



Leaving Asia? The Meaning of *Datsu-A* and Japan's Modern History¹ アジアを去る？ 脱亜の意味と日本の近代史

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History is a cumbersome science. Scholars work diligently in amassing data, reading original sources, and creating plausible narratives regarding the past.² That is, however, of scant use for mitigating and resolving international conflicts, such as those presently involving Japan and its neighbours. As Ernest Renan observed in his famous 1882 essay *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?*: "L'oubli, et je dirai même l'erreur historique, sont un facteur essentiel de la création d'une nation."³ The importance of forgetting the past or getting the facts wrong lies in the fact that at the bottom of political formations great injustices and even massacres can often be found, and directing public attention to them is not conducive to integrating a nation as a peaceful unity. Renan had legal precedents for his idea of forgetting as the basis of a nation. One French massacre that Renan refers to was Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre in Paris in 1572, when several thousand Huguenots were killed. The Edict of Nantes in 1598 granting amnesty for Protestants included also a decree that all parties extinguish from their minds the memory of all that had happened during the decades of religious fighting.⁴ Renan's problem was how to create stable nations, but the phenomenon can be observed also in international politics. If Renan had wished, he also could have taken up the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, which ended the 30-years War, and which contained not only a decree for all parties to place into "perpetual Oblivion, Amnesty, or Pardon" all hostile acts that had been committed during the war, but also prohibited litigation processes related to lost property and most debts, so that "perpetual Silence" would fall on public memory of the war.⁵ The emphasis was on forgetting the past and moving on towards reconstruction of a functioning regional state and trading system, rather than keeping war memories alive by trying to sort out injustices, perpetrated to some extent by all parties.

Of course the search for accurate historical facts is both a morally and academically justified endeavour. Leopold von Ranke's positivist 1824 maxim about finding out *wie es eigentlich gewesen*⁶ may be strictly taken as impossible, but as a teleological goal for historical studies it is commendable. A modern day representative of the school of historical positivism in Japanese studies is, George Akita, who advocates cleaning historical research of unnecessary theories and ideologies, and concentrating on straightforward reading of a vast array of original sources, discerning patterns from there, while striving "manfully to avoid bias".⁷ This kind of research is of course necessary. Somebody has to go through masses of handwritten texts and make their contents accessible to other researchers, who do not have the special skills needed, and it is also rather suitable for determining "who did what, where, when, and with whom." Notwithstanding, strict positivism does not communicate well with other human sciences, which need conceptual and theoretical elements to bridge the disciplinary abysses. Moreover, from a sociological point of view problems with the simple belief in objectivity in history and other human sciences have earlier been pointed out by Max Weber,⁸ as well as his more radical new interpreters.⁹ From the point of view of forgetting, the problem with diligent digging up of facts is that it may serve to awaken latent and inflame existing conflicts between nations. As E. H. Carr points out, historical research is a process of selection of relevant facts having historical significance, using criteria chosen by the historian herself.¹⁰ Whether they want to or not, historians – including here all who write about history, not only academic specialists – cannot help being political actors, who have influence on the destinies of nations by what, on which topics, and in which ways they convey the past.

Martin O. Heisler writes on the same topic, pointing out how difficult questions of history have recently become both in national and international situations. He observes that

[...] like currency, the past is often fungible; it can serve as a medium of exchange in relationships, both within and between societies. Past suffering and misfortune may be converted into moral capital in negotiations ...¹¹

The metonym of currency points to the idea that in debates historical facts play a symbolic role, just as coins, bills and credit cards do in the market place. They can be exchanged, and a new fact can always be given to counter another fact. They are necessary for interaction to take place and hopefully in due time their discussion may lead somewhere. Notwithstanding, the property of historical facts as symbols tends often to intensify rather than mitigate conflicts because in politics they are invariably linked with the morality of action, namely whether an historical actor did something good and commendable, or bad and condemnable. As more abstract symbols than money, the value of historical facts can easily change depending on the context and their reinterpretation. Quentin Skinner emphasizes this phenomenon with his concept of *paradiastolic* redescription,¹² whereby the moral character of a specific act can be seen in a number of different ways depending on the way it is described. He especially emphasizes how morally opposite extremes actually are rhetorically quite close to each other, so that good easily turns to bad and vice versa when a new interpretative perspective is added.

Daqing Yang, a Chinese-born researcher of Japanese imperial history and international reconciliation, while analyzing the arguments of various historians on the Nanjing Massacre, comments that although historians nowadays admit that the writing of history necessarily is a subjective endeavour, there still exists a general wish to establish basic intersubjective agreement on at least some common denominators. He calls these common understandings within the community of historians "stable truths"¹³, which implies that Ranke's *wie es eigentlich gewesen* would amount to a collection of discursive nuclei on which most of the community would agree, and on this basis reject too extreme arguments, such as outright denials that there ever was any kind of large scale killing in Nanjing in winter 1937-1938. Even if stable truths can be achieved, however, they are not always useful, and they tend not to remain stable. The reason of course is not only that "moral politics" – as George Lakoff calls the phenomenon of moralizing issues¹⁴ – creates strong political incentives towards evading them, but also the ethos of researchers forcefully leads them towards finding new perspectives on old truths. Intellectual curiosity, the publishing business, and even modest wishes for personal fame demand constant novelty.

