

Tributary System, Global Capitalism and the Meaning of Asia  
in Late Qing China

Zhijun Ren

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral  
Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the MA  
degree in History

Department of History  
Faculty of Arts  
University of Ottawa

© Zhijun Ren, Ottawa, Canada, 2012

## Table of Contents

Introduction: The Tributary System, Global Capitalism, and the Meaning of “Asia” in Late Qing China.....	1
The Tributary System: History and Historiography.....	1
Global Capitalist Modernity.....	4
Thesis Structure.....	6
Chapter 2. The Tributary System in History.....	10
Content and Formality of the Tributary System.....	10
Cultural Function of the Tributary System: a Hierarchical Order .....	12
The Tributary System as State-Controlled Trade in the Asia.....	13
Chapter 3. The Tributary System in Historiography.....	19
John King Fairbank: The Tributary system and China’s Unpreparedness.....	20
Takeshi Hamashita: An Asia Derived from the Tributary System.....	22
Tributary System as an Alternative form to the Nation-State.....	25
Connecting the Tributary System and Modernity: an Alternative Form? .....	27
Chapter 4. Multiple Modernities and Capitalist Modernity.....	30
The Idea of Multiple Modernity in East Asia.....	33
Rethinking Modernity in its global Capitalist Context .....	36
Chapter 5. The Problematic Imperialism: Imperialism as China’s Early Modern?.....	44
Chinese Imperialism and Colonialism without Capitalism?.....	49
Chapter 6. The Temporal and Spatial Dimensions of Modernity: Capitalist Time and Global Space.....	52
Capitalist Time.....	53
Global Space.....	62
Chapter 7. Commodity Form and the Nation-state.....	67
Chapter 8. The Case of Phan Boi Chau: <i>Wang Guo</i> (Lost State) and <i>Tongwen</i> (Common Culture).....	76
Phan Boi Chau and Colonized Vietnam.....	80
Phan Boi Chau and the Chinese Reformers: Liang Qichao.....	84
Phan Boi Chau and the Chinese Revolutionaries: Sun Yat Sen.....	91
Wanguo (亡国): From Dynastical Cycle to Colonization.....	95
Tongwen (同文): From Common Culture to Common Struggle.....	101

Chapter 9. Resisting Homogenizing Europe: Asia as an Alignment of Heterogeneity.....	108
Uneven development in Capitalism and Asian Heterogeneity.....	109
Takeuchi Yoshimi: Modernity in Asia and the “Heterogeneity contained in the Orient”.....	113
Sun Yat Sen’s Great Asianism: Connecting The Tributary System and Asia .....	118
 Chapter 10. Conclusion.....	 123
 Bibliography.....	 125

## **Abstract**

At the turn of the nineteenth century, global capitalism has introduced an unprecedented phenomenon: the reorientation of temporality and spatiality. Capitalist temporality and global space allowed Asian intellectuals to imagine, for the first time, a synchronized globe, where Asia became consciously worldly. Asian intellectuals began to reinterpret the indigenous categories such as the tributary system in order to make sense of the regionalization of Asia in the capitalist world system. The unity of Asian countries formed an alliance which resisted the homogeneity and universality claimed by European hegemony.

Along with the revival of the Asian ideal, the tributary system was reimagined as the incarnation of Asian heterogeneity, a source that could be utilized in the common struggle of resisting European hegemony. What the tributary system represented in the discourse of Asianism at the turn of the twentieth century, then, is a new possibility of relation between nation-states.

# **1. Introduction: Tributary System, Global Capitalism, and the Meaning of “Asia” in Late Qing China**

## Tributary System: History and Historiography

The origin of the tributary system can be traced back to the Han dynasty (206 BC–220 AD) and Tang dynasty (618-907), during which period the Chinese empire developed “loose rein” policies in dealing with the “Western territory”, namely Central Asia. The tributary system developed into its mature form during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) and culminated in the Qing dynasty (1644-1911). Beginning with China’s defeat in the Sino-British Opium War (1839-1842), the ruling Qing dynasty faced an unprecedented crisis posed by the European powers. The Sinocentric world order, which dominated East Asia for millennia, was fiercely challenged both externally and internally, and started to crumble. The most apparent sign of the failure of the Sinocentric world order was the collapse of the tributary system. China first lost its tributary state of Vietnam to France in the Sino-French War (1884-1885), and then lost Korea to Japan in the first Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895). The Sinocentric world order was in crisis and eventually faded away. The last phase of the East Asian world order ended with the introduction of the treaty system, the embodiment of a global capitalist world order imposed by the West.

Since the publication of several seminal works on the tributary system by the prominent China-scholar John King Fairbank between 1940s and 1960s, the study of the tributary system and the East Asian world order has become a part of the historiographical tradition of Western Sinology. Fairbank developed his well-known and still influential paradigm of “Western impact, China response” to explain Chinese modernization. According to this modernist theory, China’s modernization is always examined against the criteria created by the West and Japan. In this view, the

modernization of East Asia, particularly that of China, was triggered by the Western challenge. Nationalism originated in Europe, and only began to appear in East Asia after the dominant Chinese culturalism was challenged by, and yielded to, the Western nationalist way of thinking. The core proposition of this culturalist paradigm was that a set of universal ideals dominated traditional China. These ideals were fundamentally incompatible with modern nationalism. Accordingly, the Chinese, Vietnamese, and Korean only began to see themselves as belonging to different nation-states after the transition from culturalism to nationalism had been accomplished.

Following Fairbank, the historiographical tradition dismissed the tributary system as an obsolete institution that had completely withered, and had been edged out by the modern treaty system imposed by the Western imperialist powers. However, recent scholarship, especially that produced by Japanese historian Takeshi Hamashita, has provided a revisionist perspective. Hamashita, in contrast to Fairbank, has moved to a more China-centered approach. In effect, partially in response to Fairbank, he has pioneered the study of the tributary system from an East Asian perspective. Hamashita contends that historians need to examine the internal dynamics within Asia in order to understand modernity in Asia. Hamashita asserts that Asian modernization, including early industrialization, commercialization and the emergence of nationalism, originated from the indigenous tributary system. Furthermore, according to Hamashita, the tributary system enabled East Asia to start its regionalization (and modernization) as early as in the seventeenth century. After examining a series of interactions between Asian states in the premodern era, Hamashita reaches the conclusion that “tributary countries began to take

on national identities vis-à-vis China, based on their own understandings of Sinocentrism and the tributary order.”<sup>1</sup>

For Hamashita, Fairbank’s traditional historiography had understood the tributary system narrowly as “recognition and investiture of a king in each tributary state” and “the external expression of hierarchical relationship central to the maintenance of the Sinocentric system.”<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, critiquing Fairbank’s paradigm of “West impact, China response”, Hamashita comments that “the nature of western expansion in and impact on Asia was conditioned by the existence of a vibrant Asian trade zone based on the tribute trade system, well into the modern period. China and the Asian tribute trade system in turn responded to Western countries and the imposed treaties from within the system.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, beyond the unequal dialogue of West and Asia, there were sub-dialogues within Asia, which Fairbank had neglected to analyze.

Fairbank and Hamashita have each distinctively analyzed one aspect of the tributary system: Fairbank stresses the external challenges, which forced the transition from culturalism to nationalism in China; Hamashita seeks to interpret the tributary system as an internal dynamic of Asian nationalism. Although Hamashita has advanced the study of the tributary system since Fairbank, his attempt to formulate an alternative “Asian modernity” is only partially successful. What is missing in Hamashita’s understanding of modernity is the force of global capitalism. Neither Fairbank nor Hamashita grasp the tributary system in terms of the global capitalist world system and thus fail to understand the significance of this system and its applicability in the modern world.

### Global Capitalist Modernity

---

<sup>1</sup> Takeshi Hamashita, *China, East Asia and the Global Economy: Regional and Historical Perspectives*; (London; New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 19.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 13

| <sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 12

By the end of nineteenth century, East Asia was dragged into a “disjunct world” or unevenly developed world, namely the global capitalist world system. A dual-transformation took place as East Asia struggled to “reconfigure itself” during this historical moment of transition. Internally, China had transformed from a multiethnic empire, the center of a tributary system, to a nation-state among other sovereign nation-states. From the standpoint of international relations, China’s relations to its neighbors, such as Korea and Vietnam were now no longer conditioned by Confucian hierarchical/familial intra-regional relations, which involved a regional diplomacy among peripheries (tribute states) and the center (Qing dynasty). Since the late nineteenth century, the Chinese had to understand their role in the world in terms of relations between equal nation-states characterized by independence and mutual-recognition.

While Fairbank grasped the external force that enabled the transition from culturalist worldview to a nationalist worldview, he nonetheless used an ambiguous analytical category, “the West”. By creating a binary opposition of “the West” and “China”, Fairbank failed to take into account the global nature of the capitalist world system. On the other hand, Hamashita emphasizes exclusively the interactions between different countries within Asia and overlooked the critical part the global capitalist modernity played in the formation of Asian nationalism.

