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Chinese Nationalism and Modern Japan : Imitation and Resistance in the Formation of National Subjects

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Chinese Nationalism and Modern Japan: Imitation and Resistance in the Formation of National Subjects

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1. MODERN NATIONALISM IN EAST ASIA

The Subject of nationalism is the people of the nation. In modern society, a nation includes not only the members of a sovereign national polity but also the members of a specific cultural community. A nation is forged from a group of people who possess shared cultural attributes and a consciousness of affiliation. Echoing Ernest Gellner's well-known definition, we might say that nationalism is an attempt to unite a political unit with a cultural unit. The almost complete dominance in the world order of this form of polity—in which a national community (nation-state) sees unity or homogeneity as an ideal—is a relatively recent phenomenon. In the case of East Asia, introduction of the nation-state system from the West dates from the middle of the nineteenth century.

The nation-state system first appeared in East Asia as a challenge to the tribute system of imperial China. In the West, the establishment of nation-states accompanied the breakup of the imperial order. In the case of China, however, as has been pointed out elsewhere, multiple nation-states did not emerge along with the dissolution of the empire, even though the collapse of the Chinese tribute system undermined central authority and eventually led to a transfer of power (revolution).

What meaning does this hold for us? Soviet Russia bore striking similarities to China in that it sustained imperial unification as a multiethnic nation organized under a socialist system. However, Soviet Russia exists no longer. China is virtually the last surviving example of firm political unification encompassing broad territories, an empire with the face of a nation-state. I would like to pose the following question as the central problem that I shall explore in this essay: if we see nationalism as a "module" [ANDERSON 1983] commonly deployed and disseminated broadly in a manner that transcends region and culture, what are the implications

of the fusion of empire and nation in this "last empire"?¹⁾

Before launching into my main topic, however, I would like to make the following three points to provide some background on the history of nationalism in East Asia. First, the "West" did not immediately appear to constitute a threat from the perspective of imperial China, which saw itself as the center of civilization. The First Opium War (1839-1842) is today said to have raised the curtain on the modern era in China, but to the central government of the time it seemed nothing more than a local dispute. There was virtually no group or class that perceived this clash as constituting a crisis for the state or "nation." The cession of Hong Kong was similarly understood—that is, legitimized—as nothing more than the emperor's means of smoothing over relations with the barbarians; it could not be conceptualized as territorial loss or diplomatic failure. Thus, although changes were taking place in the Chinese world order, there was no drive at the time within the boundaries of this realm (*tianxia*) toward a territorial, particularistic nationalism.

Nevertheless, nineteenth-century China could not complacently sustain Chinese ethnocentric narcissism forever. The more it tried to maintain asymmetrical relations with the "barbarian" West, the more imperial China was forced to reorient itself toward this unknown, qualitatively different civilization. In the course of yielding further concessions through treaty negotiations, imperial China was progressively reduced from a universal dynasty to a particular regional state. As policy changes—including the drawing of national boundaries and the exchange of permanent foreign legations—were reluctantly instituted, momentum toward nationalism gradually began to grow in strength. Of course, the question of how to concurrently uphold the mutually incompatible sets of principles undergirding relations between equal sovereign states and those of the tribute system based on lord-vassal relations was not simply a political problem. It was a

1) "Imperial China" generally refers to the state that stood at the apex of East Asian Confucian society for more than two thousand years, from the unification of "China" under the First Emperor of Qin to the Revolution of 1911. The term "imperial" denotes the existence of a historically continuous polity marked by the absolute power of the emperor, a centralized bureaucracy, sustained territorial expansion, a unified governing ideology (Confucianism), and so on. Yet the empire encompassed a linguistic and ethnic plurality (with overlapping and multiple allegiances) that had the potential of constituting the antithesis of a national community. We find complete amalgamation or hybridization within the concept of "China" only twice: in the Yuan dynasty and later in the Qing dynasty, which drew on the legitimacy of Yuan precedent. In this light, the Qing dynasty represented the culmination of imperial China. The Department of Tributary Territories (Lifanyuan, the central government organ for ruling the tributary territories) provides the clearest example of how the amalgamation of "China" was reflected in the internal structure of imperial governance. However, as note 3 also observes, further investigation of the relation between the Qing dynasty and "China" remains necessary.

question regarding the very foundation of “(modern) civilization” (*wenming*), a point that I shall continue to pursue in the pages below.

Second, and related to the previous point, anti-Western nationalism first emerged in connection with systemic reforms from above. While such nineteenth-century popular rebellions as the Taiping Rebellion and the Muslim Revolts in northwest China raised challenges to the dynastic system, they were not precursors to the establishment of a nationalist consciousness. Rather, late-nineteenth-century nationalism arose from and among the lower and middling ranks of officials and gentry distanced from power, professionals who were not products of the imperial examination system (such as Sun Yat-sen), and merchants and entrepreneurs engaging in foreign trade. Moreover, with the debacle of the Boxer Rebellion of 1900, dynastic authority was both undermined and underwent a dramatic change in terms of engagement on the part of the leadership in the transformation of China into a nation-state.