Japanese Debate on the Meaning and Significance of *datsu-A*

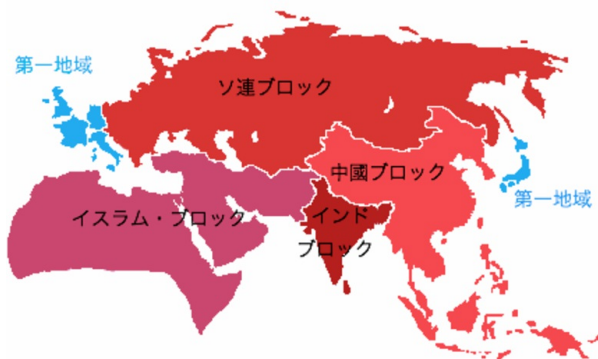
An interesting instance of challenging a stable truth is the case of Fukuzawa Yukichi's alleged programme of *datsu-A* (脱亜, "leaving Asia"), and its usual interpretation as Japan's betrayal of neighbouring Asian countries during the late nineteenth century. It is less dramatic than the Nanjing Massacre or forced prostitution cases during World War II, but nevertheless a topic of perennial discussion both in Japan and abroad. Being a textual rather than a physical deed, the discussion is mostly confined to historical scholars, rarely entering the speeches of politicians, but being also a highly symbolic act it has a rather large influence on the way Japanese national identity and its interstate relations in East Asia are perceived, especially in the sense of moral politics. The stable truth used to be, roughly from the 1950s onwards, that Fukuzawa Yukichi in 1885 had proposed that rapidly modernizing Japan should "leave Asia" and enter the group of colonial European countries by invading other Asian countries together with European colonizers. For instance Wada Haruki – a long time proponent of reconciliation among East Asian countries – in 2005 commented:

During the modernization of the 19th century, Japan constructed a national identity as "non-Asian." To this day, Japanese society retains a deep vein of anti-Asianism [...]¹⁵

Fukuzawa's name was not mentioned here; Wada's idea is that the betrayal was a collective Japanese phenomenon, and that it is still continuing. The challenge to this stable truth came in 2004, when Shizuoka University researcher Hirayama Yō in his book *Fukuzawa Yukichi no shinjitsu*¹⁶ presented the argument that the whole Japanese and international debate about leaving Asia was a non-issue during the nineteenth century, and actually emerged only in the 1950s, as part of a re-evaluation of Japan's pre-war intellectual trajectory in the context of the assessment of war guilt. A historical fact, which can be verified in archives, is that in 1885 the newspaper *Jiji shinpo* published an editorial titled *Datsu-A ron*¹⁷, variously translated as an argument for "leaving Asia", "discarding Asia", "shedding Asia", "escaping from Asia", or "dissociating from Asia". Another fact is that this editorial was not the first text to use the expression *datsu-A*; already in November 1884 Hinohara Shōzō had published in *Jiji shinpo* an article attacking the Raising Asia Society (興亜会 *Kō-A Kai*) professing somewhat ambiguous ideas of Asian cooperation. Hinohara suggested rather establishing a Leave-Asia Society (*Datsu-A Kai*) and maintaining distance from neighbouring countries, apparently not considering the rapid revival of Asia a realistic prospect at the time.¹⁸ Nevertheless, the hard facts end here. The editorial was published anonymously, and it is impossible to know who actually wrote it; the newspaper had other editorial writers besides Fukuzawa. There is thus no indisputable ground for linking the article to Fukuzawa himself. The other, and more important argument that Hirayama made was that during the nineteenth century the editorial evoked no general attention.¹⁹ It was simply an editorial in a daily, forgotten the next morning. It thus did not determine the way that Meiji period Japanese regarded their neighbours. It entered scholarly debate as late as 1951, when Tōyama Shigeki picked it up and linked it to Fukuzawa.²⁰

In Japan in the 1950s, defeat in World War II became a prism through which a complete rereading of prewar history was made. Maruyama Masao expressed well the widely shared Japanese sense of tragedy in his 1951 article 'Sentiments from the sickbed', despairing at how rapidly pre-World War II Japan had moved from the position of the hope of Asia to that of the traitor of Asia.²¹ Maruyama, however, did not place the blame on Fukuzawa; he was rather among those scholars, who regarded Fukuzawa in a positive light, as a modernizer with liberal ideas. Concerning the *datsu-A* debate, he pointed out that *Jiji shinpo* published many editorials sympathetic to Japan's neighbours. Especially after Japan's victory in the Sino-Japanese war of 1898, Fukuzawa, in an editorial titled 'Shinajin shitashimu beshi' opposed territorial annexations from China, urge the Japanese to show sympathy towards the Chinese and try to create friendly and close relations with them.²² Maruyama's Fukuzawa thus was a friend of neighbouring Asian countries.

Yet the original editorial, once rediscovered, proved in the 1950s to offer a neat explanation for the moral catastrophe, and the 1885 expression was picked up as the specific turning point, from which everything that imperial Japan subsequently did, started to go morally wrong. Seen through the prism of World War II, this brief editorial, written 60 years earlier, came to be viewed as the philosophical starting point of Japan's aggression towards its Asian neighbours. The editorial came to be interpreted as the ultimate symbol of Japanese wartime betrayal of other Asian countries. In general discussion *datsu-A* became the quintessential slogan depicting Japan's wartime sins during the last half of the twentieth century, especially after the ending *nyū-Ō* was added following it during the 1960s. *Datsu-A nyū-Ō*, "leaving Asia and entering Europe", implied an existential move to another mode of being, categorically different from Japan's neighbours. It represented thus a cosmological betrayal of ancient cultural unity purported to have existed within the Chinese cultural sphere, which had included both Korea and Japan since the arrival of written language into these countries more than a millennium earlier. In 1961 Takeuchi Yoshimi in his article 'Nihon to Ajia' [Japan and Asia] already claimed that Fukuzawa's proposal to "leave Asia" is famous,²³ although Hirayama speculates that it was famous at that time only among scholars, not yet generally.²⁴ It became a stable truth in Japan during the 1960s, and during the 1970s it spread among Chinese and Korean scholars. Through English language commentaries it also became a stable global truth, at least among students of Japanese culture and society and East Asia specialists.²⁵ Maruyama Masao also suggests that the ending *nyū-Ō* was added during the 1960s.²⁶ It is still being taught in this way to university students around the world; an easily accessible example being the MIT Visualizing Cultures teaching programme, where the years 1894 and 1885 are treated as simultaneous points of time under the rubric of 'throwing off Asia'.²⁷



