1-1-1985

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Reflections on the Question of “East” and “West” from the Point of View of Japan

William E. Naff

This discussion will necessarily be concerned more with the enumeration of loose ends than with tying them up. It is possible at this scale to do something about raising new questions or suggesting more helpful approaches to old ones, but if final answers can ever be found, which is highly doubtful, they can only be developed and supported within the context of much more extensive and ambitious studies.

Japanese experience during the past two centuries will be given major emphasis but there will be frequent references to China as well. These references will be made solely because certain well-known aspects of the Chinese experience tend to illuminate what happened in Japan. The use of three points of comparison also help to temper the illusion that the pressures for change in East Asia in recent times have been the product of a simple bipolar confrontation between “East” and “West,” however one chooses to define those two amorphous and unsatisfactory terms.

The first parallels between the Chinese and Japanese experiences with European civilization are to be found in the order in which the products of that civilization attracted attention. In both China and Japan it was European science and technology that was first noted. Then European social and political institutions were studied and finally there came a full awareness of all of European civilization. For the purposes of this discussion “European” seems a more useful term than “Western.” It will be used when referring to the continent of Europe, its technology and culture and the offshoots of that culture in other parts of the world.

Where East Asia first showed interest in European science and technology, it
appears that religious and social concerns came first in early Islamic and Indian awareness of Europe. These no doubt reflect the much longer history of contacts between Europe and western Asia, a consequence of the much greater distance that separates East Asia from Europe. There were simply not enough Europeans to make much of an impression on Chinese society as a whole but this did not prevent some of the ideas and techniques that they brought with them from having considerable impact. They may also reflect different strategies or interests on the part of the first Europeans to come to each particular area. Did the Jesuits attempt to convert other Asian peoples through science and technology? Obviously the early contacts with Islam could not have used this approach because Europe lagged behind Islam in science and technology for a long time.

In the second stage, China and Japan realized that the social and political institutions of European civilization might in some way be a precondition of the military and economic power that the European powers were exercising. China then began to consider the possibility of a need for a fundamental transformation in at least some areas of Chinese practice if the challenge was to be met. Serious discussions of the need for fundamental change began in China only a little more than half a century after the Opium War made it inescapably clear that there was a problem. It is almost habitual among students of East Asia to discuss responses to Europe in terms of an often invidious comparison between Japanese quickness and Chinese sloth. Yet the discussions in this symposium remind us once again that the celerity of the Chinese and Japanese responses may be much closer to each other than to other parts of the world. It is also useful to recall that it was a second defeat, this time not by the European powers but by a modernizing and industrializing Japan, that brought China to this stage of awareness.

In 1912 the Manchu dynasty was overthrown in a move that paralleled the Japanese Meiji restoration of 1868. A few years later, in the May 4 movement of 1919, China began to undertake a series of drastic and far-reaching reforms. But where Japan had experienced a great renewal and restoration of vigor after the resignation of the shogun and the dismantling of its feudal institutions in the ensuing years, China sank into chaos after the fall of the Manchus. There was a vast range of reasons, not the least of which was massive, and all-pervasive foreign interference in Chinese internal affairs. Japan managed to escape that.

In both China and Japan the proposed reforms and re-creation of the nation went far beyond anything that seems to have been suggested in either India or the Islamic world. In both countries we begin to see implicit in the proposals for reform the extraordinary proposition that China and Japan are something more than the totality of Chinese and Japanese history and culture. Hu Shih, whose position was somewhat less extreme than that of Ch'en Tu-hsiu, was suggesting that even if the Chinese razed everything to the ground and started over again they would still be building on Chinese bedrock and Chinese identity would inevitably reassert itself. This proposition is breathtaking both in its daring and in the underlying cultural self-confidence it reveals. Hu's premise of the generic similarity of all cultures, the starting point for these proposals, reflects a universalism that had few counterparts among serious thinkers in other parts of the
world. Yet he was saying these things in the midst of a period of national humiliation less than a century after the Opium War. It seems likely that the example of Japan, where developments were being closely, if ambivalently, followed in China, formed part of the context in which these ideas were developed.

In both China and Japan, World War I led to profound changes in the perception of European civilization. In particular, those who were hostile toward Europe found their positions greatly strengthened by this nearly successful suicide attempt on the part of European civilization. It gave irrefutable proof that, for all the problems that Chinese or Japanese civilization might have, Europe itself was also hideously, perhaps fatally, diseased. There seems to be no substantial body of scholarship that systematically addresses the spiritual and intellectual impact of World War I on the non-European nations that were either marginally involved or outside the conflict altogether. This neglect of a subject that has a major role in the structure of contemporary consciousness is itself symptomatic of ongoing problems.

Whatever its other problems, the Chinese kept the job of defining themselves for themselves in even the darkest of times. European civilization could not usurp that role no matter how hard it tried. China was too immense, too far away from Europe, too intensely literate, and too deeply rooted in its own great tradition. That traditional order was still capable of producing individuals of force and vigor even as it appeared to be in the last stages of exhaustion. China was also spared the final indignity of outright colonization. Although it lost effective control of its destiny for an agonizingly long time, no other country or group of countries was ever able to take over completely. Horrible and humiliating as China's experience was during the century that ended with World War II, it appears to have been less destructive to Chinese self-perceptions than were the experiences that Islam and India underwent during the same period. If the pace and substance of Chinese responses to European civilization appear rather impressive when compared with other areas of the world, good fortune had at least something to do with this. Distance from Europe, large size, and long existence as a coherent political and cultural entity are only some of the most important elements that distinguish China but they are by themselves sufficient to account for a large amount of difference.