The global capitalist condition created by China’s clash with the modern world gave birth to a new national identity and concept of Asia, which was transnational. The idea of tributary system, although not highly visible, played a crucial part in the forming of this new national and regional identity. At a time when modern nationalistic discourse was taking shape in China, the legacy of the tributary system, reinterpreted and recast, shaped the Chinese worldview and helped Chinese intellectuals to understand the emergence of the new imagination of Asia, as a region and a concept. Moreover, the tributary system

and its legacy were re-conceptualized and rearticulated by the Chinese intellectuals in order to cope with the imposition of global modernity. The tributary system lingered, unlike Fairbank had suggested, as a critical intellectual source for Chinese thinkers at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>4</sup>

In his study of the historical thinking of Liang Qichao, Xiaobing Tang forcefully demonstrated the modern transition and formation of Chinese nationalism and self-identity:

The world as a mappable totality, or rather the concept of a whole world, introduced a sudden spatiotemporal reorientation. *It forcibly revealed a limitedness or parochialism in the traditional cosmological order...* like generations of Chinese, had organized his daily life and sense of identity. The new and contentment, suggested *the simultaneous existence of uneven and different national territories and spaces. It visually demonstrated a new world order.*<sup>5</sup>

As the manifestation of “the traditional cosmological order”, the Sinocentric ideology of tributary system once claimed itself to be a universal order. The incursion of capitalist modernity relentlessly exposed its “limitedness or parochialism.” It appears that the first and foremost task for the modern Asian nationalists was to divorce themselves from the “traditional cosmological order” and achieve a spatiotemporal reorientation by inscribing China in the new global space. Nonetheless, the seemingly obsolete tributary system provided a spatial basis for the modern transition of Asian nationalism. In other words, it was precisely the legacy of the disaggregation of tributary system that had

---

<sup>4</sup> For example, in the 1915 edition of *Reflections on Losing One's Country* (亡國鑒), the editor Yin Ruli (殷汝驪) had included essays on the history of Vietnam, Korea, Burma, India, Egypt and Poland. It is noteworthy that the first three essays focus on former Chinese tribute states. Editor Yin's choices of topics revealed a pervading ambivalent feeling toward the situation of the modern world among the intellectuals. From one hand, many intellectuals still used the framework of tributary system to interpret the world; on the other hand, a concept of global capitalist modern world was taking shape. Yin's choices of topics illustrated this ambivalent feeling; former tribute states of China (Vietnam, Korea and Burma) are presented together with some remote and unrelated nation-states (Egypt and Poland).

<sup>5</sup> Xiaobing Tang, *Global Space and the Nationalist Discourse of Modernity: the Historical Thinking of Liang Qichao*. (California: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 2

prepared and allowed East Asia's transformation from a universal empire and its tribute states to sovereign and territorial nation-states.

It is of crucial significance for us to understand the introduction of "simultaneous existence of uneven and different national territories and space" into the minds of Chinese intellectuals and how this had initiated a structural re-conceptualization of the world, as well as China's place in it. For the first time, the world, or, to be more precise, the global capitalist world system, is presented to the Chinese in both its temporal and spatial dimensions. Hence, as Tang has pointed out, Chinese re-conceptualization of the world is fundamentally dominated and conditioned by a new spatiotemporal notion of "global, universal time" and "stable and coherent self-identity by means of a territorial nation."<sup>6</sup>

### Thesis Structure

Following the introduction, the second and third chapters will lay a foundation for the understanding of the tributary system in both history and historiography. These two chapters focus on the historical functions of the tributary system in the Qing dynasty and the evolving historiographical interpretations of the significance of the tributary system. These chapters will demonstrate how, through historians' interpretations, the tributary system has become incorporated into a broader discourse on modernity and the antinomies of empire and nation-state in Chinese history.

The second and third chapters prepare a ground upon which a discussion of higher level of abstraction could be conducted. In the following fourth and fifth chapters, attempts will be made to achieve a thorough understanding of modernity in global capitalism. Chapter four and five specifically scrutinize the popular discourses that appeal

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

to the multiplicities of modernities. These trends of promoting alternative and multiple modernities will be critically posited in the theoretical context of global capitalism. A thorough rethinking of the basic characteristics of modernity will reveal that the claims of multiple and alternative modernities are conceptually inadequate for an understanding of the dynamics of the capitalist world. Chapter six continues to examine the central characterization of capitalist modernity, namely a transformative temporal-spatial reorientation that created, at an unprecedented level, capitalist time and global space. China's modern experience will be located in this particular temporal-spatial transformation.

Chapter seven narrows down the broader discourse of capitalist modernity to the more specific issue of the nation-state in the capitalist world system. This chapter shows that the rise of the nation-state is intimately yet intricately linked to the contradictory structure of commodity form. The paradox embodied in the modern nation-state is rather a manifestation of use-value and exchange-value, two intrinsic aspects of the commodity form.

While chapter two and three represent a more concrete and historically specified research of the tributary system, chapter four to seven propose a rather abstract and theoretical investigation of the nature of modernity in the age of global capitalism. It is crucial to develop a conceptual framework, by addressing the concept of modernity in a sense that is historically specific to capitalism; this rethinking enables an approach that explicitly grasps the most fundamental characteristics of modernity in capitalism. The current historiography of China's modern experience in the capitalist world has so far been unable to account for the transformations that occurred at the most fundamental, yet abstract level.

Having reconceptualized modernity and its inflection in China, this thesis will move to its core chapters of eight and nine, where the abstractness of critical theories meets historical concreteness. The critical conceptualizations of modernity, temporality and spatiality, and commodity form, developed in the earlier chapters will form the analytical categories for these core chapters. By highlighting a Vietnamese anti-colonial revolutionary, Phan Boi Chau's floating life in colonized Vietnam, semi-colonized China and imperial Japan, chapter eight considers how was the remnant of tradition—the tributary system, connected with an emerging modern form of unity—Asianism. Chapter eight also attempts to show the complex interactions between nationalism, regionalism and global capitalism at the turn of the twentieth century. Conditioned by capitalist modernity, these interactions endowed old ideas with new meaning. In chapter nine, the tributary system will be directly situated in the context of early twentieth century Asianism.

By bringing together some heretofore unexamined aspects of Chinese intellectuals' world view, my research attempts to discover the historical transformation of Chinese nationalism and world view enacted by China's encounter with the modern global system between 1890s and 1920s. This thesis will be historical as well as theoretical. David Harvey once expressed his dissatisfaction in the absence of a connection between the abstractness of theoretical framework and the concreteness of historical and social narratives. He argues that the so-called “Theoretically informed” works are usually:

An introductory and concluding chapter in which the works of major theoreticians are in the forefront of argument, separated by a case study in which it is often hard to discern even a trace of influence of any of the theoretical work appealed to at the beginning and the end.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup>Harvey David, *Spaces of Global Capitalism: Towards a Theory of Uneven Geographical Development*. (New York: Verso, 2006), p. 78

It is the aim of this thesis to examine both the concrete and the abstract dimensions of the historical transition that took place in realms of space and time. To this end, this thesis will survey periodicals such as journals, newspapers, and magazines that were produced between 1880s and 1920s. An examination of the discourse the Chinese intellectuals used in their writing of East Asia will reveal how they constantly revised their worldview and national identity in order to cope with and adapt themselves to encroaching global Capitalist modernity. In addition to the “concreteness” of historical events, this thesis also places a significant emphasis on contemporary critical theories in attempt to establish a delicate connection between the abstract and concrete.

## 2. The Tributary System in History

### Content and Formality of the Tributary System

The origin of the Sino-centric tributary system (朝贡体系) can be traced back to the Han dynasty (206 BC–220 AD) and Tang dynasty (618-907), during which period China developed a Ji-Mi (羁縻), or “loose rein” policy in dealing with the Central Asian territories. The Loose Rein policy was actualized through the establishment of military and civil prefectures in the Central Asian region. These structures enabled the Chinese dynasties to impose a direct control over the region. The tributary system was a more sophisticated and thoroughly institutionalized set of policies, developed into its mature form during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) and culminated in the Qing dynasty (1644-1911). During the late Qing era, when China was in decline, China first lost Vietnam to France in the Sino-French war of 1884-1885, and again lost Korea to Japan in the first Sino-Japanese war 1894-1895. Meanwhile, with the escalation of Western incursion in Asia, the tributary system eventually collapsed and was replaced by the treaty and port trade system, which signalled the triumph of European powers in East Asia.

Historically, both Vietnam and Korea constituted a part of the Chinese empire. Even after their respective independence, Vietnam and Korea retained their acceptance of the Chinese ideographic writing system, Confucianism, the Chinese style bureaucracy and the Chinese civil examination system, which already formed their indigenous political institutions and ideological principles. Moreover, Vietnam and Korea maintained the tribute relation with China for the reason of geographic proximity as well as cultural similarity. John King Fairbank commented that “in theory, they were irresistibly drawn

into this relationship, they ‘came and were transformed’ (*lai-hua*), by the superior blessing of (Chinese) civilization.”<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, Siam and Southeast Asian states maintained their tribute relations with China as sheer formality. In terms of ideology and political institution, they displayed some highly Indianized characteristics. Similarly, China’s tribute relations with the Northeast and Central Asian states were rather sustained by trade of necessary commodities. China’s request of horses suitable for battle met with the Northeast and Central Asian states’ need of Chinese tea, silk and porcelain, which, at this time, were only produced in China. Trades of these necessities and luxuries were considered important for both sides.

There are three dimensions of the tributary system, namely cultural and ritual dimensions, diplomatic dimensions and trade dimensions. In conventional historiography, emphasis is placed mostly on the ritual and cultural aspects of the tribute system. The appropriate forms and ceremonies performed between the tributary rulers and the Chinese emperor, John King Fairbank argued, “constituted the tribute system”<sup>9</sup>. These rituals and formalities usually include the following items:

1. An imperial appointment was bestowed upon the tributary prince in the forms of a document recognizing the ruler’s status as a tributary.
2. A noble rank was also conferred upon the tributary prince.
3. An imperial seal was granted, to be used in the signing of the tributary prince’s tributary memorials.
4. The Chinese calendar was extended over the tributary states.