Map 1. Visualization of Umesao's geopolitics: Soviet Bloc, China Bloc, Indian Bloc, Islamic Bloc in shades of red.

these countries. (Remarkably, the United States is missing from Umesao's list of countries, but it is presumably included in Area 1.) The two cultural spheres are essentially different and opposed to each other. Umesao thus argues that Japan is like a European country, although not part of Europe as such, and that it categorically differs from the rest of Asia. Umesao was not alone in this type of categorical argumentation, and Takeuchi Yoshimi comments that such views represent a revival of *datsu-A ron*.²⁹ It was thus in this kind of internal Japanese discussion of war guilt and national identity that the "Leaving Asia" slogan was activated as a scholarly weapon against domestic opponent historians, with 1958 appearing as the likely start.

A long scholarly debate has ever since raged over the multiple aspects of the issue. One issue concerns the image and moral understanding of Fukuzawa as a towering figure in Japanese intellectual history. On one side can be placed scholars like Maruyama Masao, who criticized the use of *datsu-A ron* as a key concept in interpreting Fukuzawa's writings. He pointed out in 1991 that Fukuzawa used the word only once (this was before Hirayama's book), while on innumerable occasions he employed concepts like "liberty" (*jiyū*), "civilization" (*bunmei*), "human rights" (*jinken*), "sovereign rights" (*kokken*), and "spirit of independence" (*kokken no kishō*). These are the key concepts with which Fukuzawa's ideas should be interpreted. Maruyama also points out that after Japan's victory in the first Sino-Japanese War, when feelings of superiority over China emerged in Japan, *Jiji shinpo* published another editorial in which Fukuzawa called on the Japanese to show sympathy and friendliness towards the Chinese.³⁰ Maruyama thus established Fukuzawa as a morally righteous figure.

Scholars viewing Fukuzawa from a different angle have come to completely different conclusions. Yasukawa Junosuke, for example, in his book *Fukuzawa Yukichi no Ajia ninshiki* (Fukuzawa Yukichi's perception of Asia) presents Fukuzawa as a major figure guiding Japan in all of its wars against its neighbours, including World War II (*Ajia Taiheiyō sensō*),³¹ supporting the views of Korean and Taiwanese scholars who regard Fukuzawa as their racial enemy.³² The book has been translated also to Chinese and Korean, so that this Japanese debate also spread to the international sphere. Yasukawa 'proves' his thesis by reading Fukuzawa backwards, starting in 1901 and ending in 1860, citing all quotations that can be read as either being militaristic or as showing contempt towards Asia. These quotations are arranged neatly in a 72-page table at the end of the book. The table contains a number of quotations that even with ingenuity cannot be read as slandering Japan's Asian neighbours, but Yasukawa simply designates them as Fukuzawa's lies (*uso*) and thus simply discards

In terms of intellectual history, one crucial period toward which to direct research is thus not the 1880s, as the idea of *datsu-A* appeared there only once, but the 1950s, when the Asia-Europe divide was presented much more forcefully in Japan. A relevant example is the debate between Takeuchi Yoshimi on one hand, and Takeyama Michio and Umesao Tadao on the other, Umesao being the main opponent. In 1957 in an article titled 'Introduction to an Ecological View on the History of Civilization',²⁸ Umesao divided the historical world into two categories, which can be drawn into the map below:

For want of better names, Umesao divided the world into Area 1, marked blue in the map, and Area 2, marked with shades of red. Area 1 is composed of Japan, Britain, France, West Germany and Italy; these are the countries that he specifically mentions, but it may of course also contain a number of other Western European countries. Area 2 is composed of a Soviet Bloc, a Chinese Bloc, an Indian Bloc and an Islamic Bloc, and it is characterized by diverse revolutionary ideologies. Political processes there appear to lead toward large imperial and conflictual political formations. Area 1, on the other hand, is characterized by high levels of civilization, functioning capitalism, and peaceful striving toward a comfortable life. Warlike moments had existed in Area 1, such as recently in Germany, Italy, and Japan, but that aspect no longer characterized

their value as a historical source. A telling example is the same 1898 editorial 'Shinajin shitashimu beshi' that Maruyama had used as proof of Fukuzawa's good intentions, on which Yasukawa placed the unambiguous sign: 嘘 (lie). He thus steadfastly established Fukuzawa as a morally despicable character. His research can be commended for its perseverance. Yasukawa's research was actually what prompted Hirayama to offer his rereading of the *datsu-A ron* saga.³³ His research, like that of Maruyama, can be commended for considering the context and temporality of *Jiji shinpo's* argument, and for not discarding existing sources. Using Carr's criteria for good historiography, especially the idea that the historian's vision of the future offers the criteria for selecting the historically significant facts,³⁴ Yasukawa's interpretation appears to be a closed road in terms of any forgetting of the past. Hirayama's interpretation was more forward looking, decreasing the presumed centrality of the whole debate in relation to Japanese wartime history, and opening the door for possible oblivion.

