

Keynote Address : Comparative Studies of Civilization with Regard to the Formation and Transformation of the Nation-State

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**Keynote Address:
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1. INTRODUCTION

This year we are gathering here to participate in the sixteenth Taniguchi Symposium on the Study of Civilization. This is a series of international undertakings that have been carried out to focus on the theme "Japanese Civilization in the Modern World." It goes without saying that this initiative is aimed at constructing a comparative study of civilization as a science, which should differ from conventional disciplines such as cultural anthropology, history, or mere criticism of civilization. The first conference in this initiative was convened in 1983, and dealt with the theme "Life and Society." Since then it has been followed by many symposia focusing on various subjects, such as "Cities and Urbanization," "Mechanism of Governance," "Religion," and so on. This year we are to consider the issue of the "nation-state."

I have long maintained that civilization is a mechanism that consists of humans, apparatuses, and institutions. I believe that a "state" is one of the supreme facilities and institutions that have been created by civilization. As a matter of fact, many themes that have been discussed in the Taniguchi symposia are, either directly or indirectly, related to the state. This time we are to concentrate on the very subject of the nation-state, one of the subtypes of state that has been widely disseminated in today's world. Actually, the modern world and the nation-state are so inseparable that we could call the modern age the "era of the nation-state." To tell the truth, I have been developing a keen interest in the issue of the nation-state for quite a while, hoping to address it as part of the study of

civilization at the appropriate time.

In recent years, there have been various debates about the nation-state. One significant question is whether the form of the nation-state will continue to be as universal in the twenty-first century as it is today. This is of profound interest to us. In this symposium, therefore, I sincerely hope that we will not stick to conventional ideas and theories, but will instead review the nation-state in modern Japan from the broad perspective of the comparative study of civilization, the entire program thus enabling us to propose free and innovative hypotheses to aid further study.

In this keynote address, in order to provoke productive debates among the participants, I would like to present my views on some points.

2. FORMATION AND SPREAD OF THE NATION-STATE MODEL

The precondition for the advent of the nation-state in the modern world was the emergence of "citizens." A nation-state is, by definition, a state that is led by its citizens. The citizens are possessed of legitimate rights as well as obligations as equal members of a state. In most cases, the transition from the ancien régime of former times to the nation-state was accompanied by revolutions and violence. The major player in this transition was a newly emerging social class of citizens. The first nation-state born in history was the United States of America, which acquired independence through the American Revolutionary War (1775–1781). Aspirations for citizenship reached Europe, where they triggered the French Revolution, resulting in the birth of the first nation-state in this region (1789). Following the model of France, during the nineteenth century nation-states were established one after another in many other European countries. In Europe, several loose confederations were finally integrated into one political entity. Such integration in Italy and Germany took place in 1870 and 1871 respectively, which was shortly after the Meiji Revolution in Japan (1868).

There are various views about how the Meiji Revolution should be interpreted in this historical context. I believe it would be fair to say that the bourgeoisie had already become mature in Japan during the Edo period and that this new social class exercised its power to trigger the Meiji Revolution, thereby toppling the ancien régime. As a result, a nation-state was born in Japan.

Of course, not every new regime met all the requirements of the nation-state from its very beginning. Thus the nation-state was in a way a future objective that those who were involved with its formation strove to achieve. In Japan, the process of constructing the nation-state was fairly smooth, taking place with relatively little trouble. About half a century after the Meiji Revolution—that is, around the end of the Meiji and the beginning of the Taishō era—most of the major facilities and institutions essential for the form were already operating in Japan. More specifically, the Japanese polity was based on the centralization of political and administrative power in the national government, while the mechanism for

ruling the country also incorporated elements of decentralization. A constitution and a parliamentary system had been established. Infrastructures of transportation and communications were in place that covered the whole country. The educational system provided Japanese nationals with primary through higher education, which contributed to the dissemination of the national language, both spoken and written. The Japanese military was also functioning as a unifying organization, relying on national conscription. The religious system was consolidated, based on state-sponsored Shintoism.