That is, the reforms known as the “New Policies” of late Qing China can be seen as a kind of “official nationalism” insofar as they represented attempts to produce a nation under the dynastic system. “Official nationalism” here refers to the internally generated nationalization of a dynastic state confronted with systemic crisis, or, in the words of Benedict Anderson, “an anticipatory strategy adopted by dominant groups who are threatened with marginalization or exclusion from an emerging nationally-imagined community” [ANDERSON 1983: 95].²⁾

The fundamental reorganization of the dynastic system initiated under the New Policies was never completed; it was interrupted by the Revolution of 1911, which took place only a few years later. Nevertheless, the Republic of China (and afterward the People’s Republic of China) inherited from the Qing dynasty not only imperial territories and a diverse ethnic composition, but also a burgeoning national imagination. Thus the Republic of China represented a legitimate successor, not a

2) Benedict Anderson cites czarist Russia, Thailand, and Japan as examples of official nationalism; we might venture to generalize that nationalism takes the form of official nationalism in late modernizing dynastic states. Of particular interest is Anderson’s discussion of the process observed in the development of official nationalism by which a universal monarch “returns” to serving as the sovereign representative of a particular territory in order to preserve a monopoly on the loyalty of his subjects.

Qing dynasty China was no exception. The early-twentieth-century constitutional movement (known as the movement to make preparations for a constitution because it was cut short by the Revolution of 1911) attempted to shore up imperial authority by transforming the political figure of the emperor into the embodiment of an abstract notion of the nation, making him particular or translating him into a vernacular register. By tradition the touchstone of the legal system, the Chinese emperor was simultaneously subjected to as well as the subject of the constitution. In this way, the emperor underwent a self-transformation into the most prominent representative of the national community (at least in ideal terms), prefiguring the advent of modern self-discipline [MURATA 1997].

traitor, to late Qing nationalism. Any analysis of the nature of contemporary Chinese nationalism must take into account the deep current of historical continuity from the late Qing period.³⁾

Third, neither Chinese nor Japanese nationalism developed within a strictly binary relationship with the West. Rather, they were indelibly imbued by their regionally specific historical context. In the Japanese case, late Tokugawa and early Meiji cultural contact between Japan and the West was continually mediated by the Other of China. Matsuzawa Hiroaki characterizes the situation as follows:

As the center of the Chinese order, China refused to accept the "message" of the Western world, forwarding the message instead to Japan at the periphery of the Chinese cultural sphere. Thus, China paradoxically assisted in Japan's awakening and reorientation toward the Western world [MATSUZAWA 1993].

Meanwhile, in a manner distinct from the Japanese "fusing of China and the

In the field of European history this shift might be described as the transformation of an emperor into an absolute monarch. Historians have not shown much interest in the Chinese case, however, perhaps because the changes took place entirely at the level of legal discourse. Yet this "revolution by edict" paved the way for the Revolution of 1911 at a conceptual level—paradoxical though that may seem—and even at the time was perceived to have done so. That is, with the promulgation of the constitution of 1906, the emperor had already been divested of his spiritual transcendence so that he might "return" to the secular national community. Establishment of the Chinese Republic led to the dissolution of both the dynasty and the emperor system. Nevertheless, it can be argued that the new democratic republican system perfected rather than dismantled the framework grounded in the notion that legitimate political rule belonged in the hands of a monarchical authority serving as the "representative of the nation." The anonymity inherent to a consciousness of belonging to a "nation" (the "we Chinese" mind-set) is one result of abstracting the political figure of the emperor to its extreme. To put this another way, the abstraction of the body of the constitutional monarch who "returned" to the national community of "China" was taken even further, and the site where anonymous national subjects were sanctioned to "return" to a particular political community (the Republic of China) was in fact the birthplace of Chinese nationalism—a nationalism that inherited the legacy of imperial China.

- 3) However, the Qing dynasty belonged to a different ethnic group from the Han majority, making the nature of modern Chinese nationalism all the more complicated. While the Qing emperor is equivalent to the Chinese emperor in our discussion of the fusion of empire and nation in Chinese nationalism, the question of when and how the "Sinification" of the Manchu emperor took place (or did not take place) is by no means simple. It is generally understood that the Qing dynasty was gradually "Sinified": that is, the Manchu rulers steadily absorbed Han culture over the course of two and a half centuries. Setting aside the debate on whether this development was natural or artificial, there nevertheless remain numerous problems in the argument that the Qing dynasty became a Chinese dynasty through Han assimilation of the Manchus. For example, how does one account for the existence of Manchu nationalism from the Qing dynasty to present-day China under this simple paradigm?

West," China was steadily expanding its exchanges with Asia through tribute and trade, and with diverse "Wests" through immigration to North and Central America. Such engagements with Asia and the West offered critical opportunities for modern China to develop its own national self-image.