No oblivion ensued. Yasukawa responded with a new book explicitly directed against Hirakawa. It was titled "Fukuzawa Yukichi's arguments for war and imperial control. Criticizing the new "Fukuzawa beautification theory".³⁵ Yasukawa declared that Hirayama's interpretation is impossible (*mun*),³⁶ based on dreams and wishes (*kibō ya iyoku*),³⁷ and the whole hypothetical assertion is a mistake (*subete no kasesutekina shuchō ga ayamaru*),³⁸ strongly maintaining that Fukuzawa was a morally despicable character, who cannot be cleansed by any arguments. It is an emotion-laden, furiously written book, which restates his belief that Fukuzawa was a major culprit for the darker areas of Japan's modern history. The emotional tenor of the book reveals how painful attacks against a stable truth can be. Yasukawa is strongly supported by historian Sugita Satoshi,³⁹ and Yasukawa himself published a new book in 2013, in which he widened the attack on Fukuzawa's views on education and women.⁴⁰ A little earlier, but readily accessible as an example of the genre in English, is an article by Lee Yong-ju.⁴¹ Hirayama has responded to his critics in numerous articles, collected together in a thick volume,⁴² and there is also a large website containing various internet sources related to the debate.⁴³ Aoki Takashi⁴⁴ and Takashiro Kōichi⁴⁵ also have published new books on the theme; they do not side with either of the main debaters, but attempt to read Fukuzawa sources as texts of a political activist, whose opinions tended to vary depending on the context.

Changing meanings of Asia and Tōyō

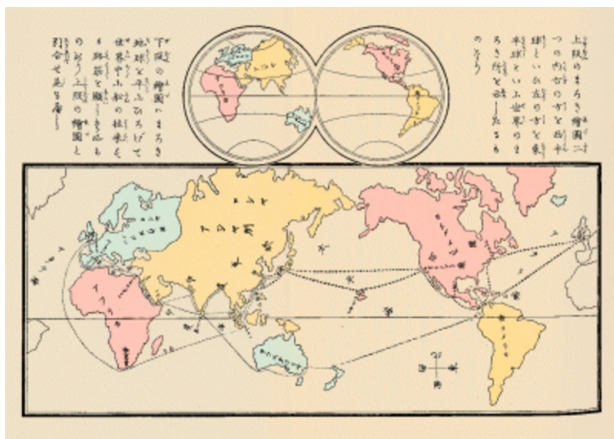
In the current situation it may not be easy to forget the issue in Ernest Renan's way. Nor does it appear possible to read enough Fukuzawa and *Jiji shinpo* to arrive at a new stable truth, nationally in Japan and even less internationally in East Asia, especially if it is done in connection with Japanese colonialism and World War II, which were non-issues in 1885. If simple forgetting and repeated readings of Japan's colonial history are no solution here, Skinner's concept of redescription opens up a third possibility for action. The issue of *datsu-A* can perhaps be redescribed in a way that undercuts or reduces its importance.

Conceptual history teaches us that our political vocabulary and the meaning of words (including geographic names) change over time, and that it is not advisable to attach contemporary meanings, or even 50-year-old meanings, to words that were used more than a century ago. Sometimes conceptual history even teaches us that specific concepts did not exist at a certain past moment, even though we believe so now. We might think that the editors of *Jiji shinpo* in 1885 used Asia in the same sense that we understand Asia today, but that would be a mistake. In Fukuzawa's time its scope was much narrower than nowadays. European geography arrived in the late sixteenth century to China with Jesuit missionaries,⁴⁶ but made no lasting impression there; nor was there too much interest in it in Japan. Perhaps the first instance when the name Asia in written form appears in a Japanese text is in a map published in 1695 by the Nagasaki astronomer and geographer Nishikawa Joken in the first edition of his *Ka-i tsūshōkō*.⁴⁷ However, it appeared only as a name in a map, and later in his *Nihon Suidokō* it appeared only in a list of European geographic place names, obviously obtained from Joken's discussions with Dutch traders.⁴⁸ Joken's contemporary, Arai Hakuseki, used *Ajia* in exactly the same way; the Italian pronunciation of the word in Japanese comes from him. There was no discussion of the concept, nor was it used as an element in arguments; it simply appeared in lists. The important geographic concepts that Hakuseki began to use in his 1725 work *Sairan Igen* were taken from classical Chinese geography, namely *Tōyō* (東洋 Eastern Ocean) and *Seiyō* (西洋 Western Ocean).⁴⁹ He took the concepts from Chinese cosmology,⁵⁰ but applied them for interpreting geographic maps based on European cosmology, using as help Matteo Ricci's world maps published a century earlier in Chinese.⁵¹ Although the concepts contain the character ocean (洋 C: *yáng*; J: *yō*), they were not mainly Hakuseki's translations of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. More than the salty water, they denoted the countries bordering these oceans; *Seiyō* referring to the place where Europeans sailed from, and *Tōyō* to the areas they came to in the east. These Chinese terms were used both as toponyms and ethnonyms, and as concepts with which to discuss foreign affairs. They had a substantive analytical content that the two European geographical terms, Europe and Asia, had not.

