

Russia, Japan, China, and the Resistance to Modernity: Eurasianism and Pan-Asianism Revisited

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Abstract:

In the 1920s, Russian Eurasianists as well as some Japanese philosophers try to organize a cultural stronghold able to serve as an orientation mark to “second rate” nations. The result is an autonomous intellectual tradition that leaves behind the dichotomy of particularism and universalism. Also in China, the interest in Asian cultural geography led Chinese intellectuals to an awareness of global space that they had to put in relation with the historical space of China. However, criticism of modernization in Japan and Russia, instead of questioning the idea of modernization as such, tends to deal with the quality of modernization. The article examines the consequences that these movements might have for the contemporary situation.

Resistance- and Slave-Nations

In the 1920s, both Japan and Russia find themselves in a paradoxical situation: Both countries are simultaneously colonizers and quasi colonized. Being aware of the worldwide rise of colonial peoples and the possible decline of imperialism, Russian Eurasianists as well as the Japanese philosophers NISHIDA Kitarō, WATSUJI Tetsurō, and others, try to organize a cultural stronghold able to serve as an orientation mark to “second rate” nations that would otherwise be lost in a sea of individual civilizations and fall victim to European imperialism. What Harry Harootunian and NAJITA Tetsuo call an “anti-imperialist imperialism,” dependent on the curious geopolitical position of Japan,¹ is formulated in philosophical terms in the Japanese culturalism

¹ Harry Harootunian and NAJITA Tetsuo: “Japanese Revolt Against the West: Political and Cultural Criticism in the Twentieth Century” in Peter Duus (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Japan* (New York & Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 711-774, cf p. 734.

(*bunkashugi*)² of the 1920s as well as in Russian Eurasianist writings of the same period. The result is an autonomous intellectual tradition that leaves behind the dichotomy of particularism and universalism as well as antagonizing schemes that insist on a confrontation of “East” and “West,” and finds philosophical means to define its own culture.

The Japanese cultural critic and sinologist TAKEUCHI Yoshimi, on the other hand, held that the two countries that have made the greatest efforts to resist modernity are China and India.³ Even into the 1970s, Takeuchi saw Chinese mass protest against foreign domination as a desirable model for Japanese society.⁴ Contrary to Japan (which Takeuchi preferred to compare with Turkey), Takeuchi found that in China modernization adopted from the beginning a more “internally generated” character, producing, for example, a socially concerned literature that stays close to daily life. The reason, as Takeuchi sees it, is that in China modernization emerged from the country’s own demands. True, Japan, as she so quickly managed to eliminate feudalism and create a modern nation state, has been more flexible and particularly able to adapt to modern requirements; from a Japanese point of view, China must therefore look backward. However, the surplus that Chinese modernization offers in Takeuchi’s view is that here modernization was

² Thinkers in the 1920s-30s expressed themselves in a complex manner through the movement of culturalism (*bunkashugi* also called *kyōyō-shugi* 教養主義). Philosophers and writers like NISHIDA Kitarō, WATSUJI Tetsurō, KUKI Shūzō, TANIZAKI Jun’ichirō, YANAGITA Kunio, and YOKOMITSU Riichi are representatives of culturalism. They were not linked by a programme but by a search for spiritual values and critique of (Western) culture. On *bunkashugi* see Tessa Morris-Suzuki: “The Invention and Reinvention of Japanese Culture” in *The Journal of Asian Studies* 54: 3, 1995.

³ TAKEUCHI, Yoshimi: *What is Modernity? Writings of Takeuchi Yoshimi* (trans. by Richard Calichman), (Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 156ff.

⁴ Lawrence Olson: “Takeuchi Yukichi and the Vision of a Protest Society in Japan” in *Journal of Japanese Studies* 7:2, 1981, p. 320.

“received on an ethnic-national basis and transformed into a subjective force.”⁵ Furthermore, Takeuchi points out that nations like Japan and Turkey are “slave nations,” a concept that he borrows from the Chinese writer LU Xun. Slave nations imitate their masters very successfully without noticing that their success – since it is based *only* on imitation – is in reality a failure.