The formation of national self-identity begins with the designation of an adjacent Other as the indispensable second party between which a line of distinction can be drawn between "us" and "them." We see creation of an essential, unified image of the nation on the basis of an antithesis with a qualitatively different "West" not only in the case of China but in the production of nationalisms throughout the non-Western world [SAKAI 1996]. A sense of belonging to a nation generally develops in light of images reflected from without, not within.

However, in modern East Asia, a binary opposition between the West and the East (non-West) was not the only mechanism at work in producing multiple imagined national communities as the Chinese order crumbled. Just as China continually inserted itself into the modern Japanese relationship with the West, so contact with Japan had a substantive impact on China's experience of the West as Other. Indeed, one could even say that the quickening of nationalism in modern China took place precisely through China's negative relationship with Japan. This negative relationship, particularly from the time of China's defeat in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895 onward, fueled a sense of national crisis in both the government and the people, which in turn lent force to the movement toward forming a nation. Even before the Sino-Japanese War, negotiations regarding legitimate authority over the Ryukyus, Taiwan, and Korea inspired an early self-awareness of China as a sovereign nation. Thus, modern Japan was a factor no less important than the Western powers in the formation of Chinese nationalism.

The Han assimilation line of argument also fails as an interpretive framework, for there were active attempts to manage ethnic differences between Manchus and Han throughout the Qing period through such bureaucratic mechanisms as the Manchu-Han administration system and the Department of Tributary Territories. Moreover, the Qing dynasty represented neither a Chinese dynasty nor China to Mongolia and Tibet, where it was always perceived as a Manchu dynasty. It was hardly coincidence that Mongolia and Tibet declared independence at the time of the Revolution of 1911. In the eyes of non-Han ethnic groups on the margins of the empire, the fall of the Qing dynasty implied the end of all ties of obedience and loyalty to the Manchu emperor: with the severing of this bond, their subordinate relations with China would also come to a close [NAKAMI 1994].

Finally, we must inquire more closely into the latent Han ethnocentrism that exists in the discourse of "China." When speaking of assimilation, we can just as easily ask how many aspects of Manchu and other non-Han cultures have been absorbed into the so-called Han culture. Linguistics provides us with one example of the degree to which the Han Subject has been permeated by other cultures: the "purest" speakers of Mandarin Chinese, which forms the base of contemporary standard (Han) Chinese, were the Manchu bannermen!

2. FROM THE CHINESE ORDER TO INTERNATIONAL LAW

Twentieth-century Chinese nationalism is the product of efforts to fuse imperial China with the nation. Even though such attempts have given rise to acute tensions, particularly in relation to ethnic unification, the project has not been abandoned. The Chinese "imperial nation-state" inherited the vast territories of the Qing dynasty and its framework of ethnicities [NISHIMURA 1996]: the People's Republic of China calls this a "unified multiethnic state." Even the Nationalist government of Taiwan in its oppositional relationship with the PRC still has not relinquished its fictional territorial rights over regions that include Outer Mongolia, despite a growing trend since the 1980s toward the Taiwanization of the "Republic of China." Such claims illustrate just how strong the spell of the national imagination of the great empire remains to this day.

How are we to understand the nature of this hybrid relationship in Chinese nationalism, in other words, the overlapping of "empire" and "nation-state"? I would like to explore this problem by narrowing our scope of inquiry to the latter half of the nineteenth century, when the two types of social organization could be most sharply distinguished. It was during this era that the deep-rooted contradictions between the traditional tribute system and international law (*wanguo gongbao*) first became apparent in modern international relations. The adjustments necessary to uphold both inspired increasingly concentrated introspection regarding the Chinese perception of the world.

Although the following points do not always adhere to a strictly chronological logic, we can break down the process of the transformation of the late Qing image of the world into three stages. First, the East Asian sphere of civilization, organized on the basis of the tribute system, did not conceive of its relations with the West in a qualitatively different manner. Analogies with historical precedent appeared to provide a basis for understanding such contact—in particular, the Spring and Autumn period and Warring States period preceding the Qin and Han Empires. During this span of approximately five centuries, while ostensibly serving the ruined authority of the king of the Zhou dynasty, various regions were constantly engaged in "crusade-less" harsh power politics within a framework of equal, horizontal relations. Moreover, rules governing international relations emerged at this time that were in many ways comparable to "international law." The multiple, horizontal conflicts between different polities in the modern world seemed to invite identification with the competition and contention between rival chiefs during the Spring and Autumn and the Warring States eras. Thus, intellectuals of the late Qing interpreted foreign international law on the basis of the standards hitherto understood to govern such power politics [SATŌ 1996].

This approach of directly citing Chinese classics and history as a means of understanding other cultures was known as "drawing analogies from the classics" (*fuhuilun*). It is important to keep in mind that the worldview and Sino-centric cultural attitudes of late Qing China were by no means overturned by use of this

filter for cultural interpretation, although the approach facilitated reception of the principles of international order. Such reliance on analogies drawn from the classics can be found not only in early engagement with international law but also in the study of Western natural science and political systems. Advocates of "Western affairs" (*yangwu*) similarly analyzed and urged the introduction of such reforms as the Western parliamentary system and democratic politics by referring to examples found in China's ancient past.