During the Tokugawa period the usages of *Seiyō* and *Tōyō* became established as concepts with which to discuss world cultural, economic and political phenomena. Sakuma Shōzan in 1856 coined a famous slogan for dealing with the European threat, calling for study of both 'Eastern morals and Western technology' (*Tōyō no dōtoku to Seiyō no geijutsu*)⁵² at a time when comparable conceptions within the *t'i-yōng* debate over 'essence' and 'practical use' were emerging in China.⁵³ In short, reigning conceptions framed in terms of an East-West dichotomy did not at this time draw on the concept of Asia. Chinese geographic terminology framed Japanese geographic, geopolitical and geocultural meanings, so that European concepts remained peripheral in Japanese language and thought.

The process of conceptual importation was similar in China at that time. Wèi Yuán in his *Hǎiguó túzhì*, completed in 1842, re-edited in 1847 and again in 1852, hardly paid any attention to the name Asia (*Yazhou*); he only listed it as a European geographical name.⁵⁴ Shōzan had started to write his *Kabōron* at the same time that Wèi penned his treatise, the men finishing their work within four months of each other.⁵⁵ The region that both studied was not styled Asia.

When Fukuzawa Yukichi appeared on the scene as the preeminent Japanese expert on Western affairs, and started his long career of translation and interpretation of European ideas, he became one of the first writers, and the most important one, to give Asia a deeper meaning in Japanese.



Map 2. Fukuzawa's World Map.

Source: *Seiyō tabi annai*, p. 12-13.

What did the concept of Asia mean during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries? We can use a map published by Fukuzawa himself in 1867 in *Seiyō tabi annai*⁵⁶ to clarify this. The basic cartographic meaning was clear. The Swedish writer Philip Johan Strahlenberg had already in 1730 moved the land boundary between Europe and Asia from the River Don to the Ural Mountains,⁵⁷ from where it continued through the Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean to the Red Sea, and this slowly became an accepted general idea in Europe during the eighteenth century.⁵⁸ Fukuzawa simply imported this geographical conception to Japan. Asia was the part of the Eurasian continent that did not fit within the concept of Europe, and thus it contained everything from Siberia southwards, and the Urals and Anatolia eastwards. Practically all Asia was either colonized, or in danger of becoming subjugated. Unlike European world maps of the time, Fukuzawa's map was not centred on the Atlantic, but on the Pacific, which we can take as an indication that although Fukuzawa was an earnest modernizer, he in no way was subservient to European conceptualizations. He imported Western information, but reinterpreted it from an Eastern perspective.

The situation gets more complicated when we leave pure cartography and consider racial categories, because at the time they were as important as geographic ones, and

Fukuzawa had to tackle them. His original source certainly was Johann Friedrich Blumenbach's race theory,⁵⁹ whatever translation or exposition Fukuzawa

then used. It was the most influential treatise on the subject in Europe, and numerous later racial works were based on its categories. Blumenbach differentiated humankind into five different races – the same that Fukuzawa used – namely white Caucasians, yellow Mongolians, red Americans, brown Malays, and black Africans. His sources of academic inspiration, Carl von Linné and Immanuel Kant, had used only four races, one for each continent,⁶⁰ but Blumenbach separated Asians into two races because of different skin colour and form of cranium. Attachment of yellow colour to Mongolian skin began at least with Kant, who, as is well known, never travelled far from his home in Königsberg. Empirically no healthy human skin is yellow, and the origin of the association is probably in Chinese cosmology, where yellow was connected with the centre, namely China itself.

European cosmology is based on four directions, north, east, south, and west, but Chinese cosmology adds to this a fifth direction, namely the centre. On these directions was based the ancient Chinese theory of five elements and five seasons, with a specific colour attached to each one. The element of the east was wood, as the direction of the rise of the sun represented growth. Its season was spring, and its colour green/blue. The element of the warm south was fire, its season early summer, and its colour red. The element of the west where the sun sets was metal, its season autumn, and its colour white. The element of the north was water, its season winter, and its colour black. Finally, the element of the centre was earth, its season midsummer, and its colour yellow, representing the colour of the fertile soil of the central Chinese plains. Eventually the colour yellow became associated also with the emperors, who symbolically stood at the centre of the cosmological order. During the Tang dynasty (618–907) dark yellow became a colour reserved solely for the emperor, and this was continued all the way to the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368). During the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) ordinary yellow was added to the imperial shades, and during Qing dynasty (1644–1912) the shades of yellow forbidden for ordinary Chinese were enlarged to contain bright yellow.⁶¹ The last Qing emperor Pu Yi in his autobiography recounts how the memory of his childhood was filled with yellow:

Each time I think of my youth, my mind fills with a yellow mist of reminiscence. For the glazed tiles on the roof were yellow, the sedan chairs were yellow, the cushions were yellow. The linings of my clothing and my hats were yellow. My belts, the porcelain dishes for my food and tea, including the cotton quilting with which they were covered to keep them warm, were yellow. The reins of my horse were yellow. This was the so-called "brilliant yellow", which was used exclusively by the Imperial household ...⁶²

Other shades of yellow could be used, and were used, by ordinary Chinese. It was considered the most prestigious colour. It is not clear how the association of yellow with China and the Mongolian race reached Europe and Kant – who lectured also on world geography, not only philosophy – but at least we know that large amounts of miscellaneous information related to China reached Europe transmitted by Jesuits.⁶³

