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Peter J. Katzenstein

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The Intra-regional System in East Asia in Modern Times

TAKESHI HAMASHITA

East Asia entered modern times not because of the coming of European powers but because of the dynamism inherent in the traditional, Sinocentric tributary system. The Ch'ing dynasty's attempt to impose its own mercantilist control over tribute met resistance from overseas Chinese traders to its trade policy and led to the expansion of overseas Chinese private trade. This in turn forced the Ch'ing state to shift its policy from trade monopoly enforcement to tax collection. European powers entered this changing tributary system in the nineteenth century and exploited it to expand their own influence. Japan seized the opportunity to detach itself from the Sinocentric tributary system, opted for westernization as a way of modernization, and then attempted to "reenter" East Asia, only to get caught between the resilient Sinocentric system and the emerging Westphalian international system.

My purpose here is to understand East Asia as a historically constituted region with its own hegemonic structure. To do this we must examine how the states and areas that found themselves in this East Asian system tried to cope with the transformation of the long-established, Sinocentric, tributary system in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The traditional historiographic categories of Western "impact" and Asian "responses" cannot adequately address the structural transformations in the East Asian hegemonic system. East Asian history in modern times must be examined in its own terms, with special attention to how its internal dynamism led to its transformation and how it accommodated the "impact" of the coming of European powers and the rise of a new international system.

Traditionally, the tributary system, central to the maintenance of the Sinocentric system of suzerainty, has been understood narrowly, as the recognition and investiture of a king in each tributary state. The system, however, understood more broadly, was the external expression of hierarchical domestic relations of control, extending downward and outward from the imperial center. In other words, the tributary system was an organic network of relations, between the center and the periphery, which includes the provinces and dependencies of the empire, rulers of native tribes and districts, tributary states, and even trading partners. This tributary system in a broader sense constituted the arena in which the states and other entities of Southeast, Northeast, Central, and Northwest Asia operated in their relations with China.

Reassessing East Asian Historiography in Modern Times

Recent advances in the study of modern East Asian history invite us to reassess orthodox historiography and to reinterprete East Asian history in new perspectives. The most important development in historical studies of East Asia for our purpose is the shift in emphasis from the study of the central governing systems to the study of peripheral areas. Local relations with neighboring countries have begun to attract scholarly interest. The larger regions are also drawing more attention. Research into the trading networks between the Ryukyus, Tsushima and Ezo, and foreign countries, for instance, have largely undermined the assumption of Japan's unity and autonomy as a state, nation, territory, and culture and underlined the importance of multiple trading networks in the East Asia region. These studies require us to analyze the tributary system and China's external relations in a new light and to examine its ceremonial and diplomatic dimension, economic relations, and the use of military might (or military relations) in terms of relative shift in the balance of power between the center and peripheries, between north and south, and between the Sinocentric geopolitics of suzerainty and international power politics. Three areas of interest are especially pertinent to our discussion.

First, studies of Japan's seclusion policy in the Edo period (1603–1867) in the East Asian historical context have underlined the importance of Satsuma-Ryukyu and Tsushima-Korean trade relations and demonstrated the relative openness of Japan's "closure." This discovery has resulted from the recent attempt to understand Japanese history in a larger regional context. Earlier studies on Japanese history invariably treated Japan's domestic history and its external relations separately. The recent attempt to study Japanese internal and external relations in an integrated perspective thus marks a significant historiographical departure. Japan was "closed" in the Edo period because of the "closed nature" of Japanese historical studies. Light cast on the core of Japanese history from the outside, from Asia outside Japan, suggests that it is now time to do away with the institutional and intellectual divides that have long segregated Japanese, Oriental (Eastern), and Western histories.

Second, studies on imperial systems in the North China at the eastern edge of the Eurasian continent have shown that a loose system of rule was constructed over East and Southeast Asia with tributary and "imperial title-awarding" relations as its central institution. The historical transformation of this larger region needs to be examined in light of the regional unity that was constituted and sustained by the tributary system.

Third, recent studies on relations between Europe and Asia have demonstrated that European powers participated in the historically constituted, Sinocentric regional order without reorganizing, let alone destroying, it. As Europeans made their way to East Asia via Islamic, Indian, and Southeast Asian spheres, they absorbed elements from each sphere and deployed them to their own advantage.

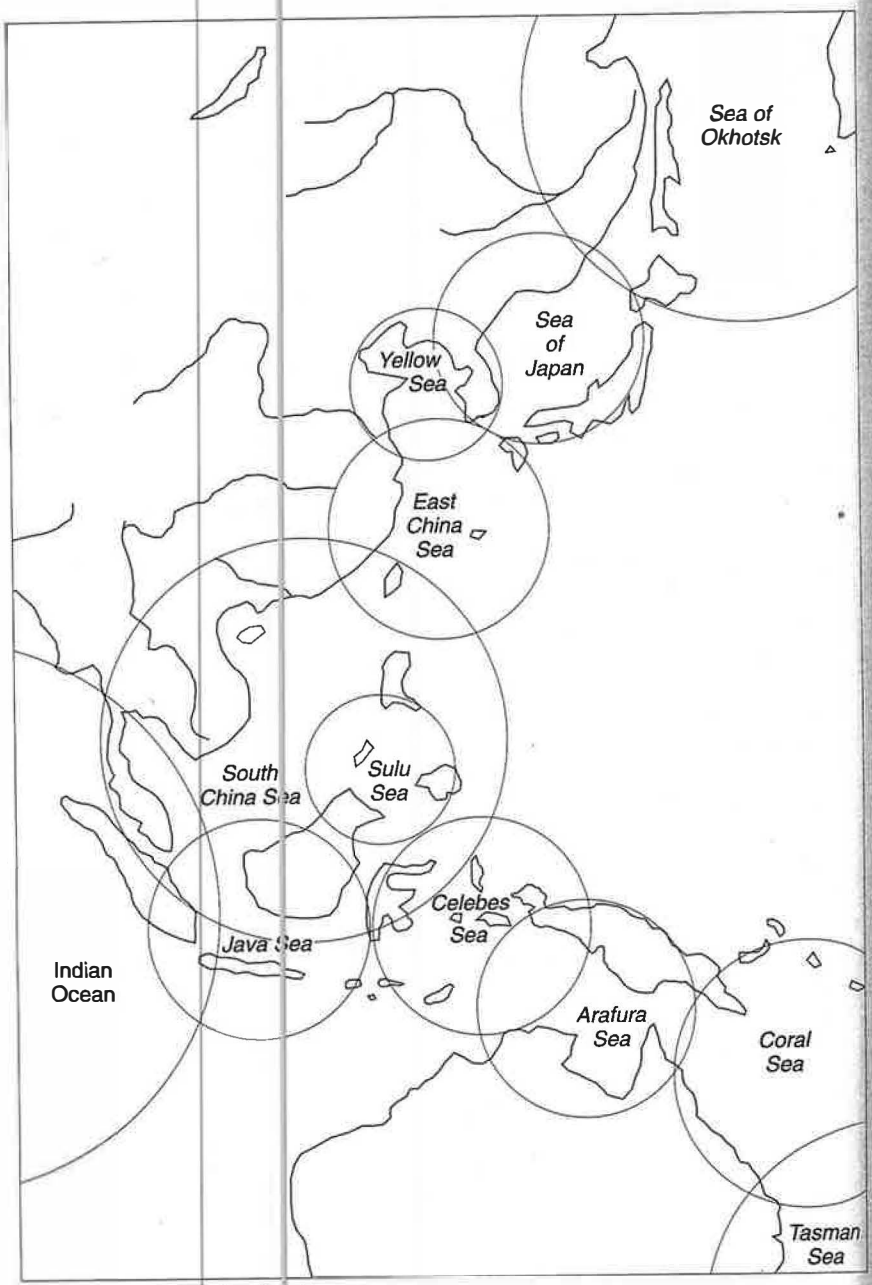
Crucial in this emerging new perspective is the "discovery" of maritime Asia. Historically, there existed several maritime regions that stretched from Northeast Asia to East Asia and then from Southeast Asia to Oceania. Within this vast area countries, regions, and trading centers and subcenters interacted with one another. This vast area is not one large expanse of water like the Indian and Pacific Oceans, but is constituted by a series of seas connected by straits. (See Figure 3-1.)