If Japan's response to the challenge of Europe seems up to now to be still more successful than that of China then one must also emphasize Japan's still greater remoteness from Europe, its relative poverty and almost total lack of natural resources (its greatest curse in other contexts), its relative smallness and compactness and its fierce martial traditions. These combined to make Japan a much less inviting target during the early stages of European expansion into East Asia. Good fortune alone is not enough to explain the successes of either China or Japan but any explanation which altogether neglects the fortuitous is unlikely to prove satisfactory.

Like the Chinese, the Japanese looked to European science and technology in the early stages of their modern response to Europe, but the process of borrowing from Europe that began in the eighteenth century was really the
second time around for Japan, something that was not true for China. In the
sixteenth century, Christianity, firearms, oil painting, and many other products
of European civilization were introduced into Japan and all spread very rapidly. In 1575, only about thirty years after firearms were first seen in Japan, Tokugawa Ieyasu, then a general under Oda Nobunaga, commanded an immense force of musketeers armed with weapons of Japanese design and manufacture at the battle of Nagashino. Traditional Japanese chivalry became obsolete in a single afternoon as the forces of Takeda Katsuyori were annihilated by Ieyasu's musketeers who took almost no casualties themselves.

Firearms were being introduced into many countries during the sixteenth
century but among these countries the Japanese response seems to be unique in its quickness, its scale, its effectiveness, and its complete independence. There was really little reason to be surprised some three and a quarter centuries later when, fifty-two years after the coming of Perry, the Japanese navy destroyed the Russian Baltic fleet in the battle of Tsushima Straits. This battle put Japan into the forefront in the development of modern naval warfare. It was the first real test of modern, steam-powered, iron-clad naval vessels; the last great naval engagement prior to this was Trafalgar, fought in wooden ships powered by sail. For the next half-century Admiral Togo was assiduously studied by everyone in the world interested in naval warfare. It is necessary to note parenthetically that during the preceding fifty years Japan had registered many achievements of at least equal impressiveness in non-military fields but European civilization at the beginning of the twentieth century was not prepared either spiritually or intellectually to take note of any positive developments in East Asia in fields other than the military.

In Japan the shift from technical, scientific, and military aspects of European
civilization to European social and political institutions was not smooth and linear. A neat, although arbitrary, date for the beginning of active interest in European institutions is 1868, the year of the Meiji restoration. There was interest in European institutions before this date and a preoccupation with technology and the military continued long afterward. Yet the Meiji restoration does furnish a useful and valid point of reference because it marked the beginning of focussed and coherent policy. But by the mid-1870s, Japan was making a radical attempt to assimilate all of European civilization, something that happened only with the May 4 movement in China. The difference in the time scales for arriving at this stage in China and Japan demonstrate that Japan was already beginning to acquire a considerable lead over China. This fact was not obvious to most observers at the time or even to hindsight until well into the twentieth century.

In a very short time, historically speaking, Japan had moved from a social and political order that could in some, though by no means all, ways be called medieval, to develop modern military forces that inflicted decisive defeats on both China and Russia. Soon afterward Great Britain entered into a military alliance with Japan, breaking both her longstanding policy of remaining free from alliances and an even longer tradition of treating Asian nations as matter-of-course inferiors.
Many other nations have tried to remake themselves during the past two centuries. Some of these efforts have been successful, some have been failures, but Japan stands alone in its success in coming to terms with a modern world with which it was at first badly out of tune. With the Japanese victory in the Russo-Japanese war and the ensuing Anglo-Japanese alliance the pattern of non-European responses to the European challenge had not simply been broken but shattered beyond all possibility of repair. It has unfortunately taken the representatives of European civilization nearly another three-quarters of a century and the shedding of much more blood before they have accepted this exceptionally clear-cut historical fact, if indeed it is accepted even now. This is a discouragingly slow reaction time for the culture that thinks of itself as the pacesetter for the rest of the world.

The succession from scientific, technological and military awareness of European civilization to an awareness of European civilization as a coherent whole is observable in both China and Japan. Clearly identifiable stages with clearly identifiable attributes occur in clear and unambiguous sequence. Not only are these ideas helpful in raising significant and sharply focussed questions about the nature of the Japanese response but they also draw attention to the lead that Japan was beginning to acquire over China by the 1870s and provide us with a starting point for trying to describe that lead. There seems to be enough promise in this scheme to make it worthwhile to try to tune it as a tool for the general analysis of cultural impact in all parts of the world.

Fedwa Malti-Douglas’s theme of Self and Other, which she develops in terms of the experience of the Islamic world, provides another promising point of reference against which to measure the Japanese experience. While it is true that Japan, for more than a thousand years, tended to define itself in relation to China, this was an almost completely one-sided affair. China not only did not attempt to force its standards upon Japan, but it remained profoundly indifferent throughout. Such a relationship can and did produce its own very real tensions in the Japanese national consciousness but they are of a different sort from those we are examining here. It was only in relation to Europe during the seventies and eighties of the nineteenth century and again for about a decade following the end of World War II that the impact of definition by others threatened to become overwhelming in Japan. These two interludes have left a deep mark on Japanese thinking down to the present, but in no very predictable pattern and they are greatly outweighed by the much longer stretch of recent history in which the Japanese have kept firm command of the process of self-definition, even when this self-definition contained elements introduced from outside. The current obsession in Japan with Nihonjinron or the theory of Japan and the Japanese illustrates this thinking. If anyone is going to define the Japanese it is going to be the Japanese themselves. They are currently setting out to create just such a self-definition at a juncture in which the question of national identity has acquired great immediacy. Far from being dependent upon others for self-definition, there is a strong tendency in Japan to overlook even the best non-Japanese scholarship that might have a bearing on the question. This tendency becomes particularly
conspicuous in a country that prides itself on staying up to the minute, where it
does not actually lead, in most areas of scholarship.\(^8\)