One important question is which foreign model did the Meiji administration try to emulate and assimilate so as to design the modern state structure for Japan. It is normally suggested that various institutions that were considered to be pertinent and fit for Japanese requirements were borrowed from European countries, including Britain, France, and Germany (i.e., Prussia). For instance, the Japanese military was designed according to the French model at the start, and later it was modified to the German style. Those promulgating the Imperial Constitution employed the German counterpart as a model. I do not think, however, that the situation was in fact so simple. For example, consider the Japanese religious system; it is highly questionable that in defining its mechanism the central government tried to any great extent to refer to European models, for the latter obviously rested on Catholicism and Protestantism. Furthermore, we are unable to pinpoint a definite model outside Japan that could have provided a blueprint for the modern Japanese imperial system.

If I may digress from the main subject here, I would like to remind you that Napoleon I was called "Naō" by Japanese people around the end of the Tokugawa era and the beginning of the Meiji period. He was very popular among the Japanese as a great hero. Frankly, it seems quite clear that Napoleon I was studied closely by those Japanese political leaders when they were engaged in prescribing the Japanese imperial system, although he might not have been the only model analyzed. Indeed, the search in Meiji Japan for specific models is a very interesting research topic, yet to be explored.

Once shaped and materialized, the nation-state of Japan in turn became a model to be emulated by other countries in the world. Here I would like to focus particularly on China. Around the middle of the nineteenth century, the Qing dynasty in China, which used to enjoy the status of superpower in the international arena, suffered the serious political turmoil of such events as the Opium War (1840–1842) and the Taiping Rebellion (1850–1864). Facing both domestic troubles and external threats, officials of the Qing dynasty needed urgently to introduce major reform in the state. At just this time, the Meiji Revolution was taking place in a small country adjacent to the continent. It is well-known that Chinese reform leaders, including Sun Yat-sen (Sun Wen), were profoundly influenced by the Japanese effort at nation building then taking place. After the 1911 Chinese Revolution, the Republic of China was established in 1912. This means that China had an external model for their nation-state—Japan.

3. MODEL THEORY FOR THE MEIJI ADMINISTRATION: TWO ERRORS

What I have discussed so far is merely general background, on which I trust we all agree. I am going to present now a model theory, first of all, of the state under the Meiji government and, second, of the relations between the nation-state and the imperialist state in modern times. Interestingly enough, with regard to these two points, there seems to be a sort of a twist, an incorrect perception, when people discuss how Japan, China, and Europe were interrelated.

It is probably true that to some extent the state of Japan was formed during the Meiji period by emulating European countries. I believe, however, that China also served as an important model for Japan. For instance, a new system was introduced to name an era after the ruling emperor. This scheme to synchronize the sequence of eras with the imperial genealogy existed in China during the Ming dynasty. In addition, the Meiji government restored the naming of bureaucrats based on the hierarchy in the ancient imperial court. It also revived the old governing system based on the *ritsuryō* codes. Of course, the restoration did not occur at a substantive level, but only in the nomenclature for referring to government offices or positions. The point is, however, that the model for these initiatives was China, and not Europe. The very concept of trying to restore imperial rule in Japan derived from an effort to take the Chinese empire as mentor. Given this historical background, would it not be fair to say that the Meiji administration was essentially committed to maintaining imperialism, while, of course, it adapted itself to changing circumstances insofar as that was required?

From the point of view of Japanese people in the middle of the nineteenth century, even if they were aware of the Opium War and other afflictions, China was still an overwhelmingly dominant superpower in the world. The Japanese did not see the overall situation as serious enough yet to topple the Chinese establishment, which still showed little danger of collapse. But it was not long before the Meiji administration came to realize that their attempt to imitate the Great Qing Empire for the purpose of nation-state building was misconceived. The government soon abandoned it and started to assimilate the Western model.

It should be noted, however, that this second attempt was also flawed. Those European countries that Japan regarded as its model were, without exception, modern imperial states. Territorial expansionism and the desire to rule other ethnic groups are essential features of any empire. Likewise, modern imperial states in Europe possessed huge territories abroad. This was the case not only for Britain and France, the forerunners of colonialism, but also for latecomers such as Germany and Italy. Smaller countries such as the Netherlands and Belgium followed suit. All these countries rushed around wildly and hastily, sailing across oceans in order to gain as many colonies as possible. In this sense, imperial states were identical to colonialist empires.

Japan faithfully observed the European model in her process of nation building in modern times, thus pursuing the construction of a Japanese empire.