This series of seas extends from Northeast Asia to the southeast of Australia and includes the seas of Okhotsk and Japan, the Yellow Sea, the East China Sea, the South China Sea, the Java Sea, the Banda Sea, the Arafura Sea just north of Australia, the Coral Sea, and the Tasman Sea between southeast Australia and New Zealand. Maritime Asia is far larger, at least as complex, and much more diverse than the Mediterranean.

The landmasses surrounding the seas are thus separated from one another and have their own histories. The states, regions, and cities located along the periphery of each sea zone are close enough to influence one another but too far apart to be assimilated into a larger entity. Autonomy in this sense formed a major condition for the establishment of the looser form of political integration known as the tributary system.

This geographical context requires us to study Asian regional history as the history of Asian seas. In this history, each sea zone saw the rise and

Figure 3-1. Maritime zones of Asia



Source: Takeshi Hamashita, *China-Centered World Order in Modern Times* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1990). Used by permission of the publisher.

fall of political and economic powers. Attempts were also made to build closer intraregional ties. The evolution of the South China Economic Zone, nowadays a lively topic of discussion, is inseparable from the historically constituted area of South China Sea. The same is true of the regions centered on the Sea of Japan and the Yellow Sea.

"Western impact" did not destroy this maritime Asia or the Sinocentric tributary system embedded in it. When was it then that China abandoned its tributary system of suzerainty and adopted the principle of national sovereignty? How did its former tributary states respond? And what remains of the traditional tributary system in the modern and contemporary East Asian international order?

Given that the tributary principle reigned in East Asia and Southeast Asia for over a thousand years, it is difficult to conclude that that local incident known as the Opium War ended it. One might argue that the master-vassal relationship centered on China ended when China began signing treaties with Western nations, such as the trilateral agreement signed by Japan, China, and the United States concerning the opening of Korean ports in the latter half of the nineteenth century and the Sino-French and Sino-British treaties, which determined the status of Vietnam, Siam, Burma, and Tibet. But from the Chinese perspective, the tributary system was still very much alive, and in the case of Korea, China sent military assistance and political advisers to post-treaty Korea after the mutual confirmation of their master-vassal relationship.

The tributary system changed from within, as three developments in modern East Asia suggest. First, "tributary" states and "equal" trading partners had asserted themselves as "middle kingdoms" in their own right, to create a zone of autonomy and to resist China's hegemony, long before the Opium War. Second, the tributary trade, run on the governmental level, had become less and less profitable in the nineteenth century, because the Ch'ing government pursued a policy of currency inflation. This policy invited growing discontent among tributary states, led to a flourishing private trade, and reduced tributary exchange to nominal levels. And finally, former tributary states adopted Westphalian international principles and methods and turned them against China. China, in the end, gave up the Sinocentric tributary system in the early twentieth century with the rise of Han nationalist movement to overthrow the Manchus and the rallying of overseas Chinese merchants under Chinese nationalism, which was soon to become the founding principle of the Republic of China, that is, the "Middle" Republic. Since then, China's "middleness" has become strongly tinged with ethnic Han nationalism.

The Tributary System and its Transformation

The core principle of Sinocentrism was the unitary benevolence and dignity of the imperial institution and its ultimate extension to "all under Heaven." In the center, power was concentrated in the person of the Emperor, under whom a Grand Secretariat (or Council of State in the Ch'ing period) acted as a "cabinet" to supervise the Six Boards. Locally, the "government" was represented by eight Governors-General and sixteen Provincial Governors.

This domestic political structure may be characterized as follows. First, central and local institutions coexisted and their powers overlapped. Governors-General and Provincial Governors were on the same level with such central institutions as the Six Boards, with no superior-subordinate relations between them. The Treasurers too had the independent right to report directly to the Emperor, though they were ostensibly under the control of the Governors-General and the Provincial Governors. The Board of Revenue was located at the institutional center, but its management was largely left in the hands of the Provincial Governors.

Second, there was a sharp distinction between the officialdom and the population. At the prefectural and district levels, officials were not allowed to hold office in their home areas, lest they become too closely connected with the local population. This system was maintained to keep local officials from becoming hostages of social organizations such as clans and "hometown" associations and to protect the basic financial integrity of the state.[1]

The Board of Ceremonies was in charge of China's external relations; a special bureau, the Mongolian Superintendency, was responsible for the control and "management" of Mongolian tribes, Tibetan affairs, and the Lamaist hierarchy. In the late Ch'ing period, a new department, the Yamen of Foreign Affairs, was established to manage all official relations with Western countries.

On China's southeastern periphery, the Ch'ing government appointed local rulers as "Administrators of the Natives" and "Native Officials."[2] This approach to peripheral control started in the T'ang period, was inherited by the Yuan, and was fully institutionalized under the Ming. In the Ch'ing period, Administrators of the Natives and Native Officials were responsible for both military and civil affairs.

[1] To investigate center and local issues here means to analyze center-local relations from the viewpoint of the strengths of local society. See Chu T'ung-chu, *Local Government in China under the Ch'ing* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962).

[2] She I-che, *Chung-kuo T'u-ssu Chih-tu* [Official ranks to minorities' leaders in Chinese history] (Peking: Association for Periphery Studies, 1947).