However, in the second phase it became clear that international law, which should have secured equality and mutual benefit among different polities, was far from offering any guarantee for China's continued existence as such. And many began to realize that China's sovereignty and interests were suffering under the enforcement of unequal commercial treaties. As a result, the explanatory power of analogies drawn from the classics soon lost its luster, and criticism of this practice emerged in the form of debates on institutional reform (*bianfa*). The core argument of advocates of institutional reform was that China's traditional mode of political organization (*zufa/chengfa*) was ineffective and should be replaced by Western modes, which they saw as superior. That is, discussions of institutional reform heightened awareness of the incompatibility of the nation-state system and the tribute system, with the latter criticized in terms of its principles. This was a pivotal moment in the articulation of such issues central to Chinese nationalism as the pursuit of foreign relations on the basis of the nation as Subject, territorial security and protection of those residing within national borders, and the survival of China amid the international struggle of survival of the fittest.

Nevertheless, despite this advocacy of the institutional reform by a particular school, national identity in modern China was not immediately reoriented toward wholesale incorporation of Western civilization. Quite to the contrary, the overturning of Sino-centric thought was anything but a smooth process; it gave rise to tremendous friction in both domestic and foreign policy. As an example, we might point to the negotiations between China and Japan regarding the "independence" of the vassal state of Korea. The Japanese spokespersons sought recognition of Korean independence on the basis of the logic of international law as it had been internalized in Japan. The Chinese negotiators, however, would not budge from their assertion that Korea was a vassal state, but that this relationship did not entail Chinese interference in its internal administration and diplomacy. As for the Korean representatives, they sought to sidestep the debate by claiming that existence as a "vassal state" and as an "independent" polity were perfectly compatible, not contradictory.

While the Chinese emphasized their country's moral duty in such discussions, they also implemented more heavy-handed measures, such as stationing troops in Seoul, to expand Chinese control through direct rule to peripheral regions in order to check Japan and the various Western powers. Administrative apparatuses were introduced to Taiwan and Xinjiang one after the other in an attempt to bind more firmly into the Chinese empire hitherto semi-peripheral regions. Such policy

changes were part and parcel of the “modern” reorganization of imperial China in the face of the threats posed by foreign civilizations [MOTEGI 1997]. In the end, China and Japan went to war over the issue of whether or not Korea was a vassal state. On China’s defeat, Korean independence and sovereignty were officially recognized in the Treaty of Shimonoseki. The East Asian tribute system had collapsed.

In the third phase, defeat in the Sino-Japanese War forcibly brought the lesson of the superiority of Western civilization home to China. That the small country of Japan—hitherto considered barbarian and now an agent of Western civilization—had routed Chinese troops further deepened a sense of ethnic and national crisis. This defeat served as the real opening to nationalism in China even as it announced the end of the Sino-centric world order.

Wielding a powerful pen while in exile in Japan after the collapse of the Reform Movement of 1898, Enlightenment advocate Liang Qichao provides what is perhaps the most concise expression of the changing view of civilization: “Knowing the world exists but not knowing the state exists; knowing the self exists but not knowing the state exists” (“Discourse on the new people” 1902). The literary activities of Liang and others who churned out manifestos urging their countrymen to cultivate a “national consciousness” during this time of crisis served as notice at long last of the bankruptcy of the traditional Chinese order.

3. JAPAN AS THE OTHER

Thus, during this period Japan became for China an exporter of a new mechanism of civilization, the nation-state. Indeed, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the locus of hegemony over “(modern) civilization” (*wenming*) shifted from China to Japan on the periphery. The West might even be said to have been only a supporting player in this overturning of the traditional order. Hamashita Takeshi argues that for modern Japan, “Westernization” was not the ultimate goal in and of itself but only a measure chosen in order to “enter” Asia [HAMASHITA 1997]. His description of Westernization as nothing more than a “means” fails to account for the curiosity and attraction felt by late-nineteenth-century Chinese and Japanese regarding this qualitatively different civilization. Nevertheless, there are ample grounds for seeing Westernization in Meiji Japan as a realization of the Chinese order in altered form. Watanabe Hiroshi points out that for Meiji advocates of opening Japan, the West itself acted as the real “China.” The Civilization and Enlightenment movement reenacted progress toward this “China” from a barbarian state, a desirable outcome even for the Chinese order itself [WATANABE 1994]. In other words, Japan had always been highly conscious of its own marginality in its historical relations with China. Once Japan had selected the West as the new focus of its “China” model, it was able to reorganize itself quickly and easily into a nation-state without having to question its fundamental view of civilization.