---

<sup>8</sup> John King Fairbank ed. *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's Foreign Relations*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 9

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p. 10

## Cultural Function of the Tributary System: Maintaining a Hierarchical Order

In the premodern Sino-centric world order, the tributary system functioned on an abstract level to differentiate and mediate between the civilized Self and the “barbarous” Other.

When it comes to differentiation of self and other, civilized and barbarian, two distinctive and competing traditions, known as the Gongyang School (公羊) and the Zuozhuan School (左传) respectively, were maintained in the Confucian doctrines. According to the Gongyang School, which was inclusive in nature, the barbarians could be absorbed through acculturation and transformation, and therefore carried the potential to become the civilized “We”. The Zuozhuan School, on the other hand, stressed the incompatibility of the barbarians and Chinese civilization. It argued that “if he be not of our kin, he is sure to have a different mind.”<sup>10</sup> The different views of the Gongyang and Zuozhuan schools could be seen as a divergence between culturalism and ethnocentrism. Whereas the Gongyang School was inclined to see human nature as transformable and alterable, the Zuozhuan School was more essentialist in nature.

The tributary system functioned to implement a synthesis of these two opposing traditions. The tributary system performed the task of being inclusive and exclusive at the same time. It was meant to be universal, hence embrace “All under Heaven,” and simultaneously maintain a highly hierarchical, and therefore, segmented, world order. On one hand, the tributary system claimed to universality; those nations who submitted to Chinese suzerainty all belonged to a universal Confucian cultural sphere. On the other hand, this universal cultural sphere was structured hierarchically. This cultural sphere radiates from the Middle Kingdom and disperses to the four corners of all-under-heaven. By doing so, the tributary system was able to achieve a synthesis of Self and Other in the

---

<sup>10</sup> James Leibold, *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism: How the Qing Frontier and its Indigenes Became Chinese*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 22

pre-capitalist sinocentric world order. It defined itself as the central domain, the middle kingdom and the sole source of Confucian knowledge, virtue and authority. Meanwhile the tributary system defined the “Other”: the outer peripheries, recipient and benefactors of the Confucian virtues.

Remarking on the diplomatic dimension of the tribute system, Fairbank observed: “The traditional Chinese order can hardly be called international because the participants in it did not use concepts corresponding to the Western ideas of nation, or sovereignty, or equality of states each having equal sovereignty.”<sup>11</sup> Indeed the tributary system was hierarchical in nature and negated the notion of formal equality. According to the Chinese ideal, China, as the Middle Kingdom, was always at the center of the Eastern Asian world; and the surrounding tributary states were regarded as mere peripheries and extensions of the Middle Kingdom.

In traditional historiography, the trade dimension of the tribute system receives most scrutiny among its three historical functions. Normally, tribute trades were conducted on two occasions. One was in the Chinese capital of Beijing, immediately after the submission of tributes to the Chinese emperor. Tribute missions were allowed to trade with the Chinese under state supervision. Another occasion was along the frontiers between China and the tributary states. This included trading at the Chinese ports. Japanese scholar Takeshi Hamashita contends that the tribute-trade system organized East and Southeast Asia into a multi-centered commercial web with silver as its common currency. The following section examines the tribute trade in the Qing dynasty.

#### Tributary System as the State-Controlled Trade in the Asia

---

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 5

The *Qing Collected Statutes* were compiled by one of the six major government branches of the Qing court, the Board of Ceremonies. It was a collection of official documents of various governmental regulations. These documents, ranged from imperial edicts to high official's memorials presented to the throne, and collectively represented the Qing Empire's official views on various national issues. Ideally, each emperor would publish his own *Collected Statutes* at the end of his reign. In his seminal work "On the Qing Tributary System", John King Fairbank translated the chapters relevant to the regulation of the tributary system from the Kangxi and Qianlong Emperors' *Collected Statutes*. Published in 1690 and 1764 respectively, these two *Collected Statutes* presented a same framework, with only minor variations in details. A close reading of the *Qing Collected Statutes* will reveal a general pattern of the tributary system, which was characterized by an increasing centralization in the regulation of tribute missions and trades.

During the early years of consolidation, the Qing central authority tended to implement a loose control over the tribute relations. The *Collected Statutes* state that during 1644-1661:

Foreign countries presented tribute to the court with a memorial and local products as proof of the fact, the Governor-General and Governor concerned should examine their authenticity and then permit them to present a memorial and send the tribute to Court.<sup>12</sup>

In 1666, the central court sanctioned that "when foreign countries present a memorial to the throne...they should be ordered to depute a special officer to give it to the Governor-General and Governor concerned, who will in turn memorialize on their behalf."<sup>13</sup> Again in 1667, it was settled that when foreign country tenders a document, the

---

<sup>12</sup> John King Fairbank and S. Y. Teng. "On the Qing Tributary System." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 2(June 1941), p. 164

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, p. 166

Governor-General and Governor concerned should “straightway open and examine the original document, deliberate, and memorialized the throne.”<sup>14</sup>

It is noteworthy that local authorities, namely the Governor-General and Governor, were entrusted with a great power in dealing with tributary affairs. These provincial and local leaders usually functioned as mediation between the central government and the tributary states.

However, local authorities’ functions changed over years. A centralizing trend can be discovered in the regulation of the tributary system. The central government of the Qing Empire had increasingly tightened its control over the system and turned it into a state-monopolized trade. The local authorities’ primary function now switched to providing necessary escorts and travelling provisions for the tribute missions once they entered the Chinese border and along the route to the imperial capital of Beijing.

Regulations against local authorities directly dealing with tributaries were sanctioned. As article 15 states:

No Governor-General, Governors, Provincial Commanders-in-chief, or other such officials may unauthorizedly and of their own accord send a communication to a foreign country.<sup>15</sup>

The high-ranked provincial leaders, as well as officials on the frontier were prohibited from communicating with tributary states in writing. The handling of tributary affairs was increasingly centralized while local authorities lost their decision-making power in dealing with the tributary states. At the same time, regulation and supervision of trade between China and tributary states were accordingly centralized. In the *Kangxi Collected Statutes*, the following three regulations, if read collectively, reveal the fact that the tribute system became a state-monopolized trade in reality:

---

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 166

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 166

Whenever a foreign ship comes privately to trade without reason and not in a year when tribute is presented, the governor-general and governor concerned shall forthwith stop it and drive it away.<sup>16</sup>

After foreign countries bringing tribute to court have come to the capital and their rewards have been distributed to them, a market may be opened in the residence for tributary envoys...the board of ceremonies shall communicate with the board of revenue, which shall ahead of time detach treasury overseers to do the receiving and buying...The Board of Ceremonies...shall despatch officials to superintend it. They shall give orders for just and fair trade.<sup>17</sup>

If there are foreigners who purposely violate the prohibitory regulations and secretly enter people's house to trade, the goods dealt in privately will be confiscated.<sup>18</sup>

In this context the right of trade is determined by the central government. In other words, trade could only be conducted after the emperor legitimized one's status as a tribute state/trading partner. The submission of tribute to the throne and the receiving of imperial rewards symbolized the imperial recognition required for trading with China. It is noteworthy that foreign trade was only allowed in the designated places in the Chinese capital, where close supervision could be directly imposed on. Private trading was strictly prohibited.

During the Qianlong reign (1735-1796), rigid central control over the tribute trade was somewhat loosened. One statute from this period stated that:

When the tribute envoys of the various countries enter the frontier, the goods brought along in their boats or carts may be exchanged in trade with merchants of China; either they may be sold at the merchants' hong in the frontier province or they may be brought to the capital and marketed at the lodging house.<sup>19</sup>

Trading was no longer limited to the Chinese capital. Exchange of goods was now allowed along the borders. Nonetheless, another regulation forbade free movement of tribute envoys: "for a tribute envoy's entrance of the frontier and the tribute route which

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 165

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 167

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 168

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p. 172

he follows, in each case there are fixed places. Not to follow the regular route, or to go over into other provinces, is forbidden.”<sup>20</sup> In other words, tribute missions were limited to trade with the designated merchants only, namely those who were stationed along the tribute route.

Through reading the regulations contained in the *Collected Statutes* from the Kangxi and Qianlong reigns, a pattern of centralization could be discovered in the control of the tributary system. It reveals the fact that although the tributary system for most of the time served as a hierarchical Sino-centric world order, on a concrete level, it was also primarily motivated by the state-monopolized trade.

The traditional historiographies have touched on three important aspects of the tributary system; however, James Hevia’s interpretation enhanced our understanding of the multidimensional nature of the tributary system. He contends that the tributary system “combined ‘diplomacy’ and ‘trade’, while never overtly acknowledging that it was fulfilling either of these quasi-natural functions. This was because within the terms of Chinese culture there could be no true diplomacy (based as it must be on natural equality between sovereign states) and because commerce was not as highly valued as, say, farming.”<sup>21</sup> In other words, the tributary system enabled the Chinese empire to deal with diplomatic and commercial matters without dealing with them overtly and directly. Hevia’s interpretation is in line with Fairbank, but he makes a further step by stressing the contradictory structure of the tributary system. Culture, diplomacy, and trade were three facets of the tributary system, which cannot be analyzed separately from each other. On the one hand, without the cultural dimension, the diplomacy and trade could

---

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p. 172

<sup>21</sup> James L. Hevia, *Cherishing Men From Afar: Qing Guest Ritual and the Macartney Embassy of 1793*. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995), p11

not be justified and sustained. On the other hand, without taking the substantial economic benefits generated from trade into consideration, abstract ideological concepts, such as Confucian virtues and supremacy of Chinese emperor as the “Son of Heaven”, are not sufficient to explain how the tributary system was able to persist for centuries.<sup>22</sup>

When the European powers first entered East Asia, they initially struggled to cope with the Chinese tributary system in the hope of consolidating their status within the Eastern Asian order. However, since the First Opium War (1839-1842), European powers began to confront Chinese imperial order militarily, expanding their commercial interests through violent means. As a result of China’s insufficiency in weaponry, and its backwardness in social structure, the Qing dynasty lost its status of suzerainty in the Asian world order. The Qing Empire lost its two “model tribute states”, namely Vietnam and Korea, to France and Japan respectively, Vietnam and Korea became their colonies, and therefore imposed a different form of domination. By the early twentieth century, no more tribute missions were sent to China.

