

Pan-Asianism represented a movement of Asian cooperation asking for the liberation of all occupied parts of Asia. Though Japan and China represented during longer phases the main axis of Pan-Asianism, it involved also other Asian countries like Thailand, Vietnam, and India. The Bengal poet and Nobel laureate for literature in 1913, Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), played an important role during the formative phase of Pan-Asianism. The word *ajiashugi*, signifying “Asianism,” appeared as early as in February 1852 in the journal *Ajia* (edited by *Seikyōsha*) where it was written with Chinese characters.¹ There are two words in Japanese for “Pan-Asianism”: *Han Ajia Shugi* and *Dai Ajia Shugi* (Greater-Asianism). Already before 1945, *Dai Ajia Shugi* was used more frequently² and it is the term that one can find most often in journals.

The real sense contained in the word “Pan-Asianism” is dependent on the extent to which “cooperation” means partnership or leadership. It is certain that the “New World Order” or the “Greater East-Asian Co-prosperity Sphere (*dai tōa kyōei-ken*)³ propagated by the Japanese government during WWII can, because of its insistence on leadership, not be understood as Pan-Asianism, just as various Russian policies for the Balkans cannot be understood as Pan-Slavist.

Pan-Slavism attempted to reflect the philosophical tradition of Herder who insisted in his *Ideen zur Geschichte der Menschheit* that *peoples* and not political movements are central participants in the creation of world history. This attitude was important for all other Pan-movements including **Pan-Africanism**. The Romantic stance included in these projects cannot be found in the political branch of Pan-Asianism though it is certainly present in philosophical writings of *Rōman-ha* (Japanese Romantic School) and Japanese culturalists, especially in Watsuji who used Herder’s same book (though sixty years later) for his climatology.

The expression “Pan-Asianism” has most probably been coined in order to indicate parallels with **Pan-Slavism** or Pan-Germanism. However, judging merely by formal-political criteria, Pan-Asianism can, if at all, only be compared with Pan-Germanism and Pan-Europeanism.⁴ Pan-Slavism, **Pan-Turkism** and Pan-Scandinavianism reacted on other Pan-movements that threatened the existence of their culture (Pan-Slavism reacted against Pan-Germanism, Pan-Turkism against Pan-Slavism, and Pan-Scandinavianism against both Pan-Germanism and germinating Pan-Slavism). If we decide to see Pan-Germanism as an exceptional case (since a large number of German-speaking minorities were scattered over

several countries), Pan-Asianism appears to be the most ambitious Pan-movement ever. Together with Pan-Europeanism, it is the only Pan-Movement that aims at the unification of an entire continent that contains diverse languages and is linked *only* by race and a vague cultural resemblance. Leaving the ‘race’ aside, this represents a first clue that indicates that Pan-Asianism can be more accurately compared with Eurasianism than with any other supra-national ideology.

It is possible that TOYOTOMI Hideyoshi (1536-1598) was the first person in history to suggest an idea of Pan-Asia when he wrote to his wife: “All military leaders who shall render successful vanguard service in the coming campaign in China will be liberally rewarded with grants of extensive states near India, with the privilege of conquering India and extending their domains in the vast empire.”⁵ In spite of its militarist pre-history, the initial impetuous for Twentieth Century Pan-Asianism came from the Japanese art historian and specialist of Indian art, OKAKURA Kakuzō, who noted in his *Ideals of the East* that the Asiatic races should “form a single web” (*Ideals of the East*, 3). Japanese as well as all other Asians should recognize their own cultural values and “weather the storm under which so much of the Oriental world went down” (241). While Japanese particularism focusing on the emperor system began to crystallize from about 1890 (thus at the same time as the **Slavophiles** developed their theories of Russian uniqueness) an intellectual, anti-particularistic movement made considerable advances.