Reason for the name Caucasian for the race populating most of Europe, but also northern Africa and Asia all the way to the River Ob in the north and the Ganges in the southeast was that for Blumenbach the ultimate source of truth still lay in the Bible. As the Caucasus mountains were in the region where the Arc of Noah had presumably landed, and as the French traveller Jean Chardin had seen, women there were beautiful like angels, Blumenbach induced from these facts that Georgians had to be the nearest to the original creation of God: beautiful, white skinned, and cultured.⁶⁴ The farther the descendants from the Flood had wandered from the Caucasus, the more degenerate and uglier they had become. This was thus a spatial theory of degeneration. Brown Malays populated India south of the Ganges and the archipelagos eastwards. Yellow Mongolians populated the rest of Asia, as well as the coldest parts of Europe in the form of Finns, and America in the form of Eskimos, and were even more degenerate than the Malays.⁶⁵

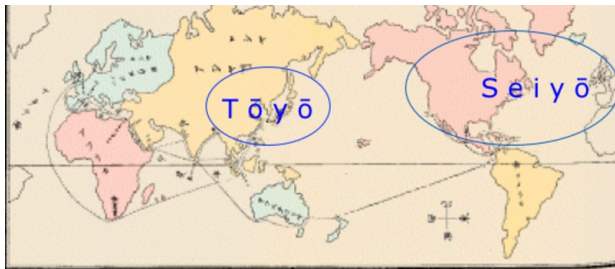
Fukuzawa introduced European race theory⁶⁶ to the Japanese for the first time in a small booklet on world geography titled *Shōchū bankoku ichiran*, published in 1869. There he wrote that the 'white and fair' race (*hakutetsu jinshu*) has intellectually the capability of reaching the highest stages of civilization. Compared with this, his description of the yellow race was uninspiring: "It is patient in case of hardship and labours diligently, but its intellect is narrow, and its speed of getting things done is extremely low." There was virtually nothing positive that Fukuzawa could say of the yellow race here.⁶⁷ As representatives of the yellow race he mentioned Chinese, Finns and Lapps; he did not say that the Japanese also belonged to the yellow race. He was clearly translating directly from some Western book, and had not yet reflected on the far-reaching implications of the racial conceptualizations. The perspective was sensible only from a European point of view, where the curious Finns were present, while for the Japanese at that time they were an unknown and irrelevant people.

In the same year 1869 Fukuzawa published also *Sekaikoku tsukushi* [All countries of the world], a small book for the education of children, in which his thinking was more developed. Both the Chinese and the Japanese are now presented as members of the Asian race that have a slight yellow tint (*iro sukoshiku kiiro nari*) on their skins.⁶⁸ Here the concept clearly forced people to try to perceive the colour in the object. However, this race was no longer presented as incapable of civilization, and especially the Chinese possessed an ancient high civilization. Lately the Asian races had fallen on bad times, nations of the white race conquering most of it, Russians from the north and British from the south steadfastly forcing themselves on the territory of China. Notwithstanding, because there is no essential problem in the intellectual capacities of members of the yellow race, Fukuzawa urges his young readers to devote themselves to studies, especially Western learning, so that they would raise their nation to a position, where Westerners would not hold them in contempt (*Seiyōjin no anadori wo uke*), an attitude they were openly showing towards subjugated Asians.⁶⁹ In terms of civilizational capacities Fukuzawa thus raises the "slightly yellow" Asian race to the same level as the white European race, the only difference being in the specific historical constellation in the process of the advancement of civilization. Of the red, brown and black races Fukuzawa does not have much to say, and nothing positive; his empirical knowledge of them acquired during harbour stops on his journeys to America and Europe was not much better than that of Blumenbach, Kant, or Linné, who had never encountered any of these people. Fukuzawa relied on what was written in the Western books. Conceptual construction heavily preceded empirical observation in the field at this time.

The concept of Asia in Japanese thought thus began to be filled with content. It was no longer only a name in a list. As it meant essentially a place of backwardness, stagnation, subjugation and disorganization, it was not a good foundation for identification and identity formation in Japan. Specific ugliness was built into it, as its practical effect was to emphasize European's exalted place in the world. The alternative concept derived from classical Chinese geography was *Tōyō*, of Eastern seas, which Fukuzawa occasionally uses. However, he never finds it necessary to present a definition of it. In Chinese it had a clear meaning, denoting the island kingdoms of Japan and Liuchiu (Ryukyu) to the east of China. This is the way that, for instance, Wei Yuan uses it in his *Haiguo tuzhi*. Japanese usage of the concept has been geographically wider since Hakuseki, and in Japanese it is both a geographic and a civilizational concept, used as a counter concept to *Seiyō*, which refers to western countries. *Seiyō* does not have a fixed meaning in terms of individual countries, but it is concentrated on the maritime Western European states, which for a long time have had intercourse with Japan, carrying not only goods but also religions, philosophies, cosmologies, and customs with them. It is a large package. The United States was easily added to it in the nineteenth century as a new visitor hailing from the European cultural sphere. Similarly, *Tōyō* is concentrated on the Chinese cultural sphere.⁷⁰ In the same year as *Datsu-A Ron* was written, in 1885, Tarui Tōkichi, whose credentials as a true friend of Korea and China are less questionable,⁷¹ published his *Great Eastern Unification Argument*. He advocated the unification of Korea and Japan against white Europeans, on the grounds of being members of the honourable Chinese Civilization, and he used both *Tōyō* and *Tōhō* (Orient) as regional concepts rather than Asia.⁷²

Jiji shinpo used *Tōyō* occasionally in a geographic sense. For instance an editorial published in 27 March 1884, titled 'It has to be said that there is no Bismarck in *Tōyō*',⁷³ comments on Chinese discussions about the possible emergence of a Chinese leader similar to Ministerpräsident Otto Eduard Leopold von Bismarck-Schönhausen in Prussia to unify the lands of Chinese Civilization against Europeans. Geographically *Tōyō* here is clearly limited to China, Korea and Japan. Although the tone of the editorial is sarcastic, the context is discussing the region as a unit, which itself was a sensible idea in light of the long history. Many of the editorials used the concept Asia, usually in the context of deploring the backwardness of Asian countries, but if Japan was also included in the discussion, *Tōyō* appears to have been preferred.⁷⁴