---

<sup>22</sup> In terms of diplomacy, I would argue that it remained highly symbolic and was conducted as a form of ritual. Concrete diplomacy took place only in the Sino-Korean and Sino-Vietnamese relations when China attempted to, directly or indirectly, interfere both countries’ internal affairs. But this is not relevant to the issues at hand.

### **3. The Tributary System in Historiography**

History reveals itself only through the production of specific narratives. What matters most are the process and condition of production of such narratives.

--Michel-Rolph Trouillot

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the regional order exemplified in the tributary system was fiercely challenged by western imperialism and global capitalism. As a result of this challenge, in Asia, the relation of suzerain and tribute states began to transform into a relation between equal nation-states. This transformation took many decades to complete and became an integral part of the modernizing process in Asia. In other words, the disintegration of the tributary system presented the first historical opportunity for both the suzerain and its tribute states to commence a reconfiguration of their national identity in relation to each other, and more fundamentally, to the global capitalist modernity. The trajectory of East Asian regionalism was profoundly shaped by the way in which the tributary system and its legacy were reinterpreted in the condition of global capitalist modernity.

While historians have always stressed the breakaway from the anachronistic tributary system, the aspects of the re-articulation of the tributary system in global capitalist modernity and the role the tributary system played in the formation of modern East Asian regional identity have by and large been neglected. At the turn of the twentieth century, the tributary system became an intellectual resource that Asianists used in the formation of a discourse of Asia. In order to understand this inadequacy, it is necessary to first map out the contemporary development of historiography on the tributary system.

## John King Fairbank: The Tributary system and China's Unpreparedness

Academic Sinology in the United States began with the prominent historian John King Fairbank (1907-1991). He was the one who institutionalized the former Sinology produced by non-professionals, such as missionaries, merchants and diplomats who worked in China and transformed it into an academic discipline. Fairbank is remembered, among other things, for his enunciation of the “impact-response” paradigm, which for several decades remained the dominant framework for interpreting the modern history of China.

In a nutshell, Fairbank's conceptual orientation is that prior to the arrival of the Western powers, Chinese society under the Qing dynasty was homeostatic at the most fundamental level. Changes, if there were any, were only allowed to operate within China's stagnated Confucian tradition. Hence any structural breakthrough required stimulation or impact from external factors. After the Sino-British Opium War of 1842, the encroachments of the Western powers in China increased rapidly, and presented the impacts from the West, against which China under the Qing dynasty had to cope with and respond to. Hence the modernizing process in China was basically a series of interactions between the “Western impacts” and “the Chinese responses”.

Until recently, people's understanding of the traditional Chinese world order was based upon John King Fairbank's classic studies. In 1968, Fairbank and his colleagues published *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's Foreign Relations*, in which the Chinese tributary system was studied systematically in English for the first time.<sup>23</sup> For Fairbank, culture and civilization constitute the core of the tributary system, and are the ultimate driving force behind the system. He saw the expansion of the tributary system as the expansion of the Chinese way of life. And in his narrative, he repeatedly used the

---

<sup>23</sup> William T. Rowe, *China's Last Empire: the Great Qing*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 133

“cultural superiority” of Chinese civilization to explain how the tributary system was sustained. Fairbank contends that “in theory, they (the tributary rulers) were irresistibly drawn into this relationship, they ‘came and were transformed’, by the superior blessings of (Chinese) civilization”<sup>24</sup> Consequently, symbolic rituals played a central role in Fairbank’s narrative. Fairbank believes that “non-Chinese rulers participated in the Chinese world order by observing the appropriate forms and ceremonies in their contact with the Son of Heaven”. According to him, these forms and ceremonies “constituted the tributary system.”<sup>25</sup> Fairbank does acknowledge, to a lesser degree, that the tributary system was “a diplomatic medium, the vehicle for Chinese foreign relations”<sup>26</sup> and “an ingenious vehicle for commerce.”<sup>27</sup> Nonetheless, his primary interest is to study the tributary system as a vehicle for Chinese civilization.<sup>28</sup>

In Fairbank’s view, the tribute system was “a natural expression of Chinese cultural egocentricity.”<sup>29</sup> It was an institutional manifestation of the inherently unequal relationship between China, the middle kingdom, and the adjunct less civilized or barbarous states. This view derived from Fairbank’s firm belief that the premodern Chinese interaction with the outside world could be elucidated by a trans-historical category of “culturism”. He contended that ever since the dawn of Chinese civilization, the Shang dynasty (c. 1500-1100 B.C.E), China had enjoyed both material and cultural

---

<sup>24</sup> John King Fairbank ed. *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's Foreign Relations*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 9

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 10

<sup>26</sup> John King Fairbank, “Tributary Trade and China’s Relations with the West.” *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, Vol.1, No.2 (Feb. 1942), p. 135

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p. 137

<sup>28</sup> Some of Fairbank’s colleagues even attempt to negate the commercial aspect of the tributary system entirely. For example, Korean scholar Hae-Jong Chun, in his case study of Sino-Korea tributary relation, asserts that “it is hardly believable that the Ching (Qing) government itself profited much from the economic aspect of Sino-Korean tributary relations” and “the tributary system brought the Korean government an enormous financial loss and net disadvantage... even the Chinese government can hardly have gained financially from these tributary relations.”

Fairbank ed. *Chinese World Order*, p. 110

<sup>29</sup> Fairbank, “Tributary Trade and China’s Relations with the West”, p. 129

superiority over the surrounding civilizations. This sense of superiority had molded the Chinese mentality, which was exemplified in the tributary system.

Before the Anglo-Chinese Treaty of Nanjing, signed in 1842, Sino-West commercial and diplomatic relations were largely molded by the institutions that constituted the tributary system. The transition from the tributary system to the treaty system, for Fairbank, inaugurated an overall transformation in East Asia. The treaty system, now as a unilateral scheme of things, expanded to Japan, Siam, and Korea. In a sense, it entirely superseded the tribute system in every aspect as the organizing dynamic of the East Asian regional order.

#### Takeshi Hamashita: An Asia Derived from the Tributary System

If the recent revival of Confucianism could be seen as an attempt to forge a Chinese identity in the condition of post-socialist global modernity, then the renewed scholarly interests in the tribute system in the past decades represent an effort and desire to trace an East Asian regionalism from the past prior to the regionalization brought about by the hegemonic Euro-American structure.

Japanese scholar Takeshi Hamashita has pioneered the new wave of tributary system study. Hamashita's main argument is that Asia should be seen as a unique historical unit, independent and autonomous from the overarching Western historical experience. Because of Asia's uniqueness, Asian historical experience must be studied independently from Western theoretical frameworks.<sup>30</sup> He sees the tributary system as a distinctive East

---

<sup>30</sup> It is noteworthy that scholars from Fairbank's generation had already begun to adopt a post-colonialist standpoint toward the tributary system. Mark Mancall, one of the contributors of *The Chinese World Order*, warned his readers that "the system cannot be explained in terms of Western usage and practice. It is misleading to find modern Western equivalents for traditional Chinese institutions or concepts: they may resemble each other in structure or function, but they may have quite different significance when examined within the contexts of the traditional Confucian and modern Western societies. Rather, the tributary system must be understood, in all its ramifications, in terms of the vocabulary and institutions of traditional China." P.63

Asian historical social system, which functioned as a multi-centered commercial web that linked the Asian states together. Since silver was used as the common currency in trading, a silver zone was created among the participating countries.

Hamashita clearly differentiated himself from previous scholarship. For him, traditional historiography had understood the tributary system narrowly as the “recognition and investiture of a king in each tributary state” and “the external expression of hierarchical relationship central to the maintenance of the Sinocentric system.”<sup>31</sup> He provides his own insightful definition of the tributary system in the following passage:

The tributary system was an organic network of relations linking the center and its peripheries, including the provinces and dependencies of the empire, rulers of native tribes and districts, tributary states and even trading partners. *This tributary system, broadly understood, constituted the arena in which the states and other entities of southeast, northeast, central and northwest Asia operated and defined their multiple relations with China and other regions of Asia.*<sup>32</sup>

After examining a series of interactions between Asian states in the premodern era, Hamashita reaches the conclusion that “tributary countries began to take on national identities *vis-à-vis* China, based on their own understandings of Sinocentrism and the tributary order.”<sup>33</sup> focusing on the intra-Asia maritime trade, Hamashita sees the tributary system as a mediation between China from one end, and the other Asian states on the other end.

Further, Hamashita argues that this commercial web had created a substantial basis upon which a modern Asian solidarity and unity could be constructed. More importantly, this formation of Asian solidarity and unity occurred prior to the arrival of the West, hence it is pure, genuine and authentic. The tributary system hence functioned as the historical precondition of the East Asian modernity. It provided the internal dynamic that

---

<sup>31</sup> Takeshi Hamashita, *China, East Asia and the Global Economy: Regional and Historical Perspectives*; (London; New York: Routledge, 2008), p13

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p13.emphases added.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p.19

generated the force of Asian modernization. In an outright manner, Hamashita's interpretation refutes Fairbank's view by claiming that the Western "impact" was largely conditioned by the intra-Asia tribute trading system. The Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch and British, who sought to trade with Asia, had to adapt to various degrees, to the vibrant Asian trade based on the tribute trade system.