Though nominally "voluntary," native tribute was just another form of tax payment, and the tributary system shared some features with domestic control. Besides, the general pattern of overlapping powers between central and local institutions prevailed in the peripheral "native" regions as well. Local powers thus had some room for maneuver and initiative despite the apparent concentration of power in the central institutions. It is possible to argue that the policy governing China's external relations was not very different from that governing its domestic relations. Indeed, the continuity in its domestic and external policies is quite striking.

Another way of considering China's geographic environment is to look at how China classified the surrounding maritime areas into Eastern Seas, Western Seas, and Southern Seas (see Map 3-1). Still, China's priority lay in Sinocentered relations, not in its geographical classifications.[3]

Its hegemonic structure consisted of a center, the domestic local areas considered most important from the center's perspective, "minorities" under Administrators of the Natives and Native Officials, areas in tributary relations with China, subdued groups, and finally trade partners in the Sinocentric tributary system. Under the tributary system a local ruler either visited or sent an emissary to visit the Emperor, who recognized the tributary group and hence legitimized its ruler. The "loyal" countries, areas, and tribes were then expected to pay regular tribute to the center.

Tributary countries are described in the Ming institutional code as falling under the following six areas or groups: (1) the first category of southeastern barbarians, that is, Korea, Japan, the Liu-ch'ius (Ryukyus), Annam, Cambodia, Siam, Champa, Java, and others, eighteen countries in all; (2) the second category of southeastern barbarians, that is, Sulu, Malacca, Sri Lanka, and others, forty-four countries in all; (3) the northern barbarians, that is, kings and rulers of Da-tan, eight altogether; (4) the northeastern barbarians, that is, the Nu-zhi; (5) the first category of western barbarians, fifty-eight groups from the west of Lan-chou in Shen-hsi Province, including thirty-eight from the western regions; and (6) the second category of western barbarians, fourteen groups altogether from the Tur-fan region.[4] In the Ch'ing period, China added more tributary countries and restructed its categories. The Ch'ing institutional code includes Laos, Vietnam, and Burma, as well as Portugal and the Netherlands. It also stipulated the routes tributary missions should take: the Korean mission was to pass through the Shan-hai customs barrier of Feng-t'ien Province; the Liu-ch'iu

[3] Huang Sheng-tseng, *Hsi Yang Ch'ao-keng Tien-lu* [Records of tribute from west sea] (Peking: The China Publisher, 1982).

[4] *Ming Hui-tien* [Grand Record of Ming dynasty], Cabinet ed., vols. 105–108 (Ch'ao-keng [tributary countries], 1502).

(Ryukyu) mission, through Fou-chou; the Annamese, through the Chen-nan barrier of Chiang-hsi Province; the Cambodian and Burmese, through Yun-nan; the Sulu mission, through Hsia-men; the Dutch through Kuang-tung; and the Portuguese and British missions, through Macao.[5] As we will see, it is important to remember when seeking to understand China's relations with European powers in modern times that these routes and points of entry, whether by sea or by land, were simultaneously trade routes and trade ports.

Given the complex historical and institutional significance of the tributary system, it is useful to examine how tributary relations functioned in reality. The tributary system as normally understood consisted of a network of bilateral relationships between China and each tribute-paying country, with tribute and imperial "gift" as the mediums of exchange and the Chinese capital as the center. Matters were never that straightforward. There also existed several other lesser or satellite tributary networks not directly connected with China, which made the system of reciprocal relationship significantly more complex. The tributary system in reality encompassed both inclusive and competitive relations extending web-like over a large area. One good example is the Ryukyus or Liu-ch'iu, whose kings sent tribute missions both to Beijing and Satsuma in the Ch'ing period, which placed China and Japan in a competitive relationship. Korea also sent missions to Japan, although it was a tributary of China. Laos was a tributary of Vietnam, itself a tributary of China. All these countries maintained satellite tributary relations with one another as well.[6]

The other fundamental feature of the tributary system to be kept in mind is its basis in commercial transactions. The tributary system paralleled or was in symbiosis with a network of commercial trade relations. Trade between Siam, Japan, and southern China, for instance, was maintained for many years on the profitable basis provided by tributary missions, even when much of the nontributary, commercial, trade was hardly remunerative. When the rice trade from Siam to Kuang-tung and Hsia-men became unprofitable in the eighteenth century, traders shifted their

[5] *Ch'in-ting Ta-Ch'ing hui-tien shih-li* [Historical record of regulations of great Ch'ing dynasty], Cabinet ed., vol. 503 (Ch'ao-keng, 1812); John E. Wills, Jr., *Embassies and Illusions, Dutch and Portuguese Envoys to K'ang-hsi, 1666–1687* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press., 1984).

[6] Kaneyoshi Uehara, *Sakoku to Ha boeki* [The closingup policy and (Liu-ch'iu-Satsuma) provincial trade] (Naha: Yaeyam Shoou, 1981); Fusataka Nakamura, *Nissen Kankeishi no Kenkyu* [Research into the History of Japan-Korean Relations] (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kobunkan, 1969); Ryoji Takeda, "Gencho Shoki no Shin to no Kankei [Vietnam and Ch'ing relation in the early Nguyen dynasty], 1802-1870" in *Vietnam-Chugoku Kankeishi* [Historical relations between Vietnam and China], ed. Tatsuro Yamamoto (Tokyo: Yamakawa Shuppan, 1975).

commercial focus from Liu-ch'iu and Nagasaki and thus maintained and even strengthened the general multilateral trade relationship.[7] Commercial penetration of Chinese traders and the emigration of "overseas Chinese" into Southeast Asia is, needless to say, historically intertwined with the expansion of this trading network. Commercial expansion and the development of the tributary trading network proceeded together. Trade relations in East and Southeast Asia expanded as tributary relations expanded.[8]

This tributary trade system also functioned as a form of trade between European and East Asian countries. In the records of trade from the Netherlands and Portugal to China in the K'ang Hsi period, several European-made cotton textiles are listed together with woolens. European-made cotton textiles are also mentioned in lists of tribute articles from Southeast Asian countries to China. Thus the tributary system in fact constituted a multilateral trading network capable of absorbing commodities from outside itself.

These aspects of the tributary trading system became more pronounced in the transition from Ming to Ch'ing in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. First, the ideal of Sinocentric unity was expanded and consolidated, strongly affecting Korea, Japan, and Vietnam. Second, tributary trade was expanded with the participation of European countries. And third, private trade expanded along with the tributary trade, and trade-related institutions such as trade settlement and tax collection underwent further sophistication.