Japanese modernization was carried out under Japanese control. Europeans
when present were most likely to be acting as hired technical advisors. There was
little possibility of confusion about who was in charge and whose interests were to
be served. Westerners so employed understood from the beginning that they
would be promptly discharged and sent home as soon as local people could be
trained to take their place. This rule is still applied, often quite harshly, in many
areas of Japanese life. Westerners who have spent their entire adult lives doing
such things as language teaching, where they are irreplaceable complements to
local talent, still tend to find themselves without real job security in a society
where job security is the norm. There are, and under present operating rules
there can be, no foreigners among the tenured faculty of the great universities
that dominate higher education in Japan. Those foreigners who stay on until
retirement may find that they have no choice but to return to a "home country"
which may have grown completely alien to them, there to rely on family or state
charity, because Japanese pension and retirement plans do not usually provide
for foreign employees.

These practices, some of which may now have outlived their original ra-
tionales, grew up out of a Japanese determination to maintain Japanese control of
Japanese institutions and of Japan’s future at a time when much of the non-
European world was losing such control. This intense spiritual and intellectual
independence on the part of Japan has had much to do with creating the
widespread European ambivalence and actual hostility to Japan. Japan never
accepted the tutelage that was so gratifying to European vanity as it was imposed
on the rest of the non-European world. Even Christian mission schools quickly
came under complete and unambiguous Japanese control and at the same time
failed to acquire the prestigious status that such institutions often enjoyed
elsewhere from their associations with the dominant foreign powers.\(^9\) Although
Europeans with reasonable expectations were often very happy in Japan, those
who aspired to play one or another of the many larger-than-life roles so widely
available to their fellows in other parts of the nineteenth and early twentieth-
century world were likely to come away from Japan with little to show for their
experiences other than salutary lessons in humility. Such lessons tend to be
resented in exact proportion to the degree to which they are needed.

The closeness that Malti-Douglas describes among “Orientalists” and the
peoples of the Middle East was, although not unknown, much less striking in the
case of Japan and intercultural tensions consequently have a markedly different
flavor. The question of Self and Other is still of almost obsessive concern in Japan
but it has presented itself in terms almost exactly opposite to those that Malti-
Douglas describes for the Middle East. Where the editing of texts of Middle
Eastern origin was for a long time almost a European monopoly, leaving that area
with the sense of cultural dislocation that comes from having outsiders presenting
themselves as the major authorities on the monuments of one’s own civilization,
the editing of Chinese or Japanese texts by Europeans is almost unheard of. It is
understood that no outsider is going to be able to make contributions at this level
that are in any way commensurate with the time and effort involved. The Chinese and Japanese traditions of philology are too deeply rooted in their own cultures, too high in their standards of performance, and in recent times too completely up-to-date with world developments in these disciplines. There is no place for the outside scholar in this; outside scholars must make their contributions in other ways.

In examining the sources of difference between East Asian experiences with Europe and that of the Middle East or India, we keep being brought back to the greater physical distance that separates Europe from East Asia. A second source that is at least as important is to be found in the tensions between Islam and Christianity. The religious and social life of East Asia is the product of an entirely different line of development from that of western Eurasia and is connected with it by little more than the fact that both are the common products of the human mind. If, as Agehananda Bharati puts it so cogently in his discussion of the problem, "India has been popularly perceived as providing a clear-cut alternative life-style, unlike the Muslim countries where the dogmatic differences are not really different enough, and unlike China and Japan where the differences are too subtle and too secular to be seen as constituting an ostensibly different life-style," it has been precisely those differences that are not really different enough that create the context in which, in Charles Issawi's powerful image, "each looked at the other, thought he saw his own face in a distorting mirror, and recoiled in horror."

Issawi is in fact reminding us that critiques of "Orientalism" that do not deal equally with the distortions and misunderstandings present on both sides and the way in which these mutual misapprehensions feed on each other are themselves in deep trouble from the outset. Such an approach is almost certain to lead to some version of the stereotyped confrontation between an overwhelmingly virile and wholly evil "West" and an utterly passive and always virtuous "Orient." Arguments built on such inherently dishonest premises are in turn all too likely to end up as examples of the worst of the evils that their practitioners impute, often quite correctly, to others.

Of the many contrasts between Japan and most of the other non-European areas being discussed here, some of the most provocative ones have to do with the areas of experience that Japan already shared with Europe at the time of their first meeting. Bernard Lewis (page 14 of this volume) notes that "Europeans were . . . accustomed from an early stage to the necessity to study and master difficult languages other than their own vernaculars and, more than that, to recognize that there were external sources of wisdom written in foreign languages, access to which involved learning those languages." This is a consequence of the movement of high civilization from the core of the Eurasian landmass to the peripheries, a commonplace observation in Japanese historiography that is seldom made in the historiography of Europe, a culture of the opposite periphery. In East Asia China is the primary core area as India and the Middle East are for Europe. Thus China has traditionally viewed scholarship as being by definition a phenomenon that takes place through the medium of the Chinese language. The great exception was the importation of Buddhism but even then the main reason
for learning Indian languages was to translate the Buddhist scriptures and once this had been accomplished Indian language studies languished. But for Japan, a culture of the periphery, what Bernard Lewis has to say about Europe in this respect would require only slight modification to make it applicable to Japan. The most important difference is that there was for all practical purposes only one foreign language that Japan had to deal with. That was Chinese, a language completely unrelated to Japanese and contrasting strongly with it in almost every aspect of morphology and syntax. It was Chinese that was the primary language for the transmission of Buddhism and of East Asian high civilization into Japan. There was some Buddhist scholarship based directly on Indian sources but with one important exception it had little impact on Japanese intellectual life.