By privileging the tribute system as a formative component of the essence of Asian regional identity, Hamashita successfully moves beyond the sinocentric narrative of East Asia history. In other words, in Hamashita's narrative, the tribute system has gone through a process of de-Sinification. He moves the tribute system away from a sinocentric system to a platform, where an imagination of Asia in its modern sense becomes possible.

Grasping Hamashita's essence, Sun Ge has commented that Hamashita has depicted Asia "as an organic whole with inherent machineries," within which the tributary system functioned as an organizing and connecting principle:

The tribute system constitutes *an ordered region with an inherent logic completely different from modern Europe*. That is, in contrast to the "state" as a unit, there is the regional mechanism of the "center to its periphery" and the corresponding relationships of paying tributes and conferring titles.<sup>34</sup>

#### Tributary System as an Alternative form to Nation-State

Hamashita's reinterpretation is connected to and resonates with the concept of alternative modernity, which is aptly presented in the works of David Kang's *East Asia Before the West: Five Centuries of Trade and Tribute* and Brantly Womack's *China and Vietnam: The Politics of Asymmetry*.

---

<sup>34</sup> Sun Ge, "How does Asia mean? (Part II)" *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, Volume 1, Number 2, 2000, p.332-333. Italic added.

Central to Kang's narrative is the argument that "international order in East Asia encompassed a regionally shared set of formal and informal norms and institutions," collectively embodied in the tributary system, which "yielded substantial stability" and "emphasized formal hierarchy among nations while allowing considerable informal equality."<sup>35</sup> This condition of hierarchical informal equality was embraced by the surrounding states and China itself. For Kang, Chinese hegemony played a stabilizing role in East Asian international order through the ideal of hierarchy and the institution of the tributary system.

Kang's argument resonates with the latest study of Sino-Vietnamese relations by Brantly Womack. In *China and Vietnam: The Politics of Asymmetry*, Womack suggests that the Sino-Vietnamese bilateral relation since the unification of China in 221 BC had been majorly characterized by a sense of asymmetry and disparity, expressed in terms of territory, population, economy and sociopolitical institutions. However, the asymmetric factor between China and Vietnam does not result in the stronger China's imposition of full domination or annexation on the weaker Vietnam. Rather, the disparities in power/resource/size are stabilized and sustained through the mediating institutions like the tributary system, which operates as a form of regional order.

The notion that "nations are sovereign entities" has dominated contemporary Western theories of international relations since the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. Western international relations theory is largely built upon the historical experience of "the competition of roughly equal powers in Europe", and commonly assumes that "either the weaker state will balance its vulnerability by means of alliances with other states or it will be subject to the hegemony of the stronger state."<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> David Kang, *East Asia Before the West: Five Centuries of Trade and Tribute*, p. 55

<sup>36</sup> Brantly Womack, *China and Vietnam: The politics of Asymmetry*, p. 2

Both Kang and Womack's studies either attempt to complement Western international relation theory, or propose an alternative theoretical framework to it. In their discourse, the tributary system occupies a central place in the international/regional relation of East Asia. Part of their effort is to rethink the notion of equal sovereignty of nation-states in the Western theory, developed since the treaty of Westphalia. According to these authors, sovereign and equal nation-state, as one crucial component of modernity, are not the only legitimate forms of political organization.

Opposing to the central notion of formal equality between sovereign nation-states, Kang and Womack argue that the tributary system, and more importantly the hierarchical and asymmetric nature of the East Asian regional order embodied in it, represent a constitutive part of an alternative modernity that claims to be independent from and parallel to the Western mainstream understanding of modern nation-state and international relation.

#### Connecting the Tributary System and Modernity: an Alternative Form?

Takeshi Hamashita has conceptually reversed and at the same time resuscitated Fairbank's argument, although in quite divergent ways. Fairbank sought to establish that modernity in China began in the moment that the traditional tributary system was displaced by the modern institution of treaties between equal sovereignties, and treated the tribute system as the major obstruction to China's path to modernity, as the sign of Chinese unpreparedness to deal with the capitalist modern world.

Hamashita, on the contrary, observes that instead of being completely surpassed by the treaty system, the tribute system, as a genuine indigenous Asian institution, represented an alternative modernity, which carries the possibility to compete with the

Western modernity founded on the exclusive European modern experience. The tribute system was precisely the historical precondition that enabled China and Asia to reach a form of modernity that derived from the unique and authentic Asian historical experience.

Although it appears that Fairbank and Hamashita have presented opposing arguments, one must recognize that, at a more fundamental level, their respective arguments could be reconciled within a common logic. Their contradistinctions in interpreting the tribute system were built on a common conceptual foundation of Eurocentric teleology of modernity. Both Fairbank's and Hamashita's positions could be seen as a response to this conceptual orientation.

According to this logic, there existed various forms of modernities, derived from a wide range of unique and distinctive historical experiences. The Western modernity subjugated other forms of modernities and became the dominating one through imperial expansion. Alternative modernities were expressed in categories of geopolitical civilization. Among them, East Asian modernity, African modernity, Islamic modernity are commonplace examples. However, the problematical nature of modernity remains veiled, because any comprehension of modernity that took the concept of Eurocentric teleology of modernity as its point of departure is itself structurally fragmented. An adequate understanding of modernity, in China and in other places, points to a new conceptualization of the most fundamental characteristics of the capitalist modernity. Instead of seeing modernity in world history as a specific stage in a linear and progressive development, emphasis should be placed on the contemporaneity of historical societies. A crucial premise of this contemporaneity is a shared spatial and temporal horizon that only becomes possible in global capitalist modernity. The tributary system does not, as Hamashita and others have claimed, propose a different form of modernity, or alternative path of modernization. In order to gain an adequate understanding of the

relation between the tribute system and modernity in China, and Asia in general, we must historicize this system in the context of the global process of spatial-temporal reorientation.

Having said that, one could even argue that talking about an “Asian” tribute system is an anachronism because “Asia” as a geographical reality and cultural/communitarian imagination was unthinkable within the pre-modern conceptual framework of “All Under Heaven” and the Sinocentric tribute system. Asia only became thinkable under the radical new condition of the capitalist modernity. “Tribute system” and “Asia” belong to two distinctive epochs, one pre-capitalist and the other capitalist. The tributary system belongs to the “All Under Heaven” cosmological order, it is only from its ruin that a capitalist world system began to surface.

The adequate understanding of the tribute system and how its legacy shaped an East Asian identity is essential to a broadened and deepened view of the intricate interplays of tradition and modernity, nationalism and regionalization, global space and capitalist temporality, which all began to unfold during the late Qing period.

## 4. Multiple Modernities and Capitalist Modernity

This chapter aims at a thorough rethinking of modernity, as both analytical category and experience. As the previous chapter has shown, there exists an inadequacy in the conceptualization of modernity. This conceptual inadequacy is aptly presented in the recent research trends of the tributary system. As a means to grasp modernity and its inflections in East Asia, this chapter will first review positions commonly known as multiple and alternative modernities. It proposes that we must go back to the most fundamental characterization of modernity, namely the logic of capitalism, in order to develop a new understanding of modernity that is adequate to the historical dynamics in the past century. With this reconceptualization of modernity as a point of departure, we could further our understanding of the intricate connections between global capitalism and nationalism, the tributary system and Asianism.

In the past decades, the demise of socialism as a political and ideological alternative to capitalism allowed all kinds of cultural claims of multiple modernities. Cultural and theoretical claims of the poststructuralist, postmodernist and postcolonial schools have found their intersection in the discourse of multiple, alternative and retroactive modernities. This revisionist tendency in the study of modernity has advocated a multiple view of that concept. For many scholars, modernity has always been “global in scope, plural in form and direction.”<sup>37</sup> For promoters of multiple, alternative and retroactive modernities, privileging the west and seeing modernity as a consequence of westernization usually mean the obscuration of the authentic historical experience of various regions of the world. As Prasenjit Duara has asserted:

---

<sup>37</sup> Arif Dirlik, *Global Modernity? Modernity in an Age of Global Capitalism*, p. 276

The idea that there are different paths of modernity assumes that there are different starting points; that different cultures and civilizations will assert their distinctive patterns of values and ideals in the pursuit of certain shared modern goals.<sup>38</sup>

Technology advancement, mature forms of sociopolitical institutions and burgeoning commercial orders, developed along diversified paths and to various extents, are commonly taken as signs of modernity in particular historical societies. According to the view of multiple modernities, these alternative forms of modernities are usually divergent from and suppressed by the overshadowing master modernity of westernization. It has become a common assertion for promoters of multiple, alternative and retroactive that modernity must be distinguished from westernization. S. N. Eisenstadt has pointed out that:

One of the most important implications of the term; multiple modernities' is that modernity and westernization are not identical; western patterns of modernity are not the only 'authentic' modernities, though they enjoy historical precedence and continue to be a basic reference point for others.<sup>39</sup>

For Eisenstadt and others, multiple modernities are the negation of the equation of modernization with westernization. Indeed modernization should not be bound with only one geopolitical category, namely the west. Instead, modernization is most adequately understood as the process of expansion of the capitalist logic. In this system, one fundamental characteristic is the co-existence of difference/diversity/particularity and universality/sameness. In other words, capitalist modernity expresses itself in many different, sometimes seemingly contradictory, forms; but at its core is the logic of capitalism—the commodity form.