At the same time, there is no question that without the example and threat presented by the new Japan, China of the late Qing period would not have engaged as deeply as it did with the West. How else to explain the importance of the Japanese model when modernization policies were first seriously pursued, or to understand why nearly ten thousand students traveled to Japan to study at the beginning of the twentieth century? Whether we are speaking of instituting the system of constitutional monarchy, reforming the bureaucracy, promoting industry, abolishing the imperial exam system, or imposing compulsory education, such projects were invariably influenced by the precedents set by Meiji Japanese reforms. In sum, Japan was perceived by China at this time (and perhaps at no other) as a qualitatively different “(modern) civilized” (*wenming*) country. It has been noted elsewhere that nationalism in the Republic of China, from the May Fourth Movement to the anti-Japanese war, made use of the Japanese state as a negative example. However, for a brief moment, Japan served as a mirror that allowed China to imagine national self-identity or homogeneity. Just as China had historically been the constitutive “unforgettable other” for Japan’s formation of a national self, so Japan acted as the “unforgettable other” for modern Chinese nationalism during this era.⁴⁾

As I mentioned earlier, this transformation in perspective necessarily led to a reconsideration of the traditional Chinese order, reversing the cultural relationship in which Japan borrowed from China. Let us examine the Official Educational Directive, patterned after the Japanese Imperial Rescript and promulgated in 1906, as an example of the compulsion during this phase to refer to Japanese achievements:

In its drive toward wealth and power, Japan has made use of primary school textbooks to raise the understanding of its people regarding matters of national welfare. Since lessons learned by the young are transformed over time into common sense and custom, the Japanese people as a whole place a priority on public affairs, and concern themselves with the issue of national shame. They believe that the joys or sorrows of the head of state are the same as the prosperity or ruin of the entire country; the prosperity or ruin of the country are in turn experienced as personal triumph or failure. Such is the true union

4) Historically, Japan had always been conscious of its marginality in the Chinese sphere of civilization. Even when claiming cultural superiority over China, Japan could not create a positive identity for itself without reference to the Other of China. Without question, the eighteenth-century nativist discourse that sought to replace China with Japan as the center of civilization (Japanese-style Chinese ethnocentrism) served as a prototype for modern Japanese nationalism. However, even as its proponents sought to avoid submission to the weight of Chinese civilization, they were still in the end bound by the center-periphery relationship, unable to exorcise from their subconscious the role played by China as a mirror. The phrase “unforgettable other” (*wasureenu tasha*) was coined by Mitani Hiroshi in his analysis of Motoori Norinaga’s critique of the “Chinese mind” (*karagokoro*) [MITANI 1997].

of ruler and ruled. Since ancient times, our country has been renowned for proper ritual and loyalty, which are deeply rooted in our fundamental character. Thus, the fruits of reform will probably be even more bountiful for China than for Japan. In order to disseminate such education, our textbooks must discuss unsparingly such topics as the difficulty and promise of rebuilding our ancestral country since its opening to the West, recent events and imperial concerns, the origins of our foreign troubles, and the government's domestic affairs [ZHU 1987: 152].⁵⁾

The section quoted above glosses the term "loyalty" as it appears in the fifth clause of the Educational Directive. Of course, there is nothing unusual about mentioning the value of devotion and loyalty to the ruler in Confucian writings; the paragraph is in many ways a rather commonsensical exposition on national virtues. Yet the very fact that the Qing government took the time to preach the virtue of loyalty to its subjects was entirely without precedent in Chinese history. Shot through with incontrovertibly "modern" language in the form of such nationalistic phrases as "the union of ruler and ruled," "national shame," "foreign troubles," and "the prosperity or ruin of the entire country," the Qing court's "Educational Rescript" would a generation earlier have been all but meaningless even to the elite, let alone the masses. At any rate, the primary schools that were to serve as channels for the cultivation of a sense of loyalty did not exist before this time. The decisive factor that enabled this reorientation in the Chinese imperial narrative toward national subjects was the example set by that "country which rose to sudden prominence in recent years" and which possessed an "imperial lineage of unbroken succession for countless eras": imperial Japan. The geopolitical structure of modern East Asia is here revealed: raising a challenge to the formerly universal Chinese order in East Asia, Japan flexed its new muscles by attempting to dictate to its regional neighbors, including China. Meanwhile, China found itself increasingly subordinated to "(modern) civilization" (*wenming*) in the course of its struggles to imitate (or repulse) the trend.

One further point must be made: the foundations of the traditional international order became visible for the first time—in the course of late-nineteenth-century negotiations between China and Japan—when contrasted with a system of sovereign states. Records of an exchange concerning the Korean problem of 1876 between Mori Arinori, Japanese minister to the Qing court, and Shen Guifang, minister of North Sea Commercial Affairs, illustrate this process. In response to Minister Mori's persistent demands for clarification of the grounds for claiming Korea as a vassal state, Minister Shen replied as follows:

Minister Mori: Hypothetically speaking, what kind of contingency plan does China have in place if Korea or China were to be remiss in terms of the rituals related to tribute payment? The issue is not irrelevant to our discussions of

5) The five topics of the Educational Directive were "loyalty, respect for Confucianism, public duty, martial spirit, and honesty."