China has considered itself the "center" for many centuries, surrounded by "barbarians" who are to be enlightened through the virtuous rule of the Emperor. The influence of the civilized center gradually spread outward and downward onto the surrounding areas in concentric circles (see Figure 3-2). The relationship between center and periphery was a unilateral and unified order in China's perspective. Seen in functional terms, however, this hegemonic structure consisted of (1) indirect rule by designating rulers of minority tribes as regional officials (*tusi, tuguan*); (2) rule over foreign peoples under the jurisdiction of Lifanyuan, a good example being the rule over the Mongols; (3) looser rule based on tributary

[7] Sarasin Viraphol, *Tribute and Profit: Sino-Siamese Trade, 1652–1853* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), chap. 4; Harukatsu Hayashi and Nobuatsu Hayashi, eds., *Kawi hentai* [Cyclical changes between Sinocentrism and barbarism] (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1958–59).

[8] Hisanori Wada, "Tonan Ajia ni okeru Shoki kakyo shakai" [The early history of Overseas Chinese Society in Southwest Asia] (Tokyo: Tokyo Gakuho, 1959), and "Jugo-seiki no Jawa ni okeru Chugoku-jin no Tsu-sho Katsudo" [Chinese commercial activities in Java in the fifteenth century], in *Ronshu Kindai Chugoku Kenkyu* [Collected articles on modern Chinese studies] editorial committee ed. (Tokyo: Yamakawa Shuppan, 1981).

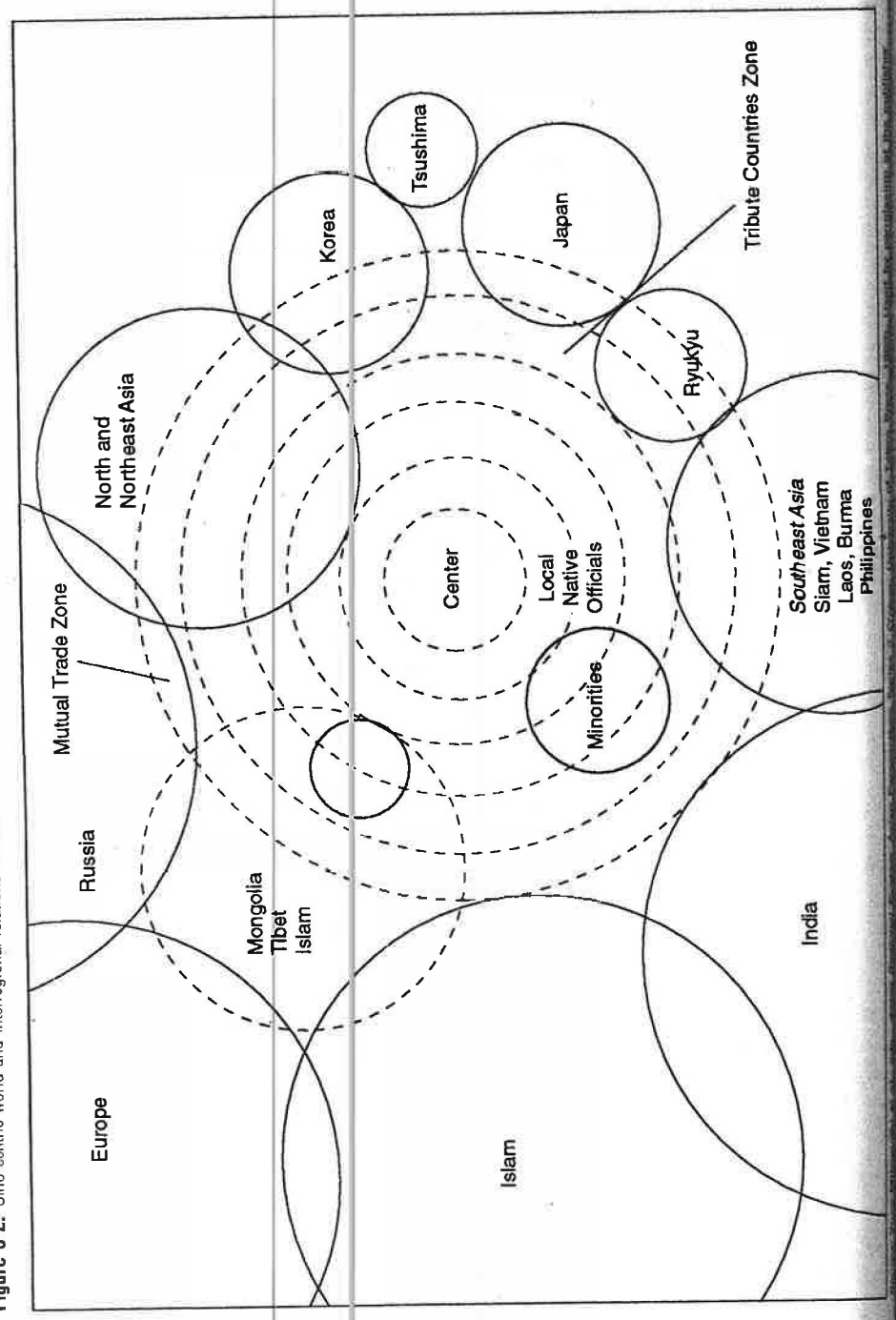


Figure 3-2. Sino-centric world and interregional relations in Asia

relations; (4) "equal" trade partners (with implication of independent relations) on the remotest periphery; and (5) the *huawai*, the area "outside of enlightenment (civilization), which the Emperor's virtue did not reach.

This concentric structure, based on the degree of strength in relational terms, shows that the tributary relationship in its original meaning was only part of the overall structure of suzerainty. This suggests that traditionally scholarship in this area has interpreted the "tributary" relations broadly in geographical terms to include relations beyond the original Chinese category and linked it directly to the principle of the "Middle Kingdom," and in doing so, extended the "tributary" relationship to mean the fundamental and centripetal governing principle.

The relationship between the tributary system and the centripetal governing principle of China may be accidental. The "tributary" relationship was dominant in East Asia, and perhaps for this reason, the Sinocentric order came to be identified in the literature with the tributary system. But this identification of the tributary system with the idea of the Middle Kingdom may be an oversimplification. As we have seen, the governing structure based on the order of the Middle Kingdom was characterized by several governing principles, including indirect rule, tribute rule, and "equal" trading partnership. The unifying principle that governed the entire Sinocentric order was the idea of the Middle Kingdom. It was an abstract principle for governing larger relations between China as the center and the other states and entities on its periphery, encompassing several different governing principles. It was not so much centripetal as comprehensive and intermediary.