---

<sup>38</sup> Prasenjit Duara, "Civilizations and Nations in a Globalizing World", in *Multiple Modernities, European, Chinese and Other Interpretations*. p.79

<sup>39</sup> S. N. Eisenstadt. *Multiple Modernities*. Daedalus, vol. 129, no. 1, pp. 1-29

Equally inadequate is Eurocentric chauvinism. The opening paragraph of Theodore von Laue's *The World Revolution of Westernization* best illustrates the colonizer's mentality and a Eurocentric conception of civilizing mission, which is intimately associated with Western colonialism and imperialism:

For the first time in all human experience the world revolution of Westernization brought together, in inescapably intimate and virtually instant interaction, all the peoples of the world, regardless of their prior cultural evolution or their capacity – or incapacity – for peaceful coexistence. Within a brief time, essentially within half a century, they were thrust into a common harness, against their will, by a small minority commonly called “The West” – the peoples of Western Europe and their descendants in North America. As a result, the human condition in the present and the future can only be understood within the framework of the Westernized world.<sup>40</sup>

This seemingly opposition between the discourses of multiple modernity and of the Eurocentric view of modernity are in fact the two extremes of the same cultural-essentialist understanding of modernity. For Harry Harootunian, both discourses are based on “the presumption of a single and thus normative temporality”, both “call attention to the uniqueness of each national experience.”<sup>41</sup> The unevenness of capitalist development manifests itself in the form of a time lag. Hence the multiple modernities narrative could be understood as the latecomers' claim of their cultural autonomies in relation to the Euro-American master historical narrative:

A single and normative temporality would show where a society was located on the developmental trajectory and how far it needed to go to catch up. Yet this distance would also encourage a search for those cultural values in the late-developing society that could be analogously matched to Western values, which were seen to have already assisted the development of England, France, and the United States as mature, modern societies. This meant that a single, normative temporality constantly demanded a comparative perspective<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> Theodore von Laue, *The World Revolution of Westernization: The Twentieth Century in Global Perspective*. Oxford University Press, 1989, p. 3

<sup>41</sup> Harootunian, preface, p. xiii-xiv

<sup>42</sup> Ibid

## The Idea of Multiple Modernity in East Asia

In the context of East Asian historiography, an eminent example of multiple modernities would be the “Naito hypotheses”, developed by Japanese Sinologist Naito Konan (1866-1934), who argued that Chinese society during the Song dynasty (960-1279) already possessed signs of modernity, as we vulgarly understand the concept today.<sup>43</sup> Naito’s theory was further developed by his student, Miyazaki Ichisada. Naito and Miyazaki’s position could be summarized as the following: China reached a significant watershed during the transition from the Tang dynasty to the Song dynasty. Naito found that Chinese society went through many crucial changes. Among them, the most decisive transition was the fall of aristocratic rule and the consequential changes in the positions of emperors and commoners. Naito took this change of the basis of the social system to be “the social characteristics of modernity”.<sup>44</sup> Miyazaki linked Naito’s claim of early Chinese modernity with world history, arguing that renaissance in the Song dynasty and in Europe were actually parallel and comparable. “The Sung established their centralized power by means of commercial controls, and the increased wealth of the cities and the development of communications produced a renaissance and reformation, the development of scientific thought, the consciousness of humanity, and a kind of nationalism...”<sup>45</sup> All of these, for Miyazaki, are traces of Song modernity.

---

<sup>43</sup> Naito’s view of early Chinese modernity is echoed by French Sinologist Etienne Balazs. He wrote “The Birth of Capitalism in China” and asked a rhetorical question: “were there ever the beginnings of capitalistic development—an embryonic capitalism that got strangled in the womb?” In this article, Balazs examined commercial activities and industrial development as capitalism and concluded, just as Naito Konan, that the Song dynasty “marks the beginning of modern times in China”. See Balazs, *Chinese Civilization and Bureaucracy: Variations on a Theme*, p. 34-54

<sup>44</sup> Hisayuki Miyakawa, *An Outline of the Naito Hypothesis and Its effects on Japanese Studies of China*, p. 537

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, p. 546. Equally noteworthy is the debate over the Chinese endogenous “capitalist sprout” and a fledgling bourgeois class, which supposedly emerged during the middle Ming dynasty (1368-1644). This debate reflects a concern of Chinese Marxist historiography, which is of different nature from the Kyoto school, and beyond the scope of this thesis.

In Wang Hui's critique, the Kyoto school approach, whose theoretical framework and historical narrative are "a derivative of European modernity", lacks a perspective of "internal historical dynamic."<sup>46</sup> The Kyoto school of sinology, mostly represented by Naito Konan and Miyazaki Ichisada, constructs:

A narrative centered on the nation-state and capitalism that inverts the Western mainstream account: whereas the Eurocentric version portrays China as an empire, a continent, or civilization, with the implication that China is not a nation-state, the Kyoto school posits the opposite.<sup>47</sup>

Countering the Eurocentric "mainstream account", the Kyoto school argues that China in the Song dynasty already possessed the characteristics of a capitalist nation-state, or at least the prototype of this ideal type, hence was a qualified Subject of world history. The Kyoto school approach's effort in reversing the Eurocentric teleological modernity is in reality a failed attempt, because its critique of the Eurocentric modernity is in fact derived from an inadequate understanding of the fundamental characteristics of modernity. Hence its appeals to categories such as a "mature state with a central administrative system" and "Neo-Confucianism as national ideology" as signs of Chinese early modernity only achieve a shift, from a Eurocentric teleological modernity to a Sinocentric teleological modernity.

A more recent effort to continue and to revive the Kyoto school sinological tradition of discovering early modernity in East Asian societies could be seen in Alexander Woodside's *Lost Modernities*. Woodside examines the civil examinations and the embryonic bureaucracies in the three early modern "mandarinates" of China, Korea and Vietnam. He seeks to establish the argument that such social and political characteristics

---

<sup>46</sup> Wang Hui, *The Rise of Modern Chinese Thought*, p. 9

<sup>47</sup> Wang Hui, "How to Explain China and its Modernity" in *The Politics of Imagining Asia*, p. 74

enabled East Asia to reach its own modernities, but these modernities were lost due to the underdevelopment of nationalism and technologies in East Asia.<sup>48</sup>

Woodside understands “modern” as “the rationalization process” and “growth of capitalism or industrialization”.<sup>49</sup> Woodside takes capitalism as essentially a stage of economical and industrial development. Hence, despite his effort to connect modernity with global capitalism, lacking the adequate abstraction, he is only able to describe capitalism as an expanding mode of production and social formation. For Woodside, just like others who support the view of multiple modernities, it is more important to discover the continuity from tradition to modernity; he claims the “false forms of revolutionary fantasy” have placed too much emphasis on the radical discontinuity and have exaggerated “the difference between ‘traditional’ worlds and ‘modern’ ones.”<sup>50</sup>

Echoing the claims of multiple modernities, he further argues that the notion of pluralized “modernities” entails an understanding of world history that will “uncover traditions of discursive rationality that the cruder singular notion of the modern has obscured; or at least to end uses of the singular term for the modern that merely camouflage one civilization’s historical self-centeredness.”<sup>51</sup> Woodside’s effort could be largely understood as an attempt to rescue the validity of East Asian modernity from the master narrative of Westernization.

---

<sup>48</sup> It is noteworthy that in some sense Woodside is repeating Joseph Needham’s earlier efforts of rediscovering the Chinese superiority in the realms of science and technology, only that Woodside has shift the point of focus from science and technology to sociopolitical institutions of the civil examination and bureaucracy. For Needham, see his multivolume *Science and civilization in China*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954

<sup>49</sup> Alexander Woodside, *Lost Modernities: China, Vietnam, Korea, and the Hazards of World History*. p. 1

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, p. 4

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, p. 9

## Rethinking Modernity in its global Capitalist Context

One crucial step to take in order to have an adequate understanding of modernity is to conceptually liberate modernity from the geographical and civilizational confinements of the Eurocentric view of history, and shift to a “Capital-centric” understanding of modernity. In the modern era, the most fundamental historical dynamic is not the expansion of the West, neither British colonialism nor American imperialism. The most fundamental historical dynamic, which truly penetrates and transforms every aspect of human activities, is the unfolding of the logic of capital.

While the multiple and alternative modernities are sometimes articulated in a self-congratulatory manner, we need to see that the so-called alternative, retroactive or multiple modernities are nothing but global variations and local inflections of a totalizing capitalist modernity. The alternative, retroactive or multiple modernities, under the disguises of “continuity from the pre-modern era”, “early modernities” and “historical precondition of modernity”, are all movements within the grandiose movement of global capitalism; all are ultimately driven by the dynamic of capitalism, as its ceaseless expansion and proliferation reinvent the tradition into modernity.