The idea of “Pan-Asianism” developed out of contacts between Okakura and Tagore.⁶ Another Asian thinker striving to lead the continent towards a spiritual renaissance was NOGUCHI Yonejirō who published books that display the same attitude as Okakura’s.⁷ At the same time, in India, Gandhi, Aurobindo, and Radhakrishnan attempted to revitalize Hinduism while in China, Tagore’s thoughts were studied by writers such as GUO Moruo, XU Zhimo, and XIE Binxin. TAKEUCHI Yoshimi states that “a special issue on Tagore’s work was published by China’s most influential literary journal. Suffering under the same kind of oppression, many Chinese writers identified with Tagore’s opposition of resistance from their own position as fellow colonized” (Takeuchi: 158).⁸

Okakura visited India in 1901-02 and met India’s cultural leaders.⁹ When copies of *Ideals of the East* reached India in 1903, the Pan-Asian revival they suggested met with unexpected enthusiasm among the English-speaking Indian intelligentsia.¹⁰ Tagore came to Japan in 1916 and tried to refuel the idea of a cultural unification of all Asian countries. However, in spite of

the considerable public interest in his visit, Tagore was disappointed by the emerging Japanese militarist and nationalist attitudes and left the country in anger.

The reasons for Tagore's miscarriage in Japan cannot be attributed uniquely to Japanese militarism. The equation of an India oppressed by the British, and a Japan oppressed by America could be accepted perhaps in 1901 when Okakura and Tagore met for the first time. Fifteen years later (meanwhile Okakura had died), Japan had rushed into a phase of such intense development that the achieved level of modernization had become incomparable with that of India. In this situation it was difficult to gain support in any Japanese camp whatsoever for an idealized image of Asia reunited by its own vernacular kind of spirituality. At worst, Tagore's invocation of "spiritual values" was perceived with pity as being typical for a country unable to obtain material values. Tagore's "culturalism," as it still solemnly predicted the doom of Western civilization, was incompatible with Japan's pragmatic attitude towards modernization.

On his visits to China, Tagore met with similar reactions, as Chinese leaders found that all warnings "against material civilizations" should be rejected (cf. Hay, 191). Contrary to LIANG Qichao, who had returned from a trip to Europe greatly disillusioned because he had become aware of the West's obsession with science and materialism, China's May Fourth generation was not ready to put "spirituality" on the top of its agenda. This generation took interest neither in Tagore's messages of anti-materialism nor in Gandhi's non-violence.¹¹ In 1924 Tagore was invited by Sun Yat-sen to meet in Hong Kong but declined the invitation.

In spite of the negative Japanese and Chinese receptions of Tagore's attempts to conserve Okakura's and Noguchi's spiritual values, it would certainly be wrong to say that Asians would have been generally deaf to such ideas. In 1919, a "New Asianism" (*shin-asiashugi* or *xin yaxiaya zhuyi*) was propagated by the Chinese Marxist thinker LI Dazhao (1889-1927, Ri Taishō in Japanese) who opposed to Japanese imperialist Asianism a real solidarity of Asian peoples.¹²

In Japan, revolutionaries like ŌKAWA Shūmei and KITA Ikki accepted ideas like the intuitive and introspective character of Asian culture.¹³ Ōkawa emphasized the Japanese moral tradition based on Buddhism and Confucianism, as well as the community that forms a cultural unity. Kita's Pan-Asianism, formulated in 1919 in *A Plan for the Reorganization of Japan*, is not simply an example of "expansionism" but concedes that every nation (especially

China) should develop its approaches towards modernization on the basis of its own tradition.¹⁴

While early Pan-Asianism, just like Pan-Slavism, was a vague concept inspired by Romanticism and widely settled “outside the pragmatic corridors of government,”¹⁵ the quickly developing political front adopted other tones. A sense of opposition to any form of Western intrusion soon fostered an aggressive kind of nationalism. One seemed to restage the same development that European nations had gone through in the eighteenth century. The fact that the internationalist potential would soon be transformed into what Europeans classed as right-wing nationalism was not at all predictable. In 1904, Lenin had welcomed “the awakening of Asia and the beginning of the struggle for power by the advanced proletariat of Asia” (at times he imagined a Pan-Asian movement with Russian leadership);¹⁶ and in 1913 the revolutionary leader Sun Yat-sen had been deeply impressed with the anti-colonial Pan-Asian theme expounded to him by Japanese prime minister KATSURA Tarō.¹⁷