Korea. Therefore, please shed some light on this matter.

Minister Shen: It is a given that the rituals of tribute payment from Korea would never fail to be performed. Therefore, it has never been necessary to concern ourselves with such an impossibility.

Minister Mori: According to international standards, all treaties possess express provisions regarding subordinate countries.

Minister Shen: Based on reason, invasion of a subordinate country cannot take place regardless of whether or not the matter is stipulated in a formal treaty.

Minister Mori: Western countries make various kinds of distinctions in relation to subordinate countries.... Some such relations are seen to be of great importance, while others are fairly loose. Since such differences exist between subordinate countries, we need to pursue this issue in more detail.

Minister Shen: A subordinate country cannot be subject to invasion as a matter of principle. Moreover, the occurrence of such an event is an impossibility whether or not there are treaty stipulations covering such a scenario [Itō 1974: 67–68].

In striking contrast to the minutely detailed coverage of the actual method of tribute payment (stipulating the numbers of people involved, schedule, route, and so on), there were no express provisions governing the basis of the tribute relationship itself. The Qing court's position was that the stability of this relationship was grounded in "reason" (*qingli*) and "principle" (*tiaoli*), not on legal stipulations. To the extent that reason and principle informed the exercise of authority, "invasion" by the suzerain polity or refusal by the vassal country to pay tribute was not only "unthinkable" but impossible. To employ more traditional terminology: ritual, not law, governed tributary relations. This logic ran counter to Japan's claim that vassal states were in fact independent, in accordance with its "modern" understanding of international law. The introduction of the sovereign nation system threw into relief the principles hitherto governing relations between China and the peripheral countries, a form of regional order that we today call the tribute system.⁶

It is clear that Japan consciously acted as a proxy of the "West" on such occasions of foreign diplomacy.

It is also apparent from the above exchange that the Qing representatives were intent on maintaining suzerain-vassal relations with Korea, steadfastly holding to the "unalterable principle" (*tianjing diyi*) of the Chinese order. The collapse of the tribute system was tantamount to a denial of China as locus of "(modern)

6) The term "suzerainty" (*zongzhuquan*) makes its first appearance in Qing diplomatic documents with the 1906 treaty between China and Britain regarding Tibet. Relations among China, Britain, and the government of the Dalai Lama were strained over the issue of control over Tibet. In contrast to the concept of "sovereignty," or exclusive rule over a specific territory, "suzerainty" was introduced to describe relations between the Qing court and Tibet in a manner that took into account Tibet's right to conduct independent diplomacy and defense. I should also point out that the imperial principle of suzerain control was articulated only in the course of engagement with modern law.

civilization" (*wenming*): that is, nothing less than an absolute denial of the self. The Chinese order—understood as universal norms (reason and principle) transcending differences between regions, cultures, and peoples—had to continue.

I observed earlier that modern nationalism presented the Chinese worldview with a tremendous challenge. Certain outlying areas in the empire sought to break free. Whether a given peripheral region severed the suzerain-vassal relationship to become independent or it was colonized, the economic, systemic base propping up the Chinese order was crumbling. Yet, as paradoxical as it may seem, the multilayered, overdetermined use of "(modern) civilization" (*wenming*) during this era may have preserved memories of suzerain-vassal relations, as I shall discuss in the next section.

4. MEMORIES OF THE SUZERAIN-VASSAL RELATIONSHIP

Twentieth-century Chinese nationalism took shape in the manner outlined in section 1. It gradually gained mass support in the Nationalist Revolution of the 1920s and the anti-Japanese struggle of the 1930s and 1940s. Of course, homogeneous sovereign rule was not immediately established. Political unification was largely realized with the establishment of the Nationalist government of 1928 and the Communist Revolution of 1949. Yet even today there is no national market, in large part because of the sheer size of China. Moreover, while unification of the Chinese nation has been an overarching goal since this polity was founded, by no means have all non-Han groups embraced a Chinese identity. Some have even raised separatist arguments for independence.

It is important to note that because the central government has tried to institute modern sovereign rule throughout the formerly imperial territories, it has had little choice but to rely on the logic of suzerain integration of the periphery. To be sure, the principle of ethnic equality found in the cultural policy known as "ethnic regional autonomy" stands in marked contrast to the hierarchy of the old Chinese order. Yet Chinese authority over former tributary territories (Tibet, Mongolia, Xinjiang) originated in the ancient suzerain-vassal relationship; with the substitution of modern sovereign rule for the former relationship, ethnic rule is given the appearance of legitimacy. In other words, the historical conception of the Chinese order has slipped quietly into the logic of governance based on the modern nation.