It is a unique characteristic of capitalist modernity that various forms of traditions and cultures are allowed to exist simultaneously along with the modern experience. Unlike previous sociopolitical configurations, which always demand formal homogeneity, capitalist modernity operates on a much more overarching and yet abstract level. Hence many have taken the mere appearance of capitalist modernity namely the “culture”, “tradition”, as evidence of the existence of multiple, alternative and retroactive modernities, or modernity itself. Modernity, despite its various forms in different phases, is always reducible to its very core, namely the logic of capitalism and structure of commodity form. Andrew Sartori has criticized this misrecognition of appearance for

actuality in capitalist modernity. He argues the view of multiple and alternative modernities:

Mistook the forms of appearances through which these structures manifested themselves for their actuality—a mistake grounded in the very nature of modern capitalist society, which systematically presents itself in forms that cloak its deeper logic.<sup>52</sup>

Commercial contacts and cultural exchange are transhistorical human activities. In other words, there has always been interchange of material and ideas between human groupings. These activities by themselves, no matter their scale, be it on an individual level, or between towns, city-states or empires, do not constitute capitalism or modernity. Only a historical specific form of exchange constitutes capitalism and modernity. Christian Uhl rightly contends that an adequate theory of capitalist modernity is needed in order to understand the nature of such activities and points out that the “contacts” between human groupings in the modern capitalist era are a particular form of activities, they supersede “contacts” in the pre-capitalist era because, fundamentally, contacts in modern societies are “the gravitational force of capitalism.”<sup>53</sup> While theories of multiple, alternative and retroactive modernities tend to take the appearance of modernity as the basic logic of modernity itself, Uhl shows us the intricate cause-and-effect relation between modernity and its various appearance is often distorted by such narratives. This relation must be rethought before we take further steps in elucidating the effect of capitalist modernity on our modern world. Uhl further contends:

The historical precondition for any search for, and for the discovery of such traces is the forced modernization by the ‘West’, without which any consciousness of the ‘east’, of ‘east tradition’, of the ‘cultural heritage of the East’, nay, of ‘historical

---

<sup>52</sup> Andrew Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History: Culturalism in the Age of Capital*, p. 6

<sup>53</sup> Christian Uhl, “Translation and Time: A Reminder of the Curvature of the Poststructuralist Plain”, p. 12

consciousness' per se, would not be thinkable at all. In other words, it is only within the horizon of modernity, that things become tradition that, what is called modern, gets defined as modern.<sup>54</sup>

While the claims of multiple modernities maintain that “tradition” allows modernities to rise in multiple forms, Uhl reverses that cause and effect relation by claiming that the “past” is translated into and defined as “tradition” only in the condition of modernity, hence, modernity creates tradition. We can only understand tradition as it is reinvented and rearticulated in the terms of capitalist modernity. Capitalist modernity created the societies as we know them today.

Sharing a similar concern with Christian Uhl, Arif Dirlik also sees the need to reexamine the cause and effect relation between modernity and its various appearances. He asserts: “the two periods taken as the ‘modern’ and the ‘early modern’ are better viewed as contradictory rather than as evolutionary phases in the history of modernity.”<sup>55</sup> Accordingly, Dirlik argues that early modern, premodern or tradition are not the premise of modernity, rather, they represent “an alternative within modernity in its initial phase.” Authentic alternative to modernity does not exist in the present, “when claims to alternative modernities are deeply compromised through entanglement in capitalist modernity.”<sup>56</sup> Thus, a retroactive narrative retrieves tradition from the past, upon which claims to multiplicity of modernity are built, scholars who participate in this enterprise do so “without realizing that these modernities themselves are created by the overarching capitalist modernity.”<sup>57</sup>

What we need, as Uhl and Dirlik have rightly pointed out, is an inversion of the cause and effect relation commonly found in the multiple/alternative modernity claims. Instead of seeing the premodern or “early modern” historical experiences of individual

---

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p. 15

<sup>55</sup> Arif Dirlik, “Revisioning Modernity: Modernity in Eurasian Perspective”, p. 285

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid

societies as the premise of the multiplicity in modernity, we need, first, to develop an adequate understanding of the core characteristics of capitalist modernity, in order to comprehend how tradition became “reinvented” in the global capitalist condition.

Derek Sayer precisely grasps the unprecedented comprehensiveness that characterizes capitalist modernity. In his examination of the relation between capitalism and modernity, he concludes that:

The new world ushered in by capital, for Marx, is fundamentally different from all that has gone before. Capitalism’s revolution is rapid, unprecedented, total and global, and it is the sheer comprehensiveness of this revolution, which allows us sensibly to speak of modernity at all. Capitalism creates a qualitatively distinct kind of society from any of those which preceded it.<sup>58</sup>

Fredric Jameson asserts that in the pre-capitalist social formations, the unifying economic determinations (mode of production) are distinctive and separated from the ideological determinations that unified the society. For instance, various forms of religion, power relations and personal domination are the unifying ideological determinations of ancient city-state, feudalism or Asiatic societies, at the same time, each configuration of society also developed its unique mode of production, the economic determinations, parallel to the ideological determination. Something unprecedented occurred in the capitalist configuration of society: “the ideological or religious dominant” and the “determinant in the type of production involved”<sup>59</sup> become identical.

As a consequential development of the disappearance of distinctions between the ideological and economic realms, the movement of capital begins to emerge as an all-comprehensive totality, within which capital’s circuit “allows it to remain always within its own terms of existence, its divisions are internal moments, its relations are only to other parts of itself, hence its advance is not to something beyond itself but only into

---

<sup>58</sup> Derek Sayer, *Capitalism and Modernity: An Excursus on Marx and Weber*. p. 6

<sup>59</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Representing Capital: A Reading of Volume One*, Verso, p. 16

itself, bringing forth from itself all its potentialities and displaying them to itself.”<sup>60</sup> In other words, there is nothing that operates beyond the movement of capital. What appears to be “multiple” or “alternative” are in nature dialogues between constituting components of a single global capitalist modernity. These “specific parts or complexes—i.e., the ‘partial totalities’—are linked to each other in a constantly shifting and changing, dynamic set of interrelations and reciprocal determinations.”<sup>61</sup>

Jameson describes the process of the congruence of economic, cultural and political authorities into the logic of capital in the following words:

The various pre-capitalist societies, whatever their technical production, are all organized collectively: only capitalism constitutes a social formation—that is, an organized multiplicity of people—united by the absence of community, by separation and by individuality.<sup>62</sup>

The “individuality” and the coexistence of “multiplicity of people” only become possible in the capitalist modernity. Unlike previous social formations where a static collectivism was imposed upon the society, capitalist social formation imposes dynamic, organic, and overarching imperatives that reach every individual in society. Here, economic, cultural and political authorities merge into one; mode of production is embodied in the ideological determination, and culture reflects the mode of production. The result of this dynamic of capitalism, as Moishe Postone has argued, was “a historically new form of social domination – one that subjects people to impersonal, increasingly rationalized, structural imperatives and constraints that cannot adequately be grasped in terms of class domination, or, more generally, in terms of the concrete

---

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, p. 141

<sup>61</sup> A Dictionary of Marxist Thought, ed. By Tom Bottomore et al. p. 537

<sup>62</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Representing Capital: A Reading of Volume One*, Verso, p. 16

domination of social groupings or of institutional agencies of the state and/or the economy.”<sup>63</sup>

As the most fundamental characteristic of capitalist modernity, Postone argues, labor assumes a quasi-objective status and constitutes the mediating social relation.

Those relations have a peculiar quasi-objective, formal character and are dualistic – they are characterized by the opposition of an abstract, general, homogeneous dimension and a concrete, particular, material dimension, both of which appear to be ‘natural’, rather than social, and condition social conceptions of natural reality.<sup>64</sup>

As an unprecedented phenomenon that only appears in capitalist society, economic and political changes, under the condition of capitalist modernity, have become an inseparable confluence with transformations in cultural and philosophical spheres. Postone’s notion that human beings have become subjugated to and dominated by, not another concrete human group, but an abstract and overarching capitalist dynamic, could be seen as a result of this confluence.

Hence, as Postone has argued, in capitalist society, the form of domination is no longer “the qualitatively specific, overt social relations” between human beings, for instance, the personal and direct domination that a monarchy imposed over his vassals, a lord over his serfs, not even the explorative relation between bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Instead, Postone points out, the domination in capitalist society is between human beings and the overarching and penetrating logic of capitalism.

There is a joke that goes: a man walks into a doctor's office with a frog stuck to his head. The doctor asks: “How did this happen?” the frog answers: “It started with a bump on my toe.” This joke serves as a good metaphor of the domination of capitalism. Most people would assume that the frog is the hyperplasia and the man is the patient seeking

---

<sup>63</sup> Moishe Postone, “Critique and Historical Transformation”, *Historical Materialism*, volume 12:3 (53–72)

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

treatment. With the parasitizing frog removed, the man would be a normal and healthy human being. The punch line of this joke is exactly the central problem of capitalism, which is that capitalism imposes an objective imperative on human subjectivity. The man in this joke, or the human subjectivity, is brought under the domination of an abnormal hyperplasia. The hyperplasia becomes the subjectivity itself, and it is dynamically, ceaselessly growing. One outstanding feature of global capitalism is that capital, not human being nor nation-states, becomes the subject of history.

This new form of domination, where human beings are subjugated to an abstract social relation, is the most basic feature that characterizes capitalist modernity. Any understanding of modernity must take the totality of capitalism and its form of domination as the point of departure.

In 1866, a Chinese mission was sent to Europe for the first time. The mission visited major European cities including London, Copenhagen, Stockholm, St. Petersburg, Berlin, Brussels and Paris. The journals kept by the members of the mission were filled with detailed descriptions of strange European social customs (to the Chinese eye), architectures of European style, and novelties such as gaslights and elevators. The members of mission paid attention only in passing to the real modernization process that was taking place in European societies.<sup>65</sup> While historians criticize that this mission achieved nothing but some shallow and superfluous observations on Western modernization, many modernist theorists do not realize that they have committed the same fallacy by taking some appearances of modernization as modernity itself.