It is true that also in China intellectuals attempted to reform the country: in the 1890s, KANG Youwei recommended that “the Emperor forcefully tell the whole country, as had been done by Peter the Great and in the Meiji Restoration, that reform was necessary.”⁶ It is also true that in China intellectuals formulated a cultural critique partly guided by Pan-Asian considerations. Even leading Qing dynasty officials developed *tong-zhong* (same kind/same race) ideologies and called for a Japanese-Chinese alliance against Russian expansionism in order to revive Asia (*yazhou*).⁷ At the turn of the century, the late Qing scholar LIANG Qichao (1873-1929) (who around 1903 briefly cooperated with Sun Yat-sen’s revolutionary movement) emerged as an original reformer and historical thinker and called for a merging of cultural systems and a modern synthesis of Buddhism and science.⁸ Like in Japan and in Russia,

⁵ Takeuchi, p. 99

⁶ WONG Young-tsu: “Revisionism Reconsidered: Kang Yuwei and the Reform Movement of 1890” in *Journal of Asian Studies* 51: 3, 1992. This led to the so-called Hundred Days’ Reform which was annulled by Empress Cixi.

⁷ Cf. Rebecca E. Karl: “Creating Asia: China in the World at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century” in *American Historical Review* 103: 4, 1998, p. 1104.

⁸ Liang formulated theories about a multi-ethnic (*guojiazhu yi*) state and insisted on the negative implications of the model of a Han Chinese state (*minzhuzhu yi*). See Hao CHANG: *Liang Ch’i-ch’ao and Intellectual Transition in China 1890-1907* (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1971), p. 261. Liang also developed the idea of a “broad nationalism (*da minzhu zhuyi*) as a kind of corporate national identity as opposed to an ethnic “narrow nationalism (*xiao minzu zhuyi*). Cf. John Fitzgerald: “The

the interest in Asian cultural geography led Chinese intellectuals to an awareness of global space that they had to put in relation with the historical space of China.

However, neither Liang nor other thinkers of his kind moulded these ideas in a sophisticated philosophy in the way Nishida or Watsuji would do only two decades later.⁹ The Chinese did not produce something that could be compared to the attempt of “recenter[ing] the ontological ground of reality away from bureaucratic hierarchies toward a spiritual largely individual world of consciousness and activity,” as has said Victor Koschmann about Nishida Kitarō.¹⁰ In China, the intellectual debate remained rather limited to political theory, and reappeared as such in the 1930s in the form of a confrontation of Eastern spirituality and Western materialism that remains very reminiscent of Japanese Meiji

Nationless State: The Search for a Nation in Modern Chinese Nationalism” in *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 33, 1995, p. 87ff.

⁹ Liang did not espouse the religious Confucian ideas of his teacher KANG Youwei Cf. Hiroko Willock: “Japanese Modernization and the Emergence of New Fiction in Early Twentieth Century China: A Study of Liang Qichao” in *Modern Asian Studies* 29: 4, 1995, p. 819. The modernizer Kang Youwei (1858-1927) tried to make of Confucianism the national religion, to which Liang was opposed.

¹⁰ Victor Koschmann: “The Debate on Subjectivity in Postwar Japan: Foundations of Modernism as a Political Critique” in *Pacific Affairs* 54: 4, 1982-83, p. 614. It is true that many Chinese thinkers (including KANG Youwei and LIANG Qichao) went beyond the rationalism of Confucianism and dealt also with Buddhism, for example YEN Fu. Cf. Benjamin Schwartz: *In Search of Wealth and Power: Yen Fu and the West* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1964). However, Marriane Bastid has asked: “Even if by their traditional training most scholars and officials of the time could grasp Kang Youwei’s or Zhang Binglin’s moral-spiritual concerns and did share a universalistic outlook, was it not primarily the political pronouncements of these thinkers that attracted the literate audience?” Review of Hao CHANG’s *Chinese Intellectuals in Crisis: Search for Order and Meaning* in *Pacific Affairs* 62: 1, 1989, p. 99.