The primary channel through which continental civilization first flowed into Japan was the Korean kingdom of Paekche. The language of written transmission was classical Chinese. The vernacular of Paekche probably played a role for some time but the culture of that kingdom has been so completely obliterated that nothing is now known about that vernacular. During the sixth century Paekche sent Buddhist scriptures, priests, and images to Japan. When Buddhism took hold the Japanese aristocracy became literate with the almost obsessive intensity that has characterized China and the countries that assimilated Chinese learning. In 589 A.D. China was recovering from the troubles that began with the fall of the Han dynasty in the third century. The Sui dynasty was founded and within less than twenty years the first formally organized embassy to China from the Japanese central government is recorded in the Japanese chronicles. This embassy, like its successors, was accompanied by monks and scholars. They were primarily interested in learning more about Buddhism but in seventh century China as in twentieth century China the acquisition of knowledge necessarily involved an introduction to political theory. During the next half-century the Japanese, impressed with the effectiveness of Chinese institutions, adapted the profoundly alien Sui-T'ang administrative system to their own needs. The adaptation did not completely take but it did result in a complete change of direction in the development of Japanese institutions, establishing the course that continued down to the Meiji restoration and beyond. It was in the seventh century, not the nineteenth, that Japan made its great leap into high civilization. Its model was China, not Europe, which would in any case have had rather little to offer along those lines at that time. Japan made this transformation on its own initiative, free from economic and military pressures. During the centuries that followed, periods of relative isolation from continental influences during which previous borrowings were sorted out and the useful ones assimilated would alternate with periods of renewed contact and cultural borrowing. Japan, like Europe a culture of the periphery, shares with Europe a long history of learning from outsiders.

Japanese interest in European learning never completely disappeared after its introduction in the sixteenth century but it was frustrated for a while by the general proscription of foreign books that was part of the attempt to eradicate Christianity. The proscription extended to most Chinese books on European science and mathematics, since these books, some of which were actually written
by Europeans, often contained references to Christianity, if only in citing the
Christian calendar. The style of the campaign and the intensity with which it was
carried out was highly reminiscent of the inquisition in Europe, where such
efforts to eradicate heterodoxies, new in this form to Japan, had a long history.
The restrictions were relaxed in the second quarter of the eighteenth century to
admit Chinese books that dealt with European astronomy, which had made great
advances during the preceding two centuries, and which could be of use in
improving the Japanese calendar. For nearly two centuries Japanese scholarship
on Europe was carried on through the medium of the Dutch language. The pace
in Dutch studies accelerated almost decade by decade throughout this period
until the end of the 1850s when Dutch was replaced by the newly accessible
languages of France, Germany, and England.\textsuperscript{12}

The emphasis in Dutch studies in the eighteenth century soon shifted from
astronomy to medicine. At the end of the century Sugita Gempaku and his
colleagues broke the official monopoly on knowledge of the Dutch language by
working through the anatomical charts in a Dutch book and then verifying their
findings in a dissection of the bodies of two executed criminals.\textsuperscript{13} The high
intellectual adventure that marked the following century was already beginning
and it was clear that the Japanese hunger for knowledge that was so often noted by
sixteenth century European visitors had only been made more ravenous by
Tokugawa restrictions.

The Japanese were not, of course, ever completely isolated from the intellec-
tual currents of the scientific and industrial revolutions in Europe even at the
height of seclusion. Techniques in painting, prints, and engraving were not
effectively banned at any time. Although the trickle of information from the
outside remained small and was accessible only to the handful of officially
designated Dutch interpreters and those to whom they reported, but at the worst
periods of isolation Japan knew a great deal more about the outside world than the
outside world would know about Japan for a long time to come.

By the end of the eighteenth century the barriers to knowledge of the outside
world were being rapidly eroded. Dutch studies were thriving in several of the
great feudal domains, notably in those of Shimazu Shigehide (1745-1833), who
sponsored many scientific and scholarly activities as he strove to make his remote
province into a center of learning.\textsuperscript{14} Similar projects were being carried on
elsewhere, particularly in the Kyushu domains adjacent to the foreign colony in
Nagasaki.

In 1789, Otsuki Gentaku, an associate of Sugita Gempaku, opened the first
public Dutch language school, the Shirando, in Edo. This was soon followed by
others ostensibly established to facilitate the study of European medicine, the
sole discipline of European studies whose dissemination was then encouraged by
the authorities. In fact these schools were making available to a rapidly expanding
and increasingly influential body of scholars the full range of Dutch scholarly and
popularizing works that had been imported to Japan.\textsuperscript{15} In 1855 the systematic
and large-scale acquisition of European knowledge received important official
support when the shogunate opened the Institute for the Investigation of Barbar-
ian (i.e. European, i.e. Dutch) Texts. Several feudal domains added their own
As Others See

institutions of foreign learning to those already in existence and private academ-
ies and independent scholars increased rapidly in number. The traditional
Japanese habit of looking to the outside for answers to national questions had
asserted itself once more, but not without opposition. Dutch studies and the
scholars associated with them were the targets of both verbal and physical attacks
from supporters of the ideal of the purity of Japanese culture. Several important
scholars were among the victims of such attacks.