As a matter of fact, in Japan, Pan-Asian ideas were adopted for multiple purposes. A new group identity (combined with traditional conceptions of “Japan as miniature China”¹⁸) soon got transfigured through its fusion with revolutionary nationalism. A Pan-Asian dimension was obtained by establishing links with Chinese revolutionary nationalism, thus producing a curious amalgam of revolutionary idealism and imperialist pragmatism. The Ultra-nationalist founder of the *Genyōsha* society, TŌYAMA Mitsuru (1855-1949),¹⁹ received Chinese visitors, some of whom plotted to overthrow the Manchu dynasty in Peking. While the choice between diplomatic approaches and simple annexation remained a subject of discussion, liberalism gradually gave way to ultra-nationalism in almost all spheres. Most important was economic success and recognition in the international community.

In 1916, KODERA Kenkichi (1878-1949), in his book *Dai Ajiashugi Ron* (1916), points to the danger of the White Peril that should be confronted with racial unity.²⁰ Since that date, the intellectual or pseudo-intellectual approaches justifying this enterprise do not lack in variety. SATŌ Nobuhiro and ŌKAWA Shūmei take up the ancient concept of *hakkō ichiu*²¹ (eight corners of the world under one roof) (Miwa, 134; Kennedy 1968 142) in order to design a geographical structure for a Japanese-led Pan-Asia. MATSURA Takeshiho conceives of an international order starting from the genuine love of the Ainu (Miwa, *ibid.*), while SHIMONAKA Yasaburo attempts to base the state upon the historical intellectual heritage of an indigenous village community (Miwa, 138).²²

Rightwing activists like UCHIDA Ryōhei develop a “China is not a state but a civilization” theory in order to justify Japan’s annexation, while²³ ISHIWARA Kanji (1889-1949)²⁴ suggests a system roughly comparable to that of the British monarch and a Commonwealth of Nations,²⁵ which he morally justifies through Nichiren’s view of Japan as “the Holy sea for a moral world order.”²⁶

Among these approaches only the more liberal Shōwa Research Association (to which belonged also the philosopher MIKI Kiyoshi) stands out through its more scientific and modern vision of Asia.²⁷ From 1933 onward, the policy scientist RŌYAMA Masamichi reformulates the concept of “Greater East-Asian Regionalism” with the help of German geopolitical thought, especially that of Karl Haushofer (1869-1946) (Miwa 137). Rōyama insists that the Japanese should reproduce neither Western imperialism nor Chinese nationalism (which, he believed, was supported by the West) and struggles to establish a new model for Asian regionalism that would transcend both Western and Chinese “modern” movements.²⁸ Through the Shōwa Research Association, a politico-geographical perspective becomes integrated into approaches that had so far been limited to juridical questions and treaties (Miwa 147). Behind this change is not only the worldwide popularity of Haushofer’s works, but also the appearance of regional trade “blocs” common in the West since the 1920s (Peattie 333). Correspondingly, to propagate Pan-Asianism in the 1930s means to propagate a “national policy” that is no longer culturally idealistic but inscribed in a larger international political spectrum in which a pragmatic grammar of blocs and groupings has replaced vague culturalist evocations of common roots. In 1910, Pan-Asian solidarity was still mainly based on simplistic arguments drawn from the domain of nativism. Now, Pan-Asianism has become a thoroughly materialist and economically minded form of regionalism.

Still it seems that scientific materialism has been unable to entirely prevent populist idealism from prospering. General MATSUI Iwane (1878-1948), commander in chief of the Japanese expeditional force in Shanghai from 1937 to 1939 and in charge of the troops in Nanjing, referred to the Asians as “brothers within the Asian family” even in 1937. MARUYAMA Masao comments on this event by saying that “the general really believed his talk about brotherly love.”²⁹ In 1940, Foreign Minister Matsuoka declares that the mission of Japan would be to propagate to the world the way of the Tenno. Any earlier idealist, cosmopolitan type of nationalism is definitely abandoned.³⁰

It is clear that political cynicism can be developed in the realm of materialism as much as in the realm of idealism. One of the results of the new “geopolitical” approach was that the establishment of the “independent” state of Manchukuo could now be justified in terms of a mutuality of interdependence. The existence of an “annexation” was denied (Miwa 145).