thinkers like FUKUZAWA Yukichi (1835-1901) or Westernizers like TOKUTOMI Sohō (1863-1957).¹¹ The striving for an integration of the problem of the “absolute” in thoughts about history or culture which is so present in Japanese philosophers like Nishida, Tanabe, and Miki, is absent. It appears rather that in the 1910s and 1920s, the world of Chinese reformers was still, as Peter Harris has said, an “uneasy mixture of the Chinese and the Western, [of] particularism and universalism.”¹²

In principle, Takeuchi, when criticizing Japan, repeats what FUKUZAWA had said seventy years earlier about Japan when declaring, “even if they did imitate the West, [what Japanese modernization achieved] could not be called civilization” since “the mere existence of ‘Western styles’ is no proof of civilization.”¹³ However, Takeuchi seems to overlook the writers, ethnologists and philosophers of early Shōwa and late Taishō culturalism who moved away from Meiji ideals of civilization and enlightenment (*bunmei kaika*). He refuses to acknowledge TANIZAKI Jun’ichirō’s writings of the early 1930s, which demonstrate a clear resistance towards modernization and announce a “return to Japan” (though without being sufficiently committed to expressions of “protest” that Takeuchi favored). Tanizaki developed an ironical method of “celebrating” the ideals of Japanese aesthetics by resisting not only Westernization but also Japanese essentialism or a purely nativist vision of Japanese culture.¹⁴

Modernizers, Traditionalists, Imitators

All this gives us reason to say that Japanese “culturalism” should be compared with some exponents of Russian philosophy rather than with authors of other “non-western” countries. What the works of these

¹¹ Liang was particularly influenced by Fukuzawa’s *jitsugaku* (*shixue*, practical learning) thought. Cf. Willock.

¹² Peter Harris: “Chinese Nationalism: The State of the Nation” in *the China Journal* 38, 1997, p. 129.

¹³ FUKUZAWA Yukichi: *An Outline of a Theory of Civilization* (trans. by D. Dilworth and G. C. Hurst), (Tokyo, Sophia University 1973), p. 16.

¹⁴ Cf. Gregory L. Galley: “The Art of Subversion and the Subversion of Art” in *Journal of Japanese Studies* 21: 2, 1995, p. 367 and 391.

Japanese intellectuals in the 1920s-30s and those of Russian thinkers linked to Eurasianism have in common is that they transcend the most basic ideas of both modernism and of national salvation. Eurasianism emerged in 1921 and was based on the observations of a “dying West” and a “rising East.” Its representatives are the linguist Nicolas S. Trubetzkoy, the geographer Petr Nikolaevitch Savitzky, the theologian Georgy V. Florovsky, the musicologist Pëtr P. Suvchinsky, and – most often forgotten – the legal scholar Nicolai N. Alekseev. Savitzky used the word *azijskij* (“asisch” in German) in order to form the word “*evrazijskij*” (Eurasian). Eurasianism impresses through its intellectual variety. A creation of émigré intellectuals, Eurasianists interpret the Revolution of 1917 as the point where Russia left the European world. Being critical of Marx’s reduction of history to class struggle, they focus on questions concerning society or the formation of the state.

Japan and Russia emerge as two similar countries in which modernization has been carried out quickly and efficiently. In both countries “resistance” was stifled to some extent but it *did* exist. In Russia criticism towards Western civilization never appeared together with simply anti-modern attitudes since here a single thinker can hardly be accredited with an unmitigated “pro-Eastern” or “anti-Western” attitude. Straightforward attitudes might have existed on the side of governments, but as soon as ideologies became more sophisticated, positions tended to be ambiguous. In Russia, most “Modernizers” were also Russian patriots in the largest sense: “Westernization” rarely ever meant to simply replace Russian culture by Western culture, which led Dostoevsky to his famous claim that “Slavophilism and Westernizers is a great (...) misunderstanding.”¹⁵ Of course, there are themes that are typically “Westernizing” like the 1860s political radicalism, post-Hegelian materialism, French enlightenment, or science worship. Still, most of the so-called “Westernizers” (like Herzen’s, Chernishevsky, Pisarev, Bakunin) were also sensitive to a particularly “Russian” approach towards civilization, modernization, and socialism.¹⁶

¹⁵ Dostoevsky: “Pushkin,” *Diary of a writer* 2nd Vol., 979-980.