In his great novel, Before the Dawn, Shimazaki Töson crystallizes the
national memory of the years between 1850 and 1886 in much the same way that
Tolstoy's War and Peace crystallizes the Russian memory of the Napoleonic wars.
In the chapter dealing with the coming of Perry, Töson quotes at length from
Engelbert Kaempfer's seventeenth century History of Japan, which he had read
in English translation, focussing primarily on the preposterous and demeaning
performances that the Dutch members of the factory at Nagasaki were required
to put on after their periodic audiences with the shogun. They were required to
stand up, sit down, posture, dance, act drunk, sing a song, demonstrate how their
clothing was fastened, how they greeted friends, relatives or casual acquaint-
ances. It was as though they were representatives of some species of clever and
amusing but not quite human creature. 16

Töson observes that for two hundred years the Dutch had been willing to
tolerate almost any kind of humiliation so long as they were permitted to retain
their foothold at Nagasaki. He then asks, as others in Japan before and after him
have asked, how the Japanese officials at Uraga in 1853 could have been expected
to know that other Europeans could not be counted upon to accept the same kind
of treatment. He suggests that a somewhat more tactful approach by Perry might
have been at least equally successful and that it would have greatly simplified
some of the ensuing negotiations. What the diaries of Townsend Harris have to
tell us about these negotiations may leave room for doubts on this score but the
fact remains that a more gentle approach was not tried and that it would have
been completely out of character for a major nineteenth century European
nation to have done so. 17

The interest in European thought and technology that had begun with
painting and astronomy and progressed to medicine was by the end of the
eighteenth century beginning to focus on military science. The threat from
Europe grew almost exponentially under the impetus of the continuous tech-
nological innovation that was a near-monopoly of Europe and its offshoots during
this one brief period of world history. As the balance of world power grew more
and more one-sided the quest for knowledge from Europe was carried out under
the shadow of the sword wielded by the European powers. Although the adapta-
tion of at least some of the techniques that had originated in Europe seemed
absolutely inescapable to many, it was never a foregone conclusion. An often
fierce nativist sentiment of one kind or another inspired all of those who worked
successfully for the overthrow of the shogunate. The new government that was
established with the Meiji restoration came into power on a platform of only
slightly modified xenophobia. 18

Like most political platforms, this one was already a dead letter by the time
its advocates were in a position to act on it. They instead initiated a program of "enriching the nation and strengthening the military" (fukoku kyōhei) that involved among other things the modernization and centralization of the impressive educational facilities that had been inherited from the old order. Many students were sent abroad. Under the new government Japan undertook a massive introduction not only of European science and technology but also of European social and political thought, literature, art, music, and dress in a desperate effort to preserve itself, obtain revision of the crippling and humiliating unequal treaties that had been forced upon it and to establish itself as a world power. The only way that a country in the nineteenth century could gain recognition in the world community was to try to become a European country, at least in outward appearance. This is what Japan did during the half century following the Meiji restoration, bringing about the brilliant and highly creative synthesis of European and East Asian civilizations that lies behind Japan's preeminence in many aspects of today's world. In the process Japan has undergone immense changes, but all cultures undergo changes over time. It would be difficult to argue that Japan has sacrificed more of its essential character, whatever that may mean, than did other countries that were less open to outside ideas and techniques. Much of the confidence with which men like Hu Shih faced the question of cultural borrowing for China may have come out of the keen interest with which they were following Japanese developments, however unhappy the implications of some of those developments were for China.

The military side of Japan's "catching up process" was, as already noted, essentially complete by the time of the Russo-Japanese War. By the 1920s Japan was coming abreast of world trends in everything from scientific research to the proletarian and surrealistic movements in the arts. In 1922 and 1923, Inagaki Tsuruho began publishing surrealistic pieces that were startlingly similar in content to what such people as Paul Éluard were doing in France at the same time. There is almost no possibility that Inagaki and Éluard were aware of each other as they wrote; they were simply working within the shared context of world culture. Japan has since remained in some ways more current with new literary and intellectual movements than has the English-speaking world which sometimes tends to become isolated in the midst of its own vastness.

Japan displayed on the whole the kind of deep-rooted national self-confidence that did not see national identity as being necessarily endangered by heavy borrowing from other cultures. Such attitudes were always somewhat controversial in Japan and they underwent a temporary eclipse during the period of military dominance in the 1930s and 1940s. They were never so clearly articulated for Japan as Hu Shih had done for China, although such things as Mori Arinori's proposal in the 1870s that the Japanese language be abandoned in favor of English were at least as daring in their implications. Yet in its modernization Japan did in fact anticipate China by half a century or more. It achieved a renewal of effectiveness, creative vigor, and social progress that far surpasses that achieved by the Soviet Union, which had lagged behind by fifty years throughout, in virtually every field except the number of human sacrifices directly demanded by the modernizing process. The ground lost during the slide into militarism and
World War II was quickly regained in a process that was probably hindered as much as it was helped by the Allied occupation authorities.

