articles consisting of similar themes of cultural unity, and indeed managed to convince some Korean nationalists to temporarily cast away political independence.

Similar to Okakura Tenshin, Yanagi was one of the few who developed a passionate appreciation for the Oriental civilization in the 1910s and 1920s when Western culture was still a major influence in the Japanese society. This was in many ways a direct response to Japan’s rapid modernization and westernization during the Meiji era. By reevaluating the very much generalized image of the East, Japan sought a ground for the rise of a Japanese hegemony in a world dominated by doctrines of Western superiority. Thus, the development of a fervent passion for the ancient Oriental civilization in early 20th century Japan shall be understood as a confrontation of the status quo, while asserting its own dominance over the territories of East Asia as a “guardian” of traditional Asiatic cultures and aesthetics. Yanagi’s narrative of mutual understanding between Japan and Korea too, served the ultimate goal of cultural assimilation and stability in the Korean empire.

Likewise, the puppet state of Manchukuo—established in northeast China in 1932—was saturated with vigorous cultural propagandas emphasizing such ideals as cultural and racial union. Yet the major difference between Manchukuo and Japan’s previous colonial gains were that Manchukuo from the very beginning was created as a nation state instead of a colony. The former Chinese emperor Puyi, who was exiled from Beijing in 1924 and lived under Japanese custody in Tianjin since then, was first declared the President of Manchukuo in 1932 and later enthroned as the official emperor of the state in 1934. This happened in the context of a post-World War I world, where imperialism was generally weakened and became increasingly illegitimate. Manchukuo thus represented the Japanese endeavour to construct nationalist and cultural tides for remote territories it sought to control. The Manchurian flag itself—the Five Races Under One Union flag—was a clear embodiment of this ideology.

The five colours of the flag each represent one race: yellow represents Manchurians, red represents the Yamato (Japanese) race, blue represents the Han people, White represents the Mongolians, and black represents the Koreans. While on the surface it was a symbol of unity, the ranking of colours suggests an implied hierarchy. This again, is an embodiment of the imperialistic ambitions masked by cultural ideologies promoted by intellectuals as Okakura and Yanagi. Propaganda campaigns permeated every aspect of the Manchurian entity, from its national flag and motto to education of the youths.

On implementing and disseminating the ideals of a Manchurian identity in replacement of the Chinese nationalist identity, Japanese officials promoted what’s now referred by the Chinese as “enslavement education” (*nuhua jiaoyu*). The primary purposes of education were to manufacture productive and obedient subjects for the greater good of the empire. To reach the goal of pacification, education in Manchukuo emphasized Confucian values of Great Unity (an idealized vision of society where individuals live in peace and harmony) as well as the concept of “Japanese-Manchurian union”. A fabricated history of Manchukuo suitable to the Japanese narrative was taught, while Chinese history was entirely erased from the curriculum. The Japanese language was also a requirement since elementary education, and from 1938 the teaching of Chinese was officially replaced by Manchurian. It was clear to the Japanese authority that language was an essential part of cultural assimilation, for it allowed shared culture, emotions, and identity between different ethnicities, thereby furthering the goal of pacification. Following the beginning of World War II, however, education in Manchukuo also progressed into a more radical phase, with ideals of a familial tide between the Japanese emperor and his subjects as well as Japanese militaristic ambitions becoming the emphasis of indoctrination. The Manchukuo officials were convinced that forcing their Chinese subjects to adopt and admire Japanese customs and traditions would lead to general support for the Japanese ambitions to create a Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. Such transition reflects the Japanese intention to train not merely obedient subjects, but entirely homogenized societies adjusted for the needs of the empire.

Besides education, the entertainment industry was another major propaganda machine utilized by the Japanese authority to establish a client Manchurian state. The Manchukuo Film Association, established in 1937, was one of the largest film corporations in Asia. The company was founded primarily for the purpose of cultural assimilation, and in 8 years it produced over hundreds of films propagating the ideology of Pan-Asianism and depicting Sino-Japanese amity. Themes of these movies and documentaries were mostly appraisals of Manchukuo, of Manchurian military and policemen, love and marriages between Chinese and Japanese, etc. Stories of Manchurian military or policemen were designed to demonstrate the heroic qualities of the Manchurian military, and the element of love was often embroiled in the plotline. Familial tide, especially mother to son relationship, was also extensively utilized to imply Sino-Manchurian tides. Others included the demonization of China and the Eight Route Army, to potentially establish an anti-Chinese sentiment.

The Japanese empire’s emphasis on cultural assimilation in Korea and Manchuria therefore demonstrates the crucial role that East Asia plays in its colonial agenda. While the reality of Japanese occupation

almost exclusively consisted of exploitation and extreme cruelty against civilians, the state attempted to fabricate a false image of an Asia unified against Western dominion. On the Korean problem Japan rather than employing pure force, exploited Korea's shared identity as a historical Confucian state to indoctrinate Korean citizens with the ideology of East Asian Co-Prosperity. Not only did this approach served the purpose of pacifying Korea, but it also made the Japanese authority seem more legitimate from an international perspective. As for Manchuria, albeit the measures taken by Japan to shape a Manchurian identity as a subservient nation state to Japan was eventually unsuccessful, through Manchukuo it could be observed the objectives of the Japanese empire. The making of a puppet nation state with a nominal ruler, an entirely new education system, and ubiquitous propaganda machine reveals the emphasis placed on cultural assimilation as an instrument to construct a supranational identity which would transcend the totality of the Eastern hemisphere...

6. CONCLUSION

From Perry's visit to Tokugawa Japan until the rise of the Japanese empire, the historical influences that East Asia—China in particular—yielded in Japan continued to shape the evolution of Japanese political ideology. As a secondary member of the Confucian world for centuries before the arrival of Western imperialism, Japan while making decisions would inevitably inspect itself relative to Asia and China. In promoting modernization and westernization, there was a need to simultaneously decry the "outmoded" way of the East from whence Japan derived its very own identity. This was however in many ways a helpless choice, for Japan witnessed the consequences of clinging to the crumbling order of Confucianism in a world dominated by Western hegemony, from China's example in the first Opium war. After Japan managed to restore its sovereignty against the West by means of westernizing, it now acquired the privilege to assert its dominance as an Oriental country, rather than a mere imitator of the supposedly superior western civilization. While Japan just like any other imperialist powers of the West sought to exploit resources of the underdeveloped, it secured the advantage of being an East Asian country capable of defending the East against Western colonizers. Thus, following the Sino-Japanese war and the Russo-Japanese war, concepts as Pan-Asianism and East Asian Co-Prosperity under Japanese hegemony served to fuel nationalistic sentiments as well as Japan's increasingly aggressive agenda as an empire. During its process of expansion in the early 20th century, the Japanese empire continued to make efficient use of such ideals of unity and "an Asia for Asians" to glorify invasion and colonization of the inferior. In each case, Asia played a central role in the formulation of Japanese.

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