The selection of the reincarnation of the tenth-generation Panchen Lama who died in 1989 provides us with an excellent example of such slippage. On this occasion, the central (Beijing) government revived the ancient method of drawing lots from a golden urn first established by Emperor Qianlong (r. 1735–95). This system of drawing lots—which had been nothing more than a means of managing Qing-Tibet relations within the suzerain-vassal framework—provides a foundation for uniform sovereign rule from the center over Tibet. Indeed, the Chinese government's claim to guarantee to the holy community of Tibet the legitimacy of

the new Panchen in this manner presents us with a classic case of the "invention of tradition" by the modern state.

Much the same can be said with regard to the debates on territorial rights to the Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands. This area, which had been part of the Chinese order until the nineteenth century, was unilaterally expropriated under the unequal treaty system; the memory of its "loss" is still felt strongly. The Japanese claim to sovereignty over the islands rests on the right of prior occupancy of masterless territory. Not surprisingly, this position has led to conflict with China. From the historical perspective of a Chinese nationalist, the modern international system dating from the nineteenth century is characterized by inequality or asymmetry, despite its veneer of formal rationality. It is a given that the era's colonies and concessions—every change made to the national boundaries and sovereign possessions—were all unjustly exacted from China. The return of Chinese control over Hong Kong in 1997 was celebrated as fulfilling this modern Chinese desire to recover sovereignty; the central government's inability to accept the independence of Taiwan and Tibet can be traced to the same origins.

Although domestic changes in the Chinese order from the beginning of the twentieth century reveal a general trend toward the establishment of the nation-state, the shift from imperial rule to national unification did not take place uniformly. Even though the regional order in East Asia had been reorganized at the end of the nineteenth century as a mixture of sovereign nations and colonies, in geopolitical terms suzerain rule over peripheral regions continued, albeit in altered form. This can perhaps be read as resistance to the "modernity" of the unifying power of the vast empire. Yet this formulation presents a problem because suzerain rights are equated with modern sovereign rule: what appears from the outside to be the reappearance or resurrection of imperial rule is seen domestically as intervention in the interests of national unification. This gap in perception cannot be easily resolved through diplomatic measures, for "the nation" is another name for collective memory (or amnesia). When memories of the dead sacrificed "for the sake of their homeland" become intertwined with the desire to recover lost territory, personal memories are elevated to a collective experience and a "Chinese" nationality is reproduced on a mass scale.

Even so, a Chinese nationalism that has embraced the ethnic and cultural structure of the former Qing empire can achieve unification only by actively pursuing multidimensionality. The experiment of "one state, two systems" in Hong Kong has fascinating implications for the question of how China, as a "unified multiethnic state," will allow for the coexistence of divergent cultural elements within the framework of the sovereign state. But those in Hong Kong who look for local self-governance cannot help feeling certain misgivings. The transfer in control merely substitutes the domination of "Chinese"-style cultural imperialism for that of the English. The discourse of "ethnic liberation," "homeland," and "tradition" emanating from the Chinese mainland conceals a power relationship conceived in the interstices between center and periphery [Chow

1993]. Thus we remain faced with the seemingly irresolvable contradiction that China as a sovereign nation exercises on this very basis a suzerain's power of influence over peripheral regions such as Hong Kong.

Furthermore, despite its trumpeting of "ethnic liberation," "ethnic self-determination," and similar slogans, Chinese nationalism has not freed itself from a discriminatory attitude that ranks races and cultures. Quite the contrary: the twentieth-century understanding of *wenming* as the "modern" has created new domestic "barbarians." It is even possible to see this move as a reorganization in the ranking of racial strengths and weaknesses. The story of the 1951 "Liberation of Tibet" as the rescue of the "barbarians" by "(modern) civilization" should be interpreted not simply as a reiteration of Chinese ethnocentrism but as indicative of a certain ranking of ethnicities and races that places the West at the apex [MURATA 1996; SAKAMOTO 1996].

At this point, we can draw up a three-tier hierarchy of values, based on the opposition between "(modern) civilization" and the "barbarian" that is central to Chinese modernity.

1. West: East:: (Modern) Civilization: Barbarian
2. Japan: China:: (Modern) Civilization: Barbarian
3. Han Ethnicity: Non-Han Ethnicity:: (Modern) Civilization : Barbarian

It should be noted at the outset that binary oppositions of 1 and 2 can be divided into different phases determined by shifts in the Chinese perception of Japan as a channel for Western civilization, the real object of desire. In actuality, the two-edged, ambivalent feelings regarding modern Japan as a self-proclaimed site for the transmission of *wenming* continued into the Republican era. After World War I, suspicions of Japanese "(modern) civilization" gained strength (recall Sun Yat-sen's speech on "Great Asianism") with the revelation of Japanese designs on China. With Japan's full-blown invasion of China in the 1930s, the attribution of civilization to Japan and backwardness to China were reversed, and Japan's image as an exporter of "(modern) civilization" was utterly destroyed.