Even now in the 1980s, when the other advanced nations find themselves unable or, more accurately, unwilling, to compete effectively with Japan in ever-growing areas of technological innovation and commercial enterprise, large numbers of the brightest and most active people in Japan remain fully involved in combing the planet to search out anything and everything, regardless of source, that might make Japan's uniquely vigorous but uniquely vulnerable economy still more competitive. There is no effort remotely like this anywhere else in the world. European studies of “the Orient” do not begin to approach the same order of magnitude or degree of urgency. For better or worse there is a somewhat lesser sense of purely pragmatic significance about most European studies of “the Orient” than there is in Japanese studies of the rest of the world. There have, of course, been many European scholars whose careers were founded on a deep love and respect for the part of the non-European world in which they carried out their life's work, but it is inescapable that studies of “the Orient” were initiated out of a comfortable sense of cultural superiority arising out of a combination of ignorance, temporary technological advantage, and religious conviction. This scholarship has often tended to idealize and at the same time to patronize those aspects of “Oriental” cultures which seemed to make them less able to withstand European encroachment when they were not using those very same aspects to rationalize ideas of innate and eternal European superiority. Japan perforce approaches the problem from a very different direction. Its concerns are first of all practical even though they embrace the full range of world culture. Unlike the other advanced nations of the world, Japan is driven by a daily sense that economic survival is at issue. It is heavily overpopulated and lacking in natural resources. The sense of ever-impending disaster that this condition engenders has served to arouse the national energies, concentrate the national attention, and create a powerful national consensus on national goals and priorities. The end result is that Japan is now able to turn back to the question of national identity from a position of relative strength and security and to think about it in greater leisure and with even a certain touch of complacency.

Insofar as the relationship between Japan on the one hand and Europe and its offshoots on the other is concerned, the modernization shoe is now very much on the other foot. It is tempting at this point to make moralistic statements about how the increasing Japanese lead in field after field is due not only to an unarguably high level of performance on the part of the Japanese but also to often dismally low and still declining levels of performance in the European world. But for all the regularity with which they are overlooked, the facts supporting this thesis are too well-known and too overwhelming to justify their being rehearsed here. It is more useful to remember that Japan in the present world demonstrates that cultural interactions are never really centered around questions of “East” and “West.” There is, of course, nothing inherently “Western” about such things as the laws of physics or the principles of genetics. The pattern of awards of doctorates in the natural sciences in the United States is only one of many sources that hints that, whatever the reasons for which modern science first arose in
Europe, its application may in fact be less in conflict with the values of some of the other parts of the world. 22 “East” and “West” are compass-bound abstractions that are decipherable only from one relatively tiny area of the planet. In the real world the questions are those focused on actual performance in reaching goals, avoiding dangers, and expanding knowledge. “Orientalism” that does not focus on such questions is unacceptable, not because it is “Orientalism” but because it is irrelevant and meretricious scholarship. 23

In the course of these discussions scholars from various disciplines that are usually out of touch with each other have been brought together to create the beginning of a dialogue. There has been a repeated catching of resonances from totally unexpected quarters that awaken hitherto unsuspected notes in each of our own areas of interest. In often intense discussions which did not always at that time seem to be directed toward that end we seem to have gradually uncovered certain themes that repeat themselves over and over as we move from region to region. What are the stages of awareness and response to pressures from alien cultural areas? What determines whose sense of self is to prevail? How much cultural borrowing can be carried out without threatening the identity of the recipient culture? For this last question answers ranging from near zero to near infinity have been suggested. There are strong indications that at this particular juncture of history the intensity of the perceived threat to cultural identity is directly proportional to the proximity to Europe although it seems clear that physical distance is not the only consideration.

Many of these recurring themes could have been predicted; many of them have already been explored elsewhere, but the main task of scholarship is scarcely begun on these topics. This dialogue has been exciting, profitable, and promising for the future. It reminds us once again of the need for an increased commitment to comparisons of experience not only between Europe and “the Orient” but between and among all the cultures of the world. Europe and its offshoots are but one of these and “the Orient” comprises a number of areas that are as distinct from each other as each is from Europe.
Notes

1. For most of Chinese history, "the West" meant India and Western Asia. The Hsi Yu Chi, one of the great masterpieces of Chinese popular literature, is a fictionalized account of the eighth century journey of the monk Hsiao Tsang to India. In Japan "the West" usually meant China. Thus, the Seiseki Gairon (A Survey of Western Writings) by Hirata Atsutane, completed in 1809, bears the alternate title of Judo Daii (The Gist of Confucianism). The school of Hirata Atsutane was a major source of leadership for the overthrow of the shogunate and the establishment of the Meiji government although its influence waned soon afterward.