Tributary states also shared the ideal of "Middle Kingdom" and were fully aware of their participation in the system. This is demonstrated historically by Vietnam, Korea, and Japan, which allowed China to intervene in their courts; these states asserted their legitimacy as peripheral states and acted as smaller-scale "Middle Kingdoms" in their immediate regions. Vietnam, for instance, required tribute from Laos. Korea insisted on the continuation of orthodox Sinocentrism under the Ch'ing dynasty, which it saw initially as a "barbarian" dynasty. China criticized Vietnam for using Nam Viet [south Yue] which existed in ancient China and forced to use Viet Nam [Yue south]. These cases show how tributary countries, acting from their own understanding of Sinocentrism, began to assert their own "national" identities vis-à-vis China.[9] The ideal of Sinocentrism was

[9] Park Chi-won, *Yeol ha ilqi* [Journal of the journey to Hot River City] (Seoul, 1780), trans. Yoshio Imamura (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1975), p. 5; Ryoji Takeda, "Gencho Shoki"; *Batavia jo nishi* [Diaries of Batavia], vols. 1–3, trans. Naojiro Murakami (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1983);

therefore not solely China's preoccupation, but one shared throughout the Sinocentric world. "Nationalism" in this sense was born in Asia from within the system and through the common ideal of tributary relations. Satellite tributary zones that surrounded the Chinese-dominated core had historically constituted identities of their own, on the basis of which they went on to their own modernization.

How did the tributary system work? What was the driving force of the networks in the system? Tributary trade consisted for the most part in the following: (1) two-way exchange of formal tribute submitted by tributary missions and "gifts" bestowed by the imperial center; (2) licensed trade in the Peking Assembly Hall by the limited group of merchants allowed to accompany tribute missions; and (3) frontier trade between merchants along China's land frontiers and in specified Chinese ports.

The form and frequency of tributary missions varied according to the degree of intimacy between the country sending the mission and China. Tribute from "native tribes and Districts" was required once a year, once every other year, or once every three years. These missions were allowed to open markets in the Peking Assembly Hall under the jurisdiction of the Board of Ceremonies, and their major tribute articles were horses and gold and silver vessels. In the early Ming period, Emperor Yung-le carried out the policy of "pacification" in the Northeast (Manchurian) area. Later, Manchu groups in the area who accepted Ch'ing control were organized into a "Pacification Guard" and established tributary relations with the Ch'ing dynasty. This tribute was as compulsory as the tax payment of other subjects. Tribute articles consisted mainly of horses and fur products. Korea maintained the closest relationship of all the tributaries with China. Tributary missions from Korea to the Ming Court were initiated in the second year of Hong-wu (1369). After a brief pause in tribute missions in the period of chaos at the end of the Ming dynasty, the Korean Yi dynasty started paying tribute again in 1636 and reopened the market at Yi-chou on the Sino-Korean border. The first tribute articles to the Ch'ing consisted of one hundred taels of gold, one thousand taels of silver, paper, furs and skins, cotton textiles, medicine (ginseng), rice and other items, twenty-eight categories of articles altogether. Gold and silver became tribute items when the circulation of silver in China became more frequent and when silver became a medium of exchange along with silk and brocade.[10]

Chang Tsun-wu, *Ch'ing-han tsung-fang mao-i, 1637–1894* [Sino-Korean Tributary Trade, 1637–1894] (Taipei: Academia Sinica, 1978); Yoshiharu Tsuboi, *L'Empire Vietnamien: face a la France et a la Chine* [Confrontation of the Vietnam empire with France and China], 1847–1885 (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1986).

[10] *Ch'in-ting Ta-ch'ing hui-tien shi-li*, vol. 503 (Ch'ao-keng).

In the tribute transactions described here, the relationship between tribute goods and "gifts" was largely one of selling and purchasing and the tribute exchange can be seen as a commercial transaction. Even the Chinese court thus acted as a party to business transactions. Its mode of payment was often Chinese currency, whether paper money or silver. In economic terms, tribute was thus managed as an exchange between seller and buyer with the "prices" of commodities fixed. According to Shigeo Sakuma, "Price standards were determined, albeit loosely, by market prices in Peking."[11] Given the nature of this transaction, it can be argued that the entire tributary trade formation was determined by the price structure of China and that the tributary trade zone formed an integrated "silver zone" in which silver was used as the medium of trade settlement. The key to the functioning of the tributary trade as a system was the difference between the prices inside China and those outside China.

The tributary countries and Chinese merchants often had cause for complaint under this system because the stipulated "prices" of tribute commodities often fell below market prices. And when China paid in paper currency, the profits accruing from tribute articles were pushed down by currency debasement, which limited the ability of the tributary missions and embassies to purchase Chinese goods. Despite these problems, the private, informal, trade that accompanied tribute missions expanded, increasing silver circulation and leading to the absorption of silver both from Europe and the Americas. On the whole, this tributary trade system took on the attributes of a silver circulating zone with multilateral channels of trade settlement in which silver was used as the chief medium of exchange.[12]

Tributary states thus grew increasingly discontented economically, because China has "rigged" tributary trade for its own fiscal convenience. The Ch'ing government demanded more tributary goods in larger volumes, but the goods it gave in exchange were not always those desired by the tributary states. The Ch'ing court often gave paper currency as its "gift," which depressed the value of tribute goods. The Ch'ing government also imposed tighter trade controls. Chinese merchants engaged in the tributary trade in and around China thus grew increasing critical of the situation. In the meantime, private trade along sea coasts, which had long accompanied the tributary trade, expanded with the emergence of Asia-wide commercial networks, and threatened to surpass the tributary

[11] Shigeo Sakuma, "Mindai no gaikoku boeki—kohaku boeki no suji" [Foreign trade of Ming dynasty], in *Wada hakushi kanreki kinen toyo-shi ronshu* [1Collected articles of Oriental history commemorating of the sixtieth birthday of Dr. Wada], (Tokyo, 1951).

[12] Takeshi Hamashita, "Kindai ajia boekiken ni okeru ginryutsu—Ajia keizaishi-zo ni kansuru ichi-koso" [Silver circulation in modern Asian trade zone], in *Shakai keizai shigaku* [Socioeconomic history] 51.1 (1985): 4.

trade in importance. This development was yet another factor contributing to the change in the Sinocentric tributary relationship.

"Western impact" needs to be understood in this changing historical context. It was in fact exploited by Siam, Burma, Tibet, Vietnam (Indochina), Japan, Korea, and other countries in China's vicinity to resist China and adopt "modernization" policies to become more autonomous within the framework of the traditional tributary relations in East Asia. European powers encouraged this path of "Asian modernization," but never replaced the traditional principle of order with their own and did not intend to do so except for extending the sovereignty principle of the Westphalian international system in their own relationships with Asian states.

Having reached East and Southeast Asia, European powers sought to conclude advantageous treaties with local states, but they encountered two major problems. One was how to decide whether the party they were negotiating with actually represented the legitimate power in its locality. The other was how to make sure that agreements concluded were honored. As long as the Sinocentric relationship in East Asia continued, bilateral treaties with local states that ignored their relations with China, especially when negotiating with states near or bordering China, were simply ineffective. European powers were forced to take into account the regional "tributary sphere," the East Asian regional order of suzerainty. They tried to establish treaty relations with East and Southeast Asian states while tacitly recognizing the presence of their master-vassal relationship with China. The tributary system and the international treaty relationship existed side by side simultaneously.