¹⁶ Some of these Modernizers even passed their ideas to the Slavophile (especially the radical social thinker Vissarion Belinsky (1811-1848) who

Therefore, criticism of modernization in Japan and Russia, instead of questioning the idea of modernization as such, tends to deal with the *quality* of modernization. Surprisingly, Takeuchi schedules Russia as a resistance nation (he seems to think only of Dostoevsky). Still, his own observations are very much in keeping with those of some Russian cultural critics. Takeuchi's criticism of Japan is directed to the same cultural situation that has been characteristic in Russia where people "did not learn about 'high' culture of the West European artistic and scientific elites, but [...] absorbed the applied technology of the 'consumer-oriented' popular culture" (Mark Raeff).¹⁷

The Contemporary Situation

Now, Japan and Russia attract a lot of attention because, as has said Gilbert Rozman, both are "great powers with an unbalanced standing in the world order."¹⁸ Apart from that, an entirely new factor has added

identified the cleavage between the Westernized Russian society and non-Westernized folk at a very early stage. Or they were openly sympathetic towards Pan-Slavism (Bakunin). For Belinsky, "the distinction between *narod* (people) and *natsiye* (nation), *narod'nost* and *national'nost* became the cornerstones of his interpretation of Russian history." (Andrei Walicki: *The Slavophil Controversy: History of a Conservative Utopia in Nineteenth-Century Russian Thought*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975, p. 399) For Herzen, "the Westernizers were increasingly aware of the need to master the themes and issues put into circulation by the Slavophiles" (Walicki: 394). Herzen took a veritable "anti-European turn" when interpreting Danilevsky and establishing Constantinople as the capital of the Russian empire. See Alexander von Schelting: *Russland und Europa im russischen Geschichtsdenken* (Bern: Francke 1948), p. 238-40. In addition, the pro-Slav philosophers (and even the conservative Slavophiles) were not simply anti-modern, but sought to lead Russia into modernization.

¹⁷ Marc Raeff: *Political Ideas and Institutions in Imperial Russia* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), p. 292.

¹⁸ Gilbert Rozman: "Japan and Russia: Great Power Ambitions and Domestic Capacities" in G. Rozman (ed.): *Japan and Russia: The*

supplementary complications to the picture as the present rise of China forces us to reconsider the position of Asia within the world order. Many signs indicate that a new self-consciousness of the Asian continent will be closely linked to the formation of a new regionalism, a regionalism that will most probably be interpreted as a post-Cold War compromise between nationalism and globalism.¹⁹

Will this regionalism make use of Pan-Asian conceptions? And will some of the truly Pan-Asian intellectual heritage be recuperated? The political scientist Wang Hui has recently affirmed that “Asia” represents an idea of civilization that can be contrasted to that of Europe.²⁰ The problem is that, at least on some levels, in China and Korea, “Pan-Asianism” is seen as an unworthy alternative because here Japan “is preparing to establish the capability to project power in Asia.”²¹ Though in both China and Korea, East-Asian discourse had once awakened intellectuals from “an exile from the traditions of East Asia caused by a blind admiration of the West (HAN Kee-hyung),”²² today one associates Japanese Pan-Asianism in these countries exclusively with an “expansionist strategy.” Ironically, one of the hindrances to a faster development of “regionalism” in China is that here larger visions are expressed in terms of “greater China.”

Peter Duus’ observation that “the idea [of Pan-Asia] lies beneath the surface of popular consciousness like unexploded bombs”²³ illustrates

Tortuous Path to Normalization, 1949–1999 (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 357.