3. For Japanese perceptions of Europe during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, see Donald Keene, The Japanese Discovery of Europe (Stanford, 1969). For Japanese-European interaction see C. R. Boxer, Christian Century in Japan 1549-1650 (Berkeley, 1967). George Elison, Deus Destroyed, The Image of Christianity in Early Modern Japan (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1973) gives the deepest and most penetrating exploration in English of the entire history of the Christian episode in Japanese history together with translations of four of the most influential anti-Christian polemics of the period. A translation and editing of the surviving portions of Joao Rogrigues, Historia de Igreja do Japao by Michael Cooper, S. J. is This Island of Japan (Tokyo and New York, 1973), which provides a fascinating first-hand account of Japan in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century. Michael Cooper, S. J., compiler and annotator, They Came to Japan (Berkeley, 1975), a collection of letters home from early European residents in Japan and the same author's Rogrigues The Interpreter (Tokyo and New York, 1974), help to cast further light on the quality of early European experience in Japan. This Island of Japan carries as an epigraph the famous quotation from his letter of 22 October, 1611: "The people of this Island of Japan are good of nature, courteous above measure, and valiant in Warre: their Justice is severely executed without any particularity upon transgressors of the Law. They are governed in great civilitie. I mean, not a land better governed in the world by Civil Policie." John Whitney Hall and Toyoda Takeshi, editors, Japan in the Muromachi Age (Berkeley, 1977), was the first major reflection in English of an ongoing reevaluation of the Muromachi age (late fourteenth-mid-sixteenth centuries). The article by Tanaka Takeshi with Robert Sakai, "Japanese Relations with Overseas Countries," pages 158-179, is particularly relevant to the present discussion. See also John Whitney Hall and Marius Jansen, Studies in the Institutional Life of early Modern Japan (Princeton, 1968), one of the volumes in the series cited above, note 2. Hosono Masanobu, Lloyd Craighill, translator and adaptor, Nagasaki Prints and Early Copperplates (Tokyo, New York, and San Francisco, 1978), provides valuable insights into the Japanese style of cultural interaction as it follows the course of the introduction of the techniques of perspective drawing and the making of copperplates. An opulent and exciting survey of the tide of influence running in the opposite direction is Siegfried Wichmann, Japonisme, The Japanese Influence on Western Art in the 19th and 20th Centuries, English-language edition (New York, 1981), which documents the profound revolution in European ways of seeing that was set off by the discovery of Japanese art.

https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ccr/vol13/iss13/16
4. *Kagemusha*, a recent film by the great Japanese director Akira Kurosawa has as its climactic scene a restaging of the battle of Nagashino. Although this film takes many liberties with historical fact the battle scene itself is rather convincing. Kurosawa’s script was based not on the actual historical records but on an extravaganza for the Bunraku puppet theatre, *Honchō Nijū-shikō* (Twenty-four Exemplars of Filial Conduct in Our Land) which was written by a consortium of six authors headed by Chikamatsu Hanji and first performed in 1766. Needless to say, Kurosawa takes liberties with this version as well.


6. Beasley (1972), Sansom (1949), and Ike (1950), all discuss this process.


8. For a rather acerbic discussion of this tendency in one field of study, see Roy Andrew Miller, *Origins of the Japanese Language* (Seattle, 1980), pages 3-32. The question of the Japanese view of the Japanese is exhaustively pursued in both the popular and the scholarly presses. A striking example which reflects not only the Japanese concern with national identity but also with being understood by the rest of the world is to be found on pages 366-401 of the June, 1980 issue of *Bungei Shunju*, one of the largest and most influential of the general interest monthlies. Entitled “Does Japanese Culture Have a Future?” it is a mixture of transcript and summary from a series of meetings held in Osaka in March, 1980 under the title “Japan Speaks.” The problem was addressed by a distinguished panel of twelve scholars and public figures including three foreigners: Robert Jay Lifton, Claude Levi-Strauss, and Daniel Bell. As with most such exercises it seems largely inconclusive but it served the useful purpose of scratching a very intense Japanese itch.

On pages 176-183 of the January 1-8, 1982 combined issue of the weekly magazine *Shukan Asahi* there is a discussion between the brilliant writer of historical fiction and historical popularization, Shiba Ryōtarō and Professor Haga Toru of Tokyo University, a specialist in comparative literature and comparative culture in which they take up some revisionist approaches toward the history of the Edo period (1600-1868). Some of the ideas are remarkably rich and exciting for a light article in a popular magazine although one suspects that neither of the gentlemen would have said quite what they said in the concluding exchanges had they been writing for posterity. In the body of the article the two take up the extraordinary hunger for knowledge that was to be found not only in the great cities of the Edo period but also among intellectuals in the most remote hinterlands.

9. For a discussion of the atmosphere of one of the most influential of these schools, the Meiji Gakuin in Tokyo, see Iwabuchi Tomoichi, *Bungakkai to Sono Jidai* (Tokyo, 1959-1969), pp. 815-860.


12. The definitive study of the subject is Itazawa Takeo, *Nichiran Kōshōshi no Kenkyū* (A Study of the History of the Interactions between Japan and the Netherlands), (Tokyo: Yoshikawakobunkan, 1959). The standard European-language study is G. T. Goodman, *The Dutch Impact on Japan* (1640-1853), (Leiden, 1967). Keene, 1969 offers a convenient survey of the subject, while Fukuwazu Yukichi, *The Autobiography of Fukuwazu Yukichi*, trans. Eiichi Kiyooka (Tokyo, 1934), provides in its early portions a first-hand account of life in one of the Dutch language schools. Richard T. Chang, *From Prejudice to Tolerance: A Study of the Japanese Image of the West* (Tokyo, 1970), focuses on two important late Tokugawa figures, Fujita Toku (1806-1855) and Sakuma Shōzan (1811-1864), providing a look at two representative views of the European threat at a time when the subject was extremely controversial. On pp. ix-x of his introduction, Chang makes the important observation that “Had the Japanese not viewed the West as a threat—as most of their Chinese contemporaries did not—they might not have been motivated to learn from the West and, with that, the Japanese quest for equality might never have gotten off the ground when it did. . .” Mary Wright (1957) states this in even stronger terms: “Until well into the twentieth century, no Chinese conservative, however xenophobic, attempted to lay the responsibility for China’s domestic disasters at the door of foreigners” (p. 44, note b). See also Carmen Blacker, *The Japanese Enlightenment: A Study of the Writings of Fukuwazu Yukichi* (Cambridge, 1964). Earl H. Kinmonth, *The Self-Made Man in Meiji Japanese Thought* (Berkeley, 1981), provides a fascinating and valuable account of the way in which the ideal of the self-made man, particularly as represented in the writings of Samuel Smiles, operated among the upwardly-mobile segments of the Japanese population during the past century.