In summary one might say that the above-described “scientific attitude” has been far too shallow. Retrospectively, Japanese geopolitics of the time looks as romantic as its culturalism. Richard Storry is probably right when blaming the “political immaturity of the Japanese people” for such failures as well as the fact that “for any Japanese [it had been] difficult to think in terms beyond those of nationality or of national interest.”³¹

In any case, the attempts to create a new form of culturalism, which thinkers like Nishida and Watsuji would subsequently undertake, must be understood within this context. A really scientific theory of Japanese culture had never existed (*had* it existed, things might have developed otherwise). True, Nishida and his pupils overtook much of an organic theory of the state (that was commonplace anyway among intellectuals worldwide); but apart from that, Nishida’s idea that the spirit of culture is always something non-material—a nothingness present in a culture—must be designated as an approach distinct from both materialism and idealism.

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Notes

1. Cf. Bougon, 241.

2. Cf. W. G. Beasley, 1987. “Japan and Pan-Asianism: Problems of Definition” in Janet Hunter (ed.), *Aspects of Pan-Asianism*. London: London School of Economics, 1987.

3. Prime Minister KONOYE Fumimaro’s “New Order in East Asia” proclamation of 1938 propagated the concept of “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere” made public by Foreign Minister MATSUOKA Yosuke on 1.8.1940). It was the official name given to the Asian territories that Japan had occupied during and before the Pacific War. While the “Inner” Co-Prosperity Sphere contained only Japan, Manchuria, the Lower Yangtze Region and Maritime Russia, the “Greater” Co-Prosperity Sphere contained East Asia, Australia, India, and the Pacific Islands (cf. Bary, Theodore de, Ryusaku Tsunoda, Donald Keene (eds). 1964. *Sources of Japanese Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), 802).

4. The Pan-European movement was founded in 1923 by Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi and is considered a precursor of the European Union. Coudenhove’s writings (see bibliography) manifest amazing parallels with Trubetzkoy’s, especially with regard to a “conversionist” conception of culture. This is particularly evident in Coudenhove’s concept of “Eurafrika” that Coudenhove suggested in 1923 in his book *Panuropa* (Wien: Herold, 1966). See also *Europa Erwacht!* Wien: Pan-Europa Verlag, 1934. For Eurafrika see Liliana Elena: “Political Imagination, Sexuality and Love in the Eurafrika Debate” in *The European Revue of History* 11: 2, 2004; and Charles R. Ageron: “L’Idée d’Eurafrique” in *Revue d’Histoire moderne et contemporaine* 1975.