¹⁹ AHN Byung-joon: “Regionalism in the Asia-Pacific: Asian or Pacific Community?” in *Korea Focus* 4:4, 1996, 5.

²⁰ WANG Hui: “Les Asiatiques réinventent l’Asie” in *Le Monde diplomatique* Février 2005.

²¹ RHEE Sang-woo: “Japan’s Role in New Asian Order” in *Korea Focus* 4:3, 1996, 27.

²² Cf. HAN Kee-hyung, “Sin Chaeho and Nationalist Discourses in East Asia” in *Sungkyun Journal of East Asian Studies* 2: 2, 2006 (no page numbers).

²³ Peter Duus: “Remembering the Empire: Postwar Interpretations of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere,” Occasional Paper Nr. 54, The

that ideas of “regionalism” or Pan-Asianism have not developed beyond the stage in which nationalists have left them in the 1920s. First, Duus’ choice of metaphor indicates that he is afraid that the Pan-Asianism will be more militarist than spiritual. More detailed observations however, show that the new Pan-Asianism will be neither militarist nor spiritual but simply economic. Fu-ko Liu and Philippe Régnier have aptly noted that, though there are dramatic moves in Asia towards regional integration, these efforts, prophesized since the 1980, have “more to do with economic aspiration than with political calculation.”²⁴ When reading academic articles on Asian Regionalism, one has the impression that references to Tagore, the Pan-Asian tradition – often including Nishida in an ambiguous way –, and Asian cultural identity are somehow grafted on the top of the article merely as a matter of decoration. The essential part of the story of Asian regionalism has shifted to economic cooperation and it is difficult to confirm that encouragements like those of KOO Jong-suh, that “the Pan-Asian movement should take a fresh approach”²⁵ are heartfelt. While some intellectuals might still defend ISHIWARA Kanji’s “beautiful dream” of Asian unity, combining history, religion and science Peattie²⁶ (1975: 362) the more generally accepted formula is “open regionalism against Pan-Asianism.” In any case, it seems that cooperation is founded on merely abstract principles that do not emphasize the dialectical components of a typically Pan-Asian system within which identity comes about through interaction. Instead of being on a spatialized

Woodrow Wilson Center, Asia program, 18 March 1993. Quoted from Baogang He.

²⁴ LIN Fu-Kuo: “The Renewal of Regionalism and an East Asian New Order” in Fu-Kuo LIN & Philippe Régnier (eds), *Regionalism in East Asia. Paradigm Shifting?* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 221. “There are inter-governmental forums like the ASEAN free trade area or the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), as well as non-governmental organizations who promote political, economic, and cultural cooperation.”

²⁵ KOO Jong-suh: “Pan-Asianism: For Primacy of East Asia” in *Korea Focus* 3:2, 1995, 38.

²⁶ Mark Peattie: *Ishiwara Kanji and the Japanese Confrontation with the West*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1975, 362.

realization of cultures, the focus is again on 18th century liberalist notions like equality and liberty.

Eurasianism, on the other hand, continues to fascinate theorists. The reason might be that “Eurasia” represents an interesting object for various kinds of people. The American policy-maker Brzezinski claims that even today “Eurasia is . . . the chessboard on which the struggle for global primacy continues to be played.”²⁷ When looking at “Eurasia” from a geopolitical point of view, totalitarian schedules might come to mind very quickly (Brzezinski reminds us that Stalin and Hitler saw Eurasia as the center of the world, Brzezinski, xiv). Therefore, critics like Mikhail Epstein or Anssi Kullberg see only the neo-imperialist component in the most recent developments of Russian Neo-Eurasianism.²⁸

It comes as a rather poor coincidence that Eurasianism has recently been revalued by the nationalist geopolitician Alexandr Dugin who refounded the Eurasian Movement in 2000.²⁹ Dugin’s journal *Elementy* agitates against globalization, the Islamic threat, and democracy (because here the people does *not* govern) and praises national-bolshevism. The journal’s tendency is highly anti-enlightenment,

²⁷ Zbigniew Brzezinski. *The Grand Chessboard – American Primacy and its Geostrategic Imperatives*. (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 31.