After integrating Taiwan (1895) and South Sakhalin (1905) under imperial rule, Japan annexed Korea in 1910. Following the conclusion of World War I, Japan acquired the so-called South Sea Islands, namely, Micronesia. During the Shōwa era, Japan extended military aggression in China, which led to the outbreak of the Asia Pacific War, resulting in total surrender. Eventually, the Japanese empire collapsed. On this particular point, one can discover a significant historical irony. It is that Japan, which was inherently the country most remote from any imperialist character, somehow aspired to become an empire.

Previously, I talked about Japan's two bad judgments in choosing models for its modernization. Although it might sound paradoxical, it would be correct to say that there was a certain consistency maintained in the Japanese approach, in that the construction of a nation-state was indeed the building of an empire. While changing the particular model selected, Japan was striding toward a specific goal with uncompromising consistency. When applying this analysis, one can visualize how Japan, Germany, and Italy were moving in parallel in their processes of undergoing modernization.

Now I propose to apply the concept of the contradiction between nation-state and empire to elucidate unique features of the Great Japanese Empire more distinctively. For example, initially the primary assumption for defining the educational, military, and religious systems in modern Japan was not imperialism but "nation-statehood." Later on, however, serious confrontations and conflicts arose when the Japanese government started to impose those institutions on peoples outside Japan. Because the educational system was relatively uncontroversial, its inroads into overseas territories were comparatively smooth. When it came to religious policy, founded on state Shintoism, however, such imposition was never successful. Obviously, the reason is that the religious policy was formulated taking only Japanese nationals into account. Unlike Christianity, Japanese Shintoism was unable to convince peoples in overseas territories that by accepting the religious faith they would automatically become subjects in a civilized empire. In other words, Shintoism failed to define itself as a universal religion such as Christianity. Those shrines erected abroad during this period were basically only to serve Japanese expatriates. The military of the Japanese nation-state was used as a means of extending aggression and imperialism abroad. Unlike the colonial armies of Britain or France, which were mainly composed of native officers and soldiers in colonial territories, the Japanese counterpart overseas had only limited numbers of native soldiers.

What is intriguing is that the Chinese approach to the relationship between nation-state and empire was exactly opposite that in Japan. What I mean by this is that China, which had established itself as an empire, aspired to build a nation-state. While maintaining territories along the periphery of the empire, thus preserving deep-rooted elements of imperialism, China embarked on an initiative of nation-state building. One could claim that even after the Communist revolution, China still remains an empire today. Nation-state building has yet to be completed

there.

4. NATION-STATE INTERMINGLED WITH EMPIRE

In fact, by reviewing the history of Asia during the nineteenth century, one can discover tangled relations between nation-state and empire in other countries as well. Korea, Vietnam, and Thailand were making efforts at modernization and reform around that time. At the same time, each attempted to establish a mini empire by incorporating other ethnic groups living along the periphery of their territories. Korea regarded Cheju Island as an overseas territory and made into its dependency a region in the north where an ethnic group called the *Joseon* (i.e., the *Manchu*) were living, thus claiming the entire land as the "Great Korean Empire." As for Vietnam, it is common knowledge today that before becoming a French protectorate in 1883, the country used to call itself the "Annam Empire," exercising a policy of territorial expansionism toward Laos and Cambodia. In this way, both Korea and Vietnam were trying to emulate the Chinese empire. Especially after the demise of the Ming dynasty in China, which had resulted from its defeat in a war against the *Joseon* in north China, Korea intensified its claim that its land was the very center of the Chinese continent. This was the so-called miniature Sinocentrism. In that context, it was only natural for Korea subsequently to pursue the development of empire. By the same token, Siam (Thailand) was endeavoring to modernize the nation from the end of the nineteenth century on, under the leadership of its kings. That effort also culminated in the formation of a mini empire, into which surrounding ethnic groups were integrated.

Similar phenomena can be identified in Africa and the Middle East during the nineteenth century. In the face of external pressure and threats coming from the great European powers, Egypt and Ethiopia strove to modernize and expanded their territories southward. Such tactics provide evidence that the effort to construct a nation-state was, in fact, closely linked with the effort to found a mini empire to the state's advantage.