Fukuzawa did not engage in an analysis of the semantic differences between *Ajia* and *Tōyō*, but Takeuchi Yoshimi felt the need to do that in 1964 in his article, 'The Way the Japanese Look at Asia'. Although it is nearly 80 years removed from the editorial, and almost 50 years removed from the present, it



Map 3. Sketch of the concepts of *Tōyō* and *Seiyō* on Fukuzawa's world map

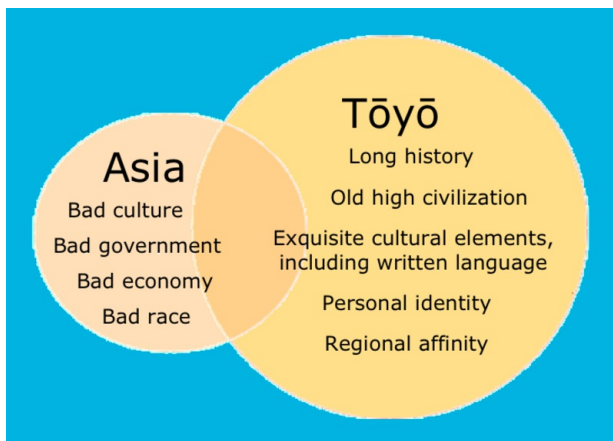
perhaps can still be used to shed some light on the situation. His view was that although the two concepts cover roughly the same geographic area, they did not have the same meaning; *Ajia* was more political, while *Tōyō* was more cultural. They were used in different contexts. Takeuchi's example was that it is possible to talk in Japanese about Eastern and Western civilization (*Tōzai bunmei*), but not about European and Asian civilization (*Ō-A bunmei*).⁷⁵ As Stefan Tanaka shows in his extensive study of Japanese history writing, from the 1890s onwards there emerged specific scholarly endeavour under the names *Tōyōshi* (history of the Eastern Ocean) and *Tōyō tetsugaku* (philosophy of the Eastern Ocean) as a Japanese answer to the revelation that European world history was merely *Seiyōshi*, history of the West that positioned European culture as superior to everything else, simultaneously labelling non-Western cultures as incomplete or undeveloped variations of what was found in the West.⁷⁶ Hundreds of studies were published during the ensuing decades on the history and culture of *Tōyō*. During this process the concepts of Asia and *Tōyō* began to overlap when both were used extensively in studies concerning roughly the same geographic area. *Tōyō* was mostly used in studies on China and Korea, but its themes

easily widened westwards and southwards. For instance, if one leafs through issues of the journal *Tōyōshi kenkyū* during the 1930s, there was constant interest also in Central Asian,⁷⁷ Indian,⁷⁸ and Southeast Asian⁷⁹ topics. Russian Siberia was excluded from *Tōyō*, because common cultural history was hard to find, but otherwise it developed into a flexible concept covering a vast geographic area. Another practical difference that always remained between Asia and *Tōyō* is that Asia has inner divisions (East Asia, West Asia, etc.), but *Tōyō* does not. It only stretches westwards and southwards, or contracts back towards east and north, according to the interests and wishes of its users.

Nowadays *Tōyō* is only a marginal concept in Japanese, the term heard seldom. If it is used, its meaning can be more metaphorical than strictly conceptual, such as in a pamphlet combined by Itō Kenichi, where he claimed that Japan in 1999 belonged neither to *Tōyō* nor *Seiyō*, but was a cultural area of its own – an idea popularized at that time by Samuel Huntington.⁸⁰ Itō equated *Tōyō* simply with China, implying with it qualitative cultural difference with Japan, and disregarding the long historical meanings of the concept.⁸¹ In popular culture, such as manga directed to older readers, it is still a living, although rare concept, and markedly activated only in an unfamiliar context. When Hatsushiba Company Executive Managing Director Shima Kōsaku in a restaurant in India sees familiar Korean and Japanese faces, he comments that all guests are *Tōyōjin* (people of the Eastern Ocean).⁸² Here the concept denotes commonality, although not in an especially deep sense. Notwithstanding, the concept never comes up if the scene of action is Japan, Korea, or China; only the strange environment makes it relevant. Similarly, the word has almost disappeared from Chinese; the main remaining expression is the pejorative 东洋鬼子 *Dōngyáng gǔizi*, "Devils of the Eastern Ocean", which refers exclusively to the Japanese. In both languages it is now an old word, which can be used either loosely, or in rare and specific contexts, and not necessarily in a good sense.

Redescribing the concepts of Asia and *Tōyō*

It is only during the early twentieth century that positive and constructive arguments based on the concept of Asia, such as those made by Okakura Tenshin in Japan and Sun Yat-sen in China, emerge. The fact that both men received their education in English was important, because that enabled them to have an "Asian" identity, and forced them into a programme of redescribing the meaning of Asia to contain positive values.⁸³ Nineteenth century scholars like Fukuzawa, by contrast, did not identify themselves with Asia; they remained persons of *Tōyō*. In Takeuchi's time it was still used regularly in Japanese as a normal word; and my argument here is that for people of Fukuzawa's generation *Tōyō* was a more important concept of personal and collective identification than *Ajia*. The relationship can be presented in Picture 1.