At this point, the relations depicted in 1 and 3 are of greater interest to us. Recognition of the superiority of Western technology and political systems had spread in the nineteenth century throughout both government and popular circles. Yet it did not immediately translate to a perception of China (the East) as "barbarian." As late Qing nationalism developed, some reformers tended to describe Chinese civilization as "decrepit." Blame for this state of affairs was laid at the door of long-term period despotism and Ming-Qing isolationism; the solution was seen in mobilizing the latent energy of the people (*minzhi*, or "popular knowledge"; *minde*, or "popular morals"; and *minli*, or "popular power"). A sense of cultural pride was also provided by the psychological mechanism of finding seemingly inferior, "barbarian" groups within China against which the "modern" national subjects could be measured. Not surprisingly, the major groups labeled "barbarian" inferior races were the ruling Manchus and the ancient vassal or tributary countries on China's periphery. In addition, Russia was designated the

Eastern barbarian; the 1903 movement protesting Russian invasion of China and other such moments of tension added fuel to the fire of ethnic hostility. Thus, as we examine the development of Chinese nationalism we must keep in mind that the binary oppositions between “(modern) civilization” and barbarism were multilayered (encompassing both the interior and the exterior of the imperial order) and sometimes reversible.

In sum, Chinese ethnocentrism did not immediately admit defeat even when recognizing Western or Japanese economic and systemic superiority. On the contrary, in the name of “(modern) civilization,” Chinese nationalism developed its own internal racialist rankings, strengthening its assimilationist or discriminatory gaze turned toward ethnic groups located on the periphery. Protests made by Chinese students in Japan against an exhibit at the Anthropology Pavilion of the 1903 Fifth National Exposition provide a particularly revealing example of this logic at work.⁷⁾

5. CONCLUSION

Benedict Anderson cites the spread of print capitalism and the rotational circuit of colonial administrators as necessary conditions for the establishment of particular modern “imagined communities.” It is thus of great interest that we can point to similar conditions already in existence in the later epochs of China (Song, Yuan, Ming, Qing). The technological revolution in the Song period, particularly the invention of printing technology, laid the groundwork for the flourishing of popular print culture and mass publishing in the Ming and Qing eras. As for Anderson’s second condition, we might point to the officials and their reserves,

7) When the 1903 Fifth National Exposition opened in Osaka, the inclusion of a “Chinaman” as part of the live display in the Anthropology Pavilion sparked a strong reaction. Indignant Chinese students in Japan lodged a protest with the Japanese government and called for the exhibit’s immediate closure. The matter was soon settled when the Japanese side made certain concessions. Of particular interest is the protesters’ reasoning: “India and the Ryukyus are already dead, the slaves of England and Japan. Korea is a protectorate of Russia and Japan, and once was China’s vassal. The Javanese, Ainu, and aborigines of Taiwan are among the world’s most inferior races, hardly distinguishable from deer and hogs,” so it was not right that “we Chinese” were being placed in the same category. In other words, the students were not angry at the discriminatory gaze directed toward “inferior races”; they were angry at the “insult” to their countrymen represented by placement in that category. China was not being acknowledged as a “(modern) civilized” nation [SAKAMOTO 1995]. Social Darwinist interpretations of ongoing conflict between the yellow and white races enjoyed a period of great popularity not only in Japan but in China as well. In both countries, white supremacism and yellow-centrism could “peacefully coexist” in the same field because they shared the same logic: discrimination on the basis of supposed racial strengths and weaknesses.

molded by the imperial exam system, who were rotated to sites throughout the great empire for stints of relatively short duration. Moreover, it could be argued that the resulting “public sphere”—free from the constraints of feudal status and heredity—was successful in disseminating a surprisingly homogenous “culture” throughout the empire. Yet despite these suggestive parallels, China never spontaneously formed a national community. As noted in the beginning of this essay, nationalism was adopted in China as part of a foreign “(modern) civilization” (*wenming*). Twentieth-century Chinese nationalism would not have emerged if it had not been for the mediation of the West and Japan as Other.

Nevertheless, even if the inspiration was secondhand, modern China embarked as a “subject” on a path of self-transformation, driving toward the creation of a single polity through national unification. Moreover, since China sought to squeeze the vast imperial territories into the framework of a national community (which holds homogeneity as an ideal), it inevitably became embroiled in both territorial and ethnic disputes. For China is an empire with the face of a nation-state, the fusion of sovereign and suzerain rule.

Accordingly, the historical legacy of the Chinese order has continued over the past century to manifest an unexpectedly strong pull not only on the former suzerain China but also on ethnic groups residing in regions that were former vassal states. This geopolitical framework will most likely become increasingly visible with the expansion of the Chinese market and predictions that China will be an economic superpower in the near future. Of course, the current dynamics of the international politics of this region should not be seen as solely or simply reenacting memories of the Chinese order. Nevertheless, we must consider the implications of the fact that the hot spots of territorial and ethnic conflict in Asia today are without exception mapped over sites where contests over “nation” and “sovereignty” took place as the Chinese order crumbled in the nineteenth century.

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