Thus we come to the rather paradoxical conclusion that the theory of nation-state turns out to be identical to the theory of empire. Even in western Europe, which is normally considered the authentic "originator" of the nation-state, half hidden behind the flag of fascinating philosophy as well as marvelous institutions is the shadow of empire. In Asia, the Chinese empire, the Mogul empire, and the Ottoman empire, which were imperialist forerunners in previous centuries, were adopted as models to emulate. Likewise, in Europe, the Roman Empire and the Holy Roman Empire, the latter defining itself as the successor to the former, were seen as guides by countries in the following centuries. For instance, Napoleon, who came to power after the French Revolution, sought to regenerate the Roman Empire in his land. It should be noted that for most countries in the modern age, acquiring and expanding overseas territories were essential prerequisites for building a nation-state. Therefore, if one tries to discuss nation-states without

looking into their imperialist aspects, the argument would be lopsided and incomplete. In fact, such imperialist features were an integral part of various countries' efforts to develop the nation-state.

5. THE ADVENT OF THE NATION-STATE, THE COLLAPSE OF EMPIRE, AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF NEO-EMPIRE

Here let us look back into history once more to analyze the emergence of the nation-state. The century from the 1770s to the 1870s can be called the first phase. This span starts with the American Revolutionary War (the War of Independence) and covers the time of revolutionary movements in Japan, Italy, and Germany, which resulted in the birth of nation-states. Without exception, these vigorously sought imperialist advancement as soon as they were born. Following this group came Turkey, China, and Russia, which established new countries pursuing nation-statehood between the end of the eighteenth century and the 1910s, a period we can call the second phase. All the above-mentioned nations are similar in that after the dissolution of preceding polities, the core of the ancien régime was preserved within the new nation-state. What is important is that in the modern world, the advent of nation-statehood, the collapse of empires, and the development of neo-empires were deeply interrelated and proceeded in parallel.

Needless to say, the third phase of the emergence of the nation-state stretches from the end of World War II through the 1960s. During this period, the neo-empires—namely, *das Dritte Reich* and the Great Japanese Empire—collapsed on the one hand, while, on the other hand, colonial territories under the imperial rule of Britain and France achieved independence one after another, resulting in the disintegration of these older empires as well. Given these observations, would it not be right to argue that it was only after the loss of colonial territories abroad that Britain and France truly became nation-state-type countries? Furthermore, in 1991, nearing the end of the twentieth century, we witnessed the disintegration of the Soviet Union, which also used to be a prime example of empire in the modern age. Although much smaller in size than the former U.S.S.R., Russia today still possesses a vast land, where many ethnic groups other than Russians live together. In fact, Russia still maintains distinctive characteristics unique among imperialist nations. As for contemporary China, as I said before, it keeps imperialist features that are much more profound and intense than those in Russia. Probably China could be called the last empire in human history.

In theories of modernization, we sometimes encounter such expressions as “a nation that has not yet fully matured as a nation-state.” The fundamental question is; which countries can be referred to as “genuine nation-states”? The truth may be that no such state actually exists. In the American “Declaration of Independence” and the French “Déclaration des droits de l’homme et du citoyen,” the ideal of mankind was proclaimed in an exalted manner. When it comes to the question of whether such a supreme ideal has really materialized in both nations, the answer is

not necessarily "yes." As a matter of fact, an even stronger "no" is likely if one closely examines the imperialist aspects of both France and the United States revealed in their history.

Today many countries in the world face extremely serious ethnic disputes. It would be fair to say that these problems are invariably taking place in countries where imperialist or mini-imperialist attributes persist. If the state in these countries, under the name nation-state, functions as a mechanism to impose its ruling power ruthlessly over ethnic minorities in its territory, then naturally, at the end of the day, it will trigger ethnic resistance movements that will pursue self-determination for those under oppression. Today, more than two centuries after the advent of the nation-state in human history, it is claimed that in formal terms, most countries have become nation-states. The truth is, however, that "nation-statehood" in a genuine sense is still an objective that people greatly hope to achieve through still further efforts.

I am afraid that conventional theories of the nation-state have been inclined mostly to present European-centered views. Another shortfall is that discussions on the tangled relations between the nation-state and empire have been lacking. My suggestion is that by casting a Japan card into such discussions, we could shed light from a different angle. I would be more than happy if my keynote speech triggered a debate to explore a new path for innovative approaches, thus making some contribution to the study of civilization as a whole.