13. Sugita Gempaku was the culminating figure in a process that had already been going on for some time. The surgeon Yamawaki Tōyō (1705-1762) had already carried out dissections in 1754, twenty years before the appearance of Sugita’s translation, the *Kaitaishinsho* (New Book of Dissection). The physician Hanaoka Seishū performed the first successful operation for breast cancer carried out under general anesthetic on October 13, 1805, thirty-seven years before the first use of ether by Crawford W. Long.


16. Shimazaki Tōson, *Yo-Ake Mae*, *Tōson Zenshū* XII, pp. 5-14. The passages excerpted correspond to p. 171-174 of volume three of Engelbert Kaemper, *The History of Japan Together with a Description of the Kingdom of Siam*, (Glasgow, 1906). This is a modern reprinting of the first English translation of 1727, a major source of inspiration for Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*.


19. See Ronald Dore, *Education in Tokugawa Japan* (Berkeley, 1965). Under the Tokugawa, education was both moral and social instruction as well as a means of enabling individuals to achieve their highest potential. Both were believed to serve the interests of society as a whole.
20. Inagaki Taruho, Inagaki Taruho Taizen, subtitled Summa Taruhologia, six volumes (Tokyo 1969-1970). Almost any of Taruho's earlier works would serve to illustrate the point but see especially his first published work, Issen-ichi-byö Monogatari (Tales of a Thousand Seconds and a Second), Volume I, pages 2-41, or Robachiefski Kukan o Megurite (Whirling around Lobachevskian Space), Volume I, pages 365-389. In 1924, the Magazine Bungei Jidai (Literary Age) was founded by Yokomitsu Riiehi, Kawabata Yasunari, and others as the organ of the Shinkankaku-ha or neo-perceptionist school of writers. This was an anti-realist movement inspired in part by a rejection of the literary program of the proletarian movement which had grown strong in the years following the Russian revolution. It also owed much to the surrealists, as can readily be seen in almost any of the works of Yokomitsu or Kawabata.

21. See William R. Braisted, trans. Meroku Zasshi, Journal of the Japanese Enlightenment (Cambridge, Mass., 1976), for an introduction to the intellectual preoccupations of an important group of thinkers. All forty-three issues of the magazine, issued between March, 1874 and November, 1875, have been translated. Mori's famous proposal is alluded to on p. xxv.

22. Chronicle of Higher Education, XXXI16 (December 8, 1980), p. 4, gives students of Asian origin or background as constituting 4.9% of total graduate school population in the United States. These students received 8.9% of all doctorates issued in 1980, 20% of all those in the life sciences, 27.9% of all those in engineering, and 12.6% of those in the social sciences.

23. Edward Said, Orientalism (New York, 1978) lies behind much of the present discussion, but Said's concern is centered on the Middle East and space does not permit a full and careful exploration of the implications of his thesis for East Asia. There is, to be sure, a particular sense in which the European world sees "the Orient" as a single, undifferentiated unit that stretches from Tangier to Tokyo and in this sense something very much like Said's "Orientalist vision" does hold for the entire region. When Said speaks of how "Empirical data about the Orient or any of its parts count for very little. . ." (p. 69) he brings into sharp focus the source of the sense of despair that is so frequently felt when one speaks to many scholars of the tradition of European humanities, not a few university administrators and, alas, an appallingly conspicuous, although not large, portion of one's fellow scholars of East Asia. The assimilation of a systematic and fantastical set of preconceptions about "the Orient" is a part of the basic socialization of the traditional European humanist, leaving most members of the class predisposed to accept only the preposterous in connection with "the Orient" and to dismiss as a crank anyone who attempts to speak of the everyday human realities of this part of the world. A member of the United States intelligence community was speaking of the same phenomenon as it applies to government circles when he said in despair of his superiors during the Vietnam war that their skepticism could be awakened only by facts. At the same time it would be less than honest not to take note of the important and influential exceptions to this rule who make it possible for those interested in the non-European world to remain alive at all in a Europe-centered academic and intellectual milieu.

Richard Minear has tested some of Said's ideas in the context of Japanese studies "Orientalism and the Study of Japan," Journal of Asian Studies, 39:3 (May, 1980), pp. 507-517. Minear has also taken up the issue on a somewhat broader scale, "Cross-Cultural Perception and World War II," International Studies Quarterly, 24:4 (December, 1980), pp. 555-580. There are some important insights explored in these articles and the scholarship, within the limits set by the thesis, is impeccable. Yet the reader may be left with a feeling of uneasiness. It is not, after all, surprising that Chamberlain, Sansom, Reischauer, and Maki should prove to be products of their time and place. We are all products of our time and place and the best that we can hope is that the best work of our generation will age as gracefully as the best work of
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these four men. For all its value, this approach carries an inherent danger of becoming overly personalized and of tuning out signal in favor of noise in the works of scholars who have achieved a very favorable signal to noise ratio in the course of their careers.

There are, to be sure, some shameful corners in present-day Japanese studies in the United States and there is little room for doubting that similar embarrassments can readily be found among the other areas represented here. It is not, however, acceptable to extrapolate from the existence of these shortcomings a picture of entire careers and entire disciplines as obscene and shameful conspiracies. No scholar or scholarly discipline, however rarified or however innocuous, could stand before judgments made on such a basis. But neither does the existence of critical excesses provide us with an excuse for not trying to do better. The best of us may not always appear in our best light but the worst of us may have at least one honest insight in the course of a career.