Picture 1. Semantic fields of *Ajia* and *Tōyō* during the 1880s.

The semantic field of *Ajia* as an imported foreign word consisted centrally of meanings that Europeans at the eighteenth century were giving it, and they tended to be systematically pejorative. There was the racial inferiority compared with the white race, backward economies compared with European industrialized states, less effective political systems compared with European parliamentary monarchies, and even though Asians valued their own cultures, Europeans generally did not regard them highly. Compared with *Tōyō*, Asia was a term that lacked historical or cultural resonance. It did not incorporate the cultural and historical experience of being Japanese. *Tōyō* however, suggested to Japanese a feeling of community with neighbouring countries, including a long history of shared culture. Of course the concept did not work in a similar way in Chinese, because its meaning was more specific there. Anyway, as far as late nineteenth century Japanese are considered, this difference in the meanings of the two concepts is easily hidden from the gaze of twentieth and twenty-first century commentators.

Hirayama analyzes well the international position of Japan in the original editorial: Japan is placed among the undeveloped Asian countries, which are despised by the culturally advanced European ones; Japan's position is not one of looking down on its

neighbours from a position of superiority; nor does the editorial contain any trace of advocating a military attack against Korea or China.⁸⁴ Thus, the 1885 *Jiji shinpo* editorial *Datsu-A ron*, which introduces the 'Leaving Asia' argument, remains a puzzle from the point of view of conceptual history. Since World War II, a lot of ink has been spilled in explorations of the political and diplomatic history of the first half of the 1880s in trying to understand what *datsu-A* actually meant. Most of the explanations are essentially attempts to legitimize the emotional thrust behind an outrageous idea. Maruyama Masao, who reflected on Fukuzawa throughout his career, suggests a better approach. The linguistic object of *datsu-A* in the editorial was not China and Korea as such, but contemporary Japanese discussions about the possible revival of Asia, which the *Jiji shinpo* editors viewed as an oxymoron.⁸⁵ The expression 'leave Asia' implied a clear understanding of Asia as a rhetorical category. It should be understood from the Wittgensteinian perspective of a *Sprachspiel*, language game,⁸⁶ where the linguistic rules of using the concepts of Asia and *Tōyō* were different. If the editors had written '*datsu-Tōyō*', leave the Eastern Ocean, it indeed could have meant a total rejection and betrayal of the valued aspects of the region that embraced Eastern civilization, one that Japan historically shared in common with China and Korea. But that was, of course, out of the question. A sensible interpretation of the expression is *datsu-A zan-Tōyō* (Leave Asia, remain in *Tōyō*), implying that Japan, Korea and China should shed their ineffective political and economic traditions, but retain common high forms of culture. Asia was a name that could be used lightly, and 'left behind' easily, because it did not carry deep emotional identity and historical resonances.

The process of shifting much of the cultural content of the concept of *Tōyō* to that of Asia is a phenomenon of the twentieth century, one that has included much scholarly writing, political speeches, and school education. The process has gone so far that *Tōyō* rarely appears in contemporary Japanese spoken or written language. Of course the historical fact remains that during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Japanese politicians and administrators were quicker than their Korean and Chinese counterparts to employ European legal and political vocabulary, as well as diplomatic practices, which gave Japan an advantage in pursuing an imperialistic policy towards its neighbours.⁸⁷ However, this does not mean that Japan ceased to be a country of *Tōyō* even at that time.

In light of the present serious conflicts within the region that is nowadays generally known in English as East Asia, it may be helpful if the idea that the

Japanese at some point in time 'left Asia', and in this sense cosmologically betrayed their physical and cultural neighbours, is removed from the collection of historical facts. Economically there is no longer a great difference between Japan and its neighbours. Japan, China and South Korea all now technologically advanced industrialized countries with a powerful international economic presence. Japan has a slightly more archaic political organization than its neighbours, with the ancient emperor system in a central place in its political and spiritual organization, and public engagement of leading politicians in religious activities a perennial issue in domestic and international politics. A century ago Okakura Tenshin called Japan a living museum of Asiatic civilization,⁸⁸ and perhaps that comment has some relevance also nowadays. However, North Korea also has a hereditary monarchical system mixing religious practices with politics,⁸⁹ so in this Japan is not unique. Sociologically the way of life and outlook of people is rather similar, with people attempting to deal with similar problems in gender roles, combination of family and working life, and organization of care in aging societies.⁹⁰ As Ochiai Emiko points out, Japan does not stand out anymore in any special way among East Asian countries, Southeast Asia included. Japan is nowadays a rather typical East Asian country. Her advice for Japan is to "quitter l'Occident, rejoindre l'Orient" refers both to identification and categorization.⁹¹

This article has simply noted that Fukuzawa Yukichi should not be blamed for a sin he did not commit, and that the history of the Japanese people does not contain any categorical betrayal of Asia in a cosmological sense. Redescriving, and then forgetting the 'leaving Asia' issue, of course does not wipe away the legacy of Japanese colonialism, invasion of neighbouring countries, war atrocities and the perennial political inability to bring closure to these issues.⁹² The *datsu-A* saga as it has been widely interpreted both the East and the West, is only a small and perhaps unnecessary element in the larger picture, one that should be eliminated.

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Notes

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³ "Forgetting, I would even go so far as to say historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation ..." [See here](#)

⁴ The French text *Édit de Nantes* [here](#): [22 February 2014].

⁵ The original Latin text, as well as historical German, Swedish, French and English translations can be found at *Die Westfälischen Friedensverträge vom 24 Oktober 1648. Texte und Übersetzungen*

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