As we have seen earlier, the Western countries were not seen as outside the tributary system in the general Sinocentric scheme of things. They were caught in the logic of tributary relations, and geographically speaking, they were seen as located at some indeterminate distance beyond China's frontiers. In Kuang-tung, for instance, Britain was not even identified by Chinese officials as the same country that had sent diplomatic representation to Tibet. When European powers dealt with Asia, therefore, they had little choice but to deal with the tributary relations that formed the basis of all relations in the region.

This is beautifully illustrated by Owen N. Denny's remarks concerning the opening of Korean ports in the second half of the nineteenth century. Denny, former U.S. consul at Tianjin whom the Korean king had invited to Korea as his diplomatic adviser in July 1885, thought of Korea as a tributary state of China. According to Denny, in the past the tribute relationships were sustained by a faith unshakable as long as China's treatment of its tributaries remained gentle, cordial, and fair and did not seek to interfere either with another country's system of tributary relationships or with its sovereignty and independence.[13]

This remark clearly shows that Denny did not consider the tributary system and treaty relations as incompatible, but that he was not sure whether or not Korean state sovereignty existed at all. The Western countries, fearing the expansion of Japanese influence, tacitly approved the continuation of Korea as a tributary (vassal) state of Ch'ing China. To enforce Korea's vassal status, the minister of northern sea trade, Li Hongzhang, appointed Paul G. von Mollendorff as head of the Korean customs office and Yuan Shi-kai as political adviser to the king of Korea to supervise the signing of the treaty opening Korean ports.

When the Spanish and the Portuguese arrived in Asia, they had to participate in the already-established intra-Asian trade network. This restricted the direct exchange between East and West, since Westerners were obliged to pay in silver or by barter for what they wanted. The Dutch and the British found that they too had to come to terms with, adapt to, and learn to exploit the existing Asian tributary trade system. Consequently, the nature of Western "expansion" in and its "impact" on Asia was conditioned by the existence and the character of this Asian trade zone.

China and the Asian tributary trade system responded to Western powers and the treaties they imposed from within the system. It is difficult, therefore, to define the emergence of modern Asia neatly as the shift from the tributary system to the treaty system.[14] British penetration into Asia began in the seventeenth century through her East India Comapany. British ships carried Asian products, such as rice, to China, products that had previously been imported to China through tributary trade relations, which they sold to purchase Chinese products such as tea and silk.

In the nineteenth century, European powers began producing raw materials such as rubber in Asia to meet their own industrial needs and to sell their industrial products to Asia. For this purpose they had to link the

[13] Takehiko Okudaira, *Chosen Kaikoku Kosho Simatsu* [A history of negotiations over the opening of Korea] (Tokyo: Toko Shoten, 1935), pp. 172–73.

[14] H. B. Morse, *The Chronicles of the East India Company Trading to China, 1635–1843*, 5 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1926–29); John K. Fairbank, "The Early Treaty System," in *The Chinese World Order* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968); Kim Key-Kiuk, *The Last Phase of the East Asian World Order: Korea, Japan, and the Chinese Empire, 1860–1882* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980). J. K. Fairbank and S. Y. Teng, "On the Ch'ing Tributary System," in *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, no. 6 (1941); J. K. Fairbank, ed., *Trade and Diplomacy on the China Coast: The Opening of the Treaty Ports, 1842–1854* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953); J. K. Fairbank, ed., *The Chinese World Order, Traditional China's Foreign Relations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968); Morris Rossabi, ed., *China among Equals: The Middle Kingdom and Its Neighbors, 10th–14th Centuries* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983).

intra-Asian trade with the international market by establishing ports where balanced trade between two quite distinct markets could be conducted. These ports, Hong Kong and Singapore, which inherited the historical trading centers of Canton and Malacca, respectively, eventually absorbed a huge amount of capital from overseas Chinese.[15] This led to the closer integration of the Southeast Asian and southern Chinese economies and to their extension into the Indian Ocean trade zone. Nevertheless, the marketing structure in the European colonies in Asia continued to display the characteristics of the traditional intra-Asian trade associated with the tributary system. Elements of domestic, intermediate, and international markets all were present in Singapore and Hong Kong.[16]

Sino-Japanese Relations in Modern Times

With this brief description of the relationship between the Asian tributary trade system and the West, we may now turn to the question of Sino-Japanese relations in modern times. How did they start? Previous studies on the subject have concentrated on the differences in how the Japanese and the Chinese modernized under "Western impact."[17] Such a focus—on Japan's adoption of the national strengthening policy and on its imperialist expansion into China during the Sino-Japanese War in 1894—traces the history of modern Japan only from the perspective of "Westernization" and understands the history of moden Japan as the emergence of a "small West" in Asia. But to be more fully comprehended Japanese modernization needs to be examined in terms of its generation from within the Sinocentric tributary system. From this perspective Japanese modernization was an attempt to move the center of the tributary trade structure to Japan. In other words, the main issues in Japanese modernization were how to cope with the Chinese dominance over commercial relations in Asia, the dominance that had functioned as the base for Sinocentric economic integration through the tributary trade relationship, and how to reorganize relations among Japan, China, Korea, and Liu-ch'iu (Ryukyu) in a way that put Japan at the center.

First, let us consider these questions from the economic perspective. In

[15] Cheng K'uan-ying, *Nan-yu Jih-chi* [Diary of the journey to the South Sea], 1967, p. 33.
[16] Chiang Hai Ding, *A History of Straits Settlements Foreign Trade, 1870–1915* (Singapore: National Museum, 1978).
[17] K. N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Wong Lin Ken, "The Trade of Singapore, 1819–69," *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 33.4 (December 1960): 11–12.

the literature Japanese modernization is described as a matter of industrialization and the recovery of autonomy in tariff matters, that is, in terms of the formation of a national economy and the achievement of full national sovereignty. Analyses of these questions usually start with explaining how Japan achieved "national wealth and power." Yet if we ask why Japan chose to industrialize in the first place, however, studies are not very convincing. Although the details of Japanese industrialization have been much discussed, there is hardly any inquiry into why Japan opted for industrialization as it did. Because the course of Japan's modernization has been studied as a process of overcoming its subordination to Western powers or achieving its independence from the West, the importance to Japan of the historical relationship between Japan and China has been largely ignored. To understand the direction and nature of Japanese modernization, however, it is crucial to recognize that Japan opted for industrialization after the opening of its ports because of its location in a web of commercial relations with China.