²⁸ Anssi Kullberg, *May 2001* “From Neo-Eurasianism to National Paranoia: Renaissance of Geopolitics in Russia” in *The Eurasian Politician* 4, August 2001. Mikhail Epstein: “Response: ‘Post-’ and Beyond” in *Slavic and East European Journal* 39:3, 1995. See especially Epstein 2006, which offers one of the best English summary of the Dugin’s and Gumilev’s thoughts currently available in English.

²⁹ Dugin calls his movement also “radical traditionalism.” Some of Dugin’s most important texts as well as the programme of the neo-Eurasian Movement is contained in the journals and magazines *Milyi Angel*, *Elementy* and the newspaper, *Den’* (since 1993 *Zavtra*). Dugin’s main books are: *Mysteries of Eurasia* (1991), *Hyperborean Theory* (1992), *Conspirology* (1992).

spartanic, pessimistic, and populist.³⁰ We are reminded that in Soviet times, Eurasianism was especially popular among the KGB, the Red Army, and Alpha troops (Kullberg 2001: 4) who defined Eurasianism as purely imperialist and expansionist (Dugin himself is the son of a KGB officer).³¹ Dugin uses climatic-geographical components like the synthesis of the Forest and the Steppe in order to pin down the cultural narrowness of the Western civilization (the Forest) and its inability to understand the Eastern Steppe culture. The recurrence to “sacred sciences” like alchemy, astrology, and sacred geography does not make his arguments more convincing. Ironically, these far-right ideologies sharply collide with that of the Eastern European New Right, which continues to praise “the notion that the end of Soviet rule is to be seen as the process of reattachment to Europe after years of being ‘almost swallowed by Eurasia.’”³² More sophisticated is Lev Gumilev’s (1912-1990) Neo-Eurasianism. In extensive historical investigations, Gumilev establishes Slavic and Turkish elements as the foundations of Eurasian identity, making of Russia a synthetic civilization.³³ Kullberg points to the fact that Gumilev supported during the Cold War Greater Russian imperialism and integrates influences from fascism (Kullberg, 3). Still

³⁰ Leonid Luks: “Der ‘dritte Weg’ der ‘Neo-Eurasischen’ Zeitschrift ‘Elementy’ – zurück ins Dritte Reich?” in *Studies in East European Thought* 52: 1-2, 2000, 49-71.

³¹ The conclusions to be drawn from the theory of passionarity are according to Dugin that Russians are a fresh and young ethnos, which has the potential to consolidate the super-ethnos of Russia-Eurasia. Galya Andreyeva Krasteva: “The Criticism towards the West and the Future of Russia-Eurasia” in *The Eurasian Politician*, July 2003, 4.

³² Roger Griffin: “Europe for the Europeans: Fascist Myths of the New World Order” 1922-1992 on www.alphalink.com.au.

³³ Gumilev’s books are: *Drevniaia Rus’ i Velikaia Step’* [Old Russia and the Vast Steppe] (Moscow: Mysl’ 1989); *Etnogenez i biosfera Zemli* [Ethnogenesis and the Biosphere of the Earth] (Leningrad: Gidrometeoizdat. 1990); “Gumanitarnye i estestvennonauchnye aspekty istoricheskoi geografii” [Humanistic and Scientific Aspects of Historical Geography] in *Noosfera i khudozhestvennoe tvorchestvo* (Moscow: Nauka, 1991). See here again Epstein 2006.

Gumilev recognizes himself as a follower of the Eurasians Trubetzkoy and Savitzky.

In conclusion, one can say that Pan-Asianism and Eurasianism are no longer strongholds of “second rate nations” as it had been at least partly in the 1920s. The movements are today very far removed from ontological researches for an Asian cultural reality that propelled the studies of these early Japanese and Russian philosophers. Resistance *to* or critical reworkings *of* modernity are either absent or formulated in an extremist and non-intellectual fashion.