5. Letter from 1592. Quoted from Stephen Hay: *Asian Ideas of East and West: Tagore and his Critics in Japan, China, and India* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), 112.
6. Hay points to the fact that the initial idea of Pan-Asianism might have been developed by Western intellectuals and that the Asians picked these ideas up. Above that, Asianism is certainly also connected to a refusal of Western Yellow-Peril thinking.
7. It needs to be mentioned that Pan-Asianist ideas existed already in the 1870s and were propagated through UEKI Emori and TARUI Tōkichi (1850-1922) who wanted to unite Japan with China.
8. Simultaneously KU Hung-ming, LIANG Sou-ming, and CHANG Chun-mai attempted to strengthen Confucian traditions while TAI Xu and LIANG Qichao strengthened Buddhist traditions. He, 107.
9. The Bengali religious leaders Mozoomdar and Vivekananda had visited Japan in the 1880s and 1890s.
10. Hay, 39. Hay's book provides a very detailed account of the Tagore's activities in East Asia.
11. Cf. Mitter, 278.
12. LI Dazhao was one of the founders of the Chinese communist party and was executed in 1927. See Bougon 251.
13. Cf. Szpilman, 55ff.
14. *A Plan for the Reorganization of Japan (Nihonkaizō hōan taikō* [1919]) has usually been condemned as fascist. Kita considers Japanese social traditions and introduces neo-Confucian elements. In Kita's plan there are suggestions of de-modernization. See Wilson, 79.
15. "Introduction" to White, 6.
16. Vladimir Lenin: "The Awakening of Asia" in *Collected Writings* Vol. 19 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1963), 86. Later on, Stalin would call himself "Asian" in order to assume leadership in Asia. On the first Pan-Asian congress in Bandung, the Soviet Union appeared as the ally of all victims of colonialism and imperialism. Cf. R. Coudenhove-Kalergi: *Weltmacht Europa* (Stuttgart: Seewald, 1976), 52.
17. Altman & Schifferin, 386.
18. Kennedy, 19.
19. The *Genyōsha* 玄洋社 (Dark Ocean Society) was a nationalist society founded about 1881 with the goal to establish Japanese domination in Asia. In 1901 *genyōsha* leaders founded the "Amur Society" whose purpose was the "heightening of the wisdom and virtue of the Yamato race (1930 document of the Amur Society)." Quoted from Bary et. al., *Sources . . .*, 761. The Amur society cooperated with the nationalist Chinese revolution of Sun Yat-Sen.
20. Miwa, 140.
21. *Hakkō ichiu* 八紘一宇 (Chinese pronunciation *bahong yiyū*) signifies in Chinese that all corners of the world can be governed like one's own house. It can be found in the *Nihongi*, and according to the *Kokugo Daijiten* (Ed. Shōgakkan) Emperor Kanmu used it already in the sense of "to unify the country." ŌKAWA Shūmei presents the concept in his *History of Japan from 660 BC*. See also Kennedy 1968, 142 and Mark Peattie: "Though, under the principle of *hakkō ichiu*, the Japanese Emperor will be leader of the East Asian League and eventually the world, Japan itself will not occupy this position." *Ishiwara Kanji and the Japanese Confrontation with the West* (Princeton University Press, 1975), 321.
22. The panoramic perspective can be prolonged: NAKAYAMA Masaru explains how to bring about communitarian social change by concentrating on agrarian cultural values (140). According to Miwa, this "agrarianist response to the social problems of Japan had become the prototype of the new order to be established in East Asia" by the end of the 1930s (141).
23. Miwa, 136. NAITŌ Konan (1868-1945) explained why a modern Nation State could not be formed there because "in China there are no greater [subjectively] bodily organizations than a village community or an extended family."
24. ISHIWARA Kanji was a Japanese military officer in the Guandong Army. He and ITAGAKI Seishirō were the men behind the Mukden Incident that took place in Manchuria in 1931.
25. Cf. Peattie 333: KITA Ikki's "revolutionary empire" at the center of Asian reform was a notion not unlike Ishiwara's.

26. Japan's leading role in the Pan-Asian cooperation and especially Manchukuo is established in an idealistic way as a "racial paradise" for the various peoples of Manchuria. It is the question of creating a "third civilization," of letting China return to East Asia, and of the foundation of world peace.
27. In 1936, GOTŌ Ryūnosuke, Prince Konoe's close friend, organized the *Shōwa kenkyū-kai* (Shōwa Research Association) to advise the prince on long-range political and economic planning. He invited distinguished scholars, such as the philosopher MIKI Kiyoshi, the political scientist RŌYAMA Masamichi. Cf. Miwa 137 and Shillony, 111.
28. Cf. NOJIMA KATO Yoko: "The Attraction of Regionalism: Japanese Conceptions of Transnational Integration and Chinese Responses 1912-1945" Unpublished paper presented at the Second International Convention of Asia Scholars, Berlin 2001. <http://www4.ocn.ne.jp/~aninoji/final.comments.html>.
29. Maruyama, 95.
30. Cf. UMEGAKI Michio's Epilogue "National Identity, National Past, National Isms" in White 1990: "Little room was left for persons like KIYOSAWA Kiyoshi or the young ISHIBASHI Tanzan to assert any influence on official policy. Their idealistic nationalism—tolerant of others' nationalism and presuming a higher authority regulating the relationships among states—had little chance of survival."
31. Storry, 299.

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