Japan opted for industrialization as it did, because its attempts to expand its commercial relations with China had been defeated. Japanese merchants could not compete with the entrenched overseas Chinese merchants who ruled the Dejima trade in Nagasaki in the Edo period. Chinese merchants held a monopoly on the export business for seafood and native commodities that Japanese traders simply could not break.

When the Japanese consul in Hong Kong, Suzuki, emphasized the importance of the Hong Kong market in 1890 in a report he sent to the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he commented on the low morale of Japanese traders in Hong Kong and pointed out the following: (1) Chinese merchants were united and had a long-term strategy that went beyond short-term profit; (2) Japanese merchants were undercapitalized and when they suffered even a single loss, had to withdraw; and (3) there were indications that Japanese producers sold their products Chinese people were fond of to Chinese merchants much cheaper than to Japanese merchants.[18]

According to the consul's report, Chinese merchants not only controlled the local market but even extended their influence to Japanese producers, and he was very pessimistic about Japanese merchants entering the Hong Kong market. It was under such circumstances—the commercial power of Chinese merchants and their influence in Japan—that the need for cultivating the Chinese market increased. And it was from Chinese merchants

[18] Frances V. Moulder, *Japan, China and the Modern World Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), chap. 1.

in Japan that Japanese obtained the information needed to start a modern cotton textile industry capable of competing with Western cotton textiles for a share of the Chinese market.

In the nineteenth year of Meiji (1887), Chinese merchants in Yokohama started buying cotton cloth produced in Saitama prefecture. The parties concerned pressed the authorities to promote exports to the Chinese market and asked the Japanese consul in Hong Kong about future possibilities. Prominent Chinese merchants in Hong Kong advised the Japanese to produce cloth in bolts as wide as that sold by the West, both plain and striped, at a competitive price. Based on this advice, production and export to China got under way.[19] This example is representative of the general course of Japanese industrialization, which started with the production of substitutes for Western textiles in Asia. Competition among Japan, China, and India in the production of cotton textiles also started at about this time.

Increased foreign trade with Western countries through foreign firms also provided an impetus to Japan's industrialization. The expansion of new exports like silk and coal, along with such traditional items as seafood, accelerated its industrial development.[20] Although this was due to the commercial activities of Western firms, the main aim of such firms was not to export industrial products of their own countries, but to import Asian products. The opening of the Japanese market thus did not change its trade relations with East Asia significantly.

Political relations between Japan and China in the early Meiji period can now be reinterpreted in this light. Previous studies of the Sino-Japanese treaty of May 13, 1871, have generally concluded that the treaty represented the equality of the two nations as demonstrated by the approval of mutual consular jurisdictions. It is pointed out that the treaty embodied the idea of equality of nations common to modern international intercourse and that it marked the opening of the modern era in international relations in East Asia.[21] It is doubtful, however, whether the equality Japan supposedly obtained was recognized as such by Ch'ing China. China's dealings with other states were informed by its long-established idea of a hierarchy of dignity with the Emperor at the top. "Equality" with the Emperor was unthinkable, indeed impossible, in Chinese scheme of

[19] Otojiro Okuda, *Meiji shonen ni okeru honkon nihon jin* [Japanese in Hong Kong in the early years of Meiji] (Taipei: Taiwan Government, 1937), pp. 275–81.
[20] Ibid., pp. 244–247.
[21] Kanji Ishii, *Kindai nihon to igirisu shihon; Jadin-maseson shokai wo chushin ni* [Modern Japan and British capital: A history of the Jardine-Matheson Company in Japan] (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1984), chap. 2.

things. The Kiakhta Treaty of 1727 with Russia can serve as an example of this problematic.

Article 6 of the Kiakhta Treaty, which concerned the exchange of official letters, included a clause that implied "equality" between the signatories. The article provided that such letters should be exchanged between the Russian Senate and the Ch'ing Colonial Office.[22] Compared with the one-sided nature of the tributary system in which China was clearly dominant, the exchange of letters under the Kiakhta arrangement appears evenhanded. Yet China did not really see Russia as an equal; after all, the mandate of the Colonial Office was to control the affairs of the Mongols. The treaty also provided for the opening of mutual trade on the frontier in place of trade in the Assembly Hall in Peking. Although this stipulation also seems to imply equality between the two countries, the trade in question was originally conducted as part of the tributary trade. We can also find a good deal of evidence to show that knowledgeable Chinese believed the Emperor was merely doing a favor to Russia.

Given this historical precedence about "equality," how should we interpret the significance of the Sino-Japanese Treaty of 1871? The Chinese party concerned with the treaty negotiations was the Yamen of Foreign Affairs. The duties of the Yamen were similar to those of a ministry of foreign affairs. Established under strong pressure from Western powers to replace the Ministry of Ceremony, the Yamen included among its members some of the ministers of the Council of State and was thus far more powerful than the Colonial Office or the Mongolian Superintendency. But it did not have the power to bind Governors-General and Provincial Governors responsible for policy implementation. It is hard to imagine that when the Yamen signed treaties with foreign countries, China recognized them as equal.[23] It was Japan who exploited this expression of "equality" as if it were a concession from China to reorganize international relations in East Asia to its own advantage.

In view of these factors, which were implicit in the tributary system and not part of the "Western impact," we can argue that Japan's moderniza-

[22] Michio Fujimura, "Meiji shoki ni okeru nisshin kosho no ichi danmen: ryukyu bunto joyaku wo megutte" [Sino-Japanese negotiation on the Ryukyus] (1), *Nagoya daigaku bungakubu kenkyu ronshu, shigaku* [Journal of the Faculty of Arts of Nagoya University] 16 (1968). cf. Fujimura, "Meiji ishin gaiko no kyu kokusai kankei eno taio: Nisshin shukojoki no seiritsu wo megutte" [The foreign policy of the Meiji government toward traditional international relations of Asia], ibid., 14 (1966).
[23] Kin'ichi Yoshida, *Kindai roshin kankei shi* [Sino-Russian relations in modern times] (Tokyo: Kondo Shuppan, 1974), chap. 3; Eric Widmer, *The Russian Ecclesiastical Mission to Peking during the 18th Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976).

tion was initiated in a fairly unstable international environment. After Japan emerged from the isolation of the Edo period, it launched the project of abolishing the tributary system (of which it had previously been a part) and reentering into East Asian relations on a new basis. Japan confronted the tributary system when it tried to reconstruct its relationship with Korea and the Ryukyus. Historically speaking, its attempt to do away with a system that is still largely intact throughout East Asia ultimately proved fatal.

Migration and Chinese Nationalism

Large-scale Chinese emigration started in the 1860s, after treaties signed in 1858 and 1860 legalized overseas travel by Chinese workers. The treaties were a product of the desire on the part of Britain, France, and the Netherlands to obtain Chinese labor in their colonies to offset the international labor shortage that followed the abolition of the African slave trade. In 1866, Britain and France signed the Chinese Labor Immigration Agreement with China and started what became known as the coolie trade or the pig trade, the supply of Chinese indentured labor.

The Ch'ing attitude to these treaties was less of respect for the results of diplomatic negotiations than a reluctant concession to satisfy the demands of foreign powers. The Ch'ing government had long prohibited Chinese emigration for moral reasons. From then on, however, there was a remarkable increase in the number of emigrants working on rubber and sugar plantations and in tin mines in Southeast Asia. Between the mid-1880s and the mid-1910s, Chinese emigration to British Malaya totaled 4.1 million to Singapore (an average of 120,000 a year) and 1.57 million to Penang (an average of 44,000).[24]

It is well known that Sun Yat-sen was supported by overseas Chinese, and Sun himself actively sought to mobilize overseas Chinese support to advance his cause. In his lectures on nationalism, Sun referred to many different aspects of the Chinese tributary system and tried to reinterprete its historical significance within the national-international framework. He argued: "As to justice, even in the days of her greatest power, China never completely destroyed another state. For instance, former Korea was nominally a tributary of China but in reality she was independent. She lost her independence only in the last ten or twenty years."[25]

[24] Ta Chen, *Chinese Migrations, with Special Reference to Labor Conditions* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Labor, 1923), pp. 4–21. Yen Ching-hwang, *Coolies and Mandarins: China's Protection of Overseas Chinese during the Late Ch'ing Period, 1851–1911* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1985).

After pointing out the historical significance of the Sino-Japanese War for the tributary system in East Asia, Sun Yat-sen summarized the role of the system as follows:

> Let us again [go back a little further] and speak of territories lost earlier: Korea, Formosa, and Pescadores. These territories were ceded to Japan after the Sino-Japanese War [1894–95]. It was this Sino-Japanese War which induced the great powers to start to talk about dividing up China. . . . In the first year of the Republic [1921], Nepal was still bringing tribute into Szechwan. Since then no more tribute has been paid, because the roads through Tibet have been obstructed."[26]

> Thus, when China was strongest, her political strength inspired awe in all her neighbors. The nations in the south and west of Asia considered it an honor to be a feudatory state [of China] and to pay tribute. At that time European imperialism had not yet penetrated into Asia, and the only country in Asia that deserved to be considered imperialistic was China. That is why the weaker and smaller countries feared China; they feared lest they be crushed by her political force. Even at the present time, none of the weaker and smaller Asiatic races feels absolutely secure in regard to China.[27]

Sun Yat-sen thus replaced the Chinese tributary relations with territorial issues in relation to foreign powers and equated suzerainty with imperialism, but retained some basic features of the Sinocentric tributary system, which was based on authority relations, not treaty relations. Although the major thrust of his argument was anti-Manchu, anti-imperialist Chinese nationalism, it is clear that his basic idea about China's new external relations with its surrounding area is to some extent coterminous with the historical Sinocentric tributary zone. He explained this point thus:

> When we held our recent Nationalist Conference in Canton, Mongolia sent representatives to ascertain whether the Southern Government was continuing the imperialistic traditions toward the foreign countries. As soon as these representatives arrived and saw that the policy adopted by our Conference was to assist the weaker and smaller races and was utterly devoid of imperialistic tendencies, they heartily approved [our plan] and proposed to

[25] M. d'Elia Paschal, S. J., *The Triple Demism of Sun Yat-Sen* (Wuchang: Franciscan Press, 1931), p. 192.
[26] Ibid., pp. 93.
[27] Ibid., p. 94–95.

> unite [with us] in order to form a Great Eastern Nation. Not only did Mongolia approve our policy, but all other weaker and smaller races did likewise.[28]

This shows that the widest sphere of Sun's nationalism or the unified area in terms of space was imagined as being closely related to the sphere of the historical tributary system.

Generally speaking, Chinese emigration, despite its diversity, had the following common traits: (1) the maintenance of family and communal ties with home country, with considerable traffic between homeland and the host country; (2) the maintenance of traditional social units, customs, and lifestyles in the host country; and (3) well-developed social organizations for facilitating emigration. With these traits, Chinese communities developed their entrenched economic position in Southeast Asia. To promote the anti-imperialist movement in China and obtain financial support, Sun actively raised issues important to overseas Chinese. In his National Reconstruction plan, he wrote:

> Encouragement must be given to the education of overseas Chinese and our overseas cultural work, so that they may succeed to the fine cultural heritage of their fatherland. Special facilities will be afforded to those young Chinese abroad who return to China to study or work.[29]

Tribute and emigration thus became the two basic factors that conditioned the Asian character of Sun Yat-sen's idea of nationalism in its extended form.

How then, does modern Chinese nationalism differ from this extended nationalism and from xenophobic antiforeignism? The answer to this question, as posed at the beginning of the twentieth century, might be found in the social structure of China, above all, in the relationship between the state, the "race," and society. Sun Yat-sen himself also tried to establish nationalism on the basis of these foundations. But in China the state has always proved too fragile to support this sort of nationalism; and the other two elements, "race" and society, are not adequate to the task. Without a durable state, the core value of race quickly broke down, as Sun had warned that it would, into family ties, local social ties, and provincialism.

Tribute, trade, and migration, on the other hand, reinforced national consciousness among overseas Chinese under colonial domination. The overseas Chinese found their unity in the shared experience of living as

[28] Ibid., p. 95.
[29] Ibid., p. 262.

an ethnic minority. Thus, Chinese nationalism was created in the periphery among the overseas Chinese, where attachment to China and national consciousness was strong, not in the center. Overseas Chinese have also maintained the historical idea of a wider Sinocentric regionalism derived from the traditional idea of a "Middle Kingdom" and loosely related to long-term tribute relations in East and Southeast Asia.

The Chinese diaspora as a whole is strengthened and unified by an interlocking system of family ties, local and regional ties, national ties, and the historical notion of a "Middle Kingdom." Currently, the Chinese diaspora looks to South China as its economic and regional center, and South China itself is renewing its historical connections to Southeast Asia.

The Sinocentric world is thousands of years old, not hundreds. Over its history it has turned toward and away from maritime Asia. These broad swings have always had a deep impact both on Chinese affairs and on the affairs of Asia as a whole. After an interval of two hundred years, China has begun looking south again. The economic and political weight of South China and maritime Asia is likely to increase further with the return of Hong Kong to China in 1997. Such a reorientation of China may set in train developments that will reorganize Chinese relations with Singapore and the other Southeast Asia states as well as with Korea and Japan. An Asian maritime order, for better or for worse, is likely to intersect in new and unpredictable ways with the maritime order centered around the United States. In a larger historical perspective the United States is a very recent upstart in Asia. How it comes to terms with the ascendance of maritime China will have a profound effect on the evolution of Japan's position in Asia.