---

<sup>65</sup> Bin Chun, *Cheng Jie Bi Ji*, Hunan Renmin chubanshe,

## 5. The Problematic Imperialism: Imperialism as China's Early Modern?

In the previous chapter, efforts were made to establish a reconceptualization of modernity. This chapter will tackle related but more specific issues, namely imperialism in early Chinese modernity. It will discuss recent trends in the study Qing imperialism, with emphasis placed on the works of James Hevia and Laura Hostetler. The central argument of this chapter is that while these new research trends in the studies of the Qing Empire progressively lead to an alternative to the Eurocentric teleological modernity, at the same time, they also veil the global capitalist character of modernity. By situating and historicizing imperialism in global capitalism, this chapter seeks to revisit the distinction between multiple modernity and capitalist modernity.

Writing in the 1970s, Akira Iriye complained the lacking of imperialism as a framework in the understanding of modern East Asian history. For him, the East Asian history between the Opium War and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century has been vaguely periodized as the “age of imperialism” in East Asia. However, as a concept, imperialism in East Asia was ambiguously defined at best. On a disciplinary level, he sees a gap of knowledge between historians specializing in imperialism who have no relevant training in East Asia history and East Asian scholars who do not take imperialism as their primary concern and are “ignorant of incessant reinterpretations of imperialism”.<sup>66</sup>

Three decades later after Akira Iriye's comment, William Rowe, in his *China's Last Empire: the Great Qing*, a volume of a series of works that represent a reassessment of the latest trends in the writing of Chinese history in Western Sinology, shows a

---

<sup>66</sup> Akira Iriye, “Imperialism in East Asia.” in *Modern East Asia: Essays in Interpretation*, p.123

noteworthy interest on imperialism in Asia. He points out that imperialism has become a pivotal theme in the historical narrative of the Qing dynasty. Rowe develops a problematic pattern to distinguish two kinds of imperialism identifiable in Chinese history, namely economic imperialism and political/military imperialism.

Rowe notes that historians who take a left wing stance tend to use imperialism as an economic category. According to Rowe, capitalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was “the most efficient mode of production, exploitation, and surplus accumulation developed to that time”. Rowe’s understanding represents a very conventional view of capitalism (and imperialism). According to Rowe, the internal drive for ceaseless proliferation of capital was to “find an external outlet for investment of this surplus capital or else face strangulation and collapse of the domestic economy itself.”<sup>67</sup> This is the most commonly conceivable view of capitalism and its eventual expansion to the globe, and it has been widely applied to the study of modern East Asian history. The “imperialism” in the economic realm represents a vulgar understanding of Marxist-Leninist theory.

Instead of treating imperialism as a totalizing whole, Rowe finds it necessary to make a distinction between the economic form and the political/military form of imperialism, as if these are divisible dimensions. This definition of imperialism as competition over territorial expansion between the great powers is mostly “employed by non-Marxist diplomatic historians”.

Overall, Rowe’s distinction between a Marxist and non-Marxist definition, economical dimension and political dimension of imperialism represents an overall inadequacy in the understanding of the dynamics of imperialism (and capitalism) in modern East Asian history. Significantly, this inadequacy is also revealed in the more

---

<sup>67</sup> William Rowe, *China’s Last Empire: the Great Qing*, p.231

recent writings of Chinese history, where the tributary system and the related administrative institutions of the Qing dynasty are taken as evidence of a form of Chinese imperialism and colonialism (sometimes used interchangeably without further elaboration and reflection) in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These new collections of historical approaches, sometimes collectively known as the “New Qing History” school, share a common theoretical starting point, which, contrary to the conventional treating of China as a victim of colonialism and imperialism, attempt to understand China in the Qing empire as a central source of colonial and imperialist expansion in world history.

James Hevia was probably the first China historian to promote the idea of situating the Qing in the world history of simultaneous imperial expansion. In his award-winning work *Cherishing Men From Afar*, Hevia asserts that the Marcartney mission to China in 1793 and its consequential disputes must be interpreted as an encounter “between two imperial formations, each with universalistic pretensions and complex metaphysical systems to buttress such claims.”<sup>68</sup> In Hevia’s account, China and Britain must be treated equally as “two expansive colonial empires, each organized around principles that were presumably incompatible with those of the other.”<sup>69</sup> In other words, the initial clash between the Qing Empire and Great Britain were basically reducible to the rivalry between Chinese Confucianism and English mercantilism; both were employed by respective empires in their colonial projects and constituted a part of the empires’ expansive policies.

Hevia has implicitly created a significant dichotomy, namely ritual and diplomacies. The central confliction between the Qing and British empires, then, according to Hevia, was the mutual suspicious and denial between Lord Marcartney’s “demarcation between ceremony and business, with its specific construction of diplomatic and commercial

---

<sup>68</sup> James Hevia, *Cherishing Men from Afar*, p. 25

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

exchange” and the Qing emperor’s “views on the ritual formation of imperial sovereignty”,<sup>70</sup>.

Recall how John King Fairbank depicted the transition from tributary system to the treaty system as the most important historical watershed in modern Chinese history. According to Fairbank, this remarkable transition from traditional ritual (tribute presentation as sign of submission) to modern diplomacy (treaties between equal sovereignties) allowed China to transform itself from a universal empire to a nation-state. Clearly, Hevia would differ with Fairbank on this point. Instead of seeing a progressive linear relation between the Chinese ritual (tradition and non-Western) and British diplomacy (modern and Western), Hevia posits them in juxtaposition. If we take our interpretation of Hevia’s analysis a step further, it becomes evident that behind the encounter of Chinese Confucianism and British mercantilism, Hevia’s narrative, on a more abstract and theoretical level, is largely built on the underling assumption of a chronological and consequential relation between “early modern” and “modern”. Unlike Fairbank, who saw the ritualistic tradition of the Chinese court as sign of Chinese unpreparedness, Hevia treats the ritual component of the Chinese cosmological order in equality with British diplomacy and mercantilism; the latter are usually associated with rationalization and taken as a sign of modernity.

Laura Hostetler proceeds with Hevia’s argument by claiming that China joined the global trend as early as the seventeenth century. In Hostetler’s view, during its 267 years of rule, the Qing dynasty aggressively doubled the territory it inherited from the Ming dynasty. Accompanying this imperial expansion was the process of incorporation of the ethnically non-Han and culturally non-Chinese people into the Qing Empire. Hostetler examines the ethnographic and cartographic records produced during this imperial

---

<sup>70</sup> *ibid*, p. 210

expansion, and makes the argument that the simultaneous development of a “practice of ethnography” and the “empirical practices in the collection and categorization of knowledge” in both China and Europe suggest that “Qing China was not isolated from global trends in science and the codification of ‘objective’ knowledge. Nor was it simply a recipient of European knowledge, but actively connected to an emergent early modern world.”<sup>71</sup>

“The techniques of expansion that the Qing employed, and the epistemology behind these techniques”, as well as the “various modes of visual representation” the Qing used to construct images of its colonized people and territories, according to Hostetler, “were similar to those that shaped early modern European expansion.”<sup>72</sup> Hostetler sees the Qing as one central source of the colonial powers, whose expansions utilized ethnographic aid to colonial administrators that was common to all other colonial powers around the globe.<sup>73</sup>

While Hevia and Hostetler’s attempts to locate Qing expansion in a global movement and rescue China from the orientalist imagination of being an isolationist and immobile empire must be appropriately appreciated, nonetheless, their claims must be carefully examined in the conceptual context of historically specific imperialism.

---

<sup>71</sup> Laura Hostetler, “Qing Connection to the Early Modern World: Ethnography and Cartography in Eighteenth-Century China”, p. 624. See also Laura Hostetler, *Qing Colonial Enterprise: Ethnography and Cartography in Early Modern China*

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, p. 625

<sup>73</sup> In a book review, James Millward writes that Hostetler’s work is an intersection of two historiography trends: “first is the acknowledgment that the Qing dynasty of the Manchus was an imperial power, engaged in expansion, colonialism, and the other activities that contemporaneous empires elsewhere performed; second, that much of what was happening in China under the Qing fits a general pattern of worldwide developments that growing numbers of scholars are calling ‘early modern’.” Millward’s statement serves as a comprehensive summary of the New Qing history school that developed in the United States in the past three decades. Hostetler’s work must be situated in this intellectual lineage.

It also should be pointed out, Hostler’s assertion that Chinese cartography had merged with the mainstream of world (European) cartography in the eighteenth century is rendered unconvincing if one takes into consideration the fact that traditional Chinese cartography continued to develop despite the employment of both Western technique and personnel.

On a more basic level, Hevia and Hostetler's common epistemological pitfall is that they have treated the concept of imperialism in a trans-historical manner, as if imperialism had always been the same organization with the same motivation since its inception. Furthermore, capitalism and imperialism should not be understood as simple economic categories, or exploitive relations between more advanced societies over the conquered or colonized societies. It is true that capitalism and imperialism plunder profits generated in the "peripheral" areas like China. Nonetheless, treating capitalism and imperialism exclusively as economic categories overlook some of their operations at a much more basic level. The imperialism that the world had encountered in the era of capitalism represented a force that not only transformed the existing social, political, and economic structures, but fundamentally, it brought transformation to the most elusive and private level of human activities.

#### Chinese Imperialism and Colonialism without Capitalism?

The Chinese of empires of Han, Tang, and Yuan undertook expansionist policies that were akin to Roman imperialism, Ottoman imperialism, or Mogul imperialism in the pre-capitalist period. But at the most basic level, all these ancient "imperialism" differed from British imperialism, Japanese imperialism, and the most recent American imperialism in a fundamental way. Imperialism in the latter cases are all-inclusive and pervasive to the deepest structure of everydayness, they penetrate to the most inner core of human life, as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have noted:

The rule of Empire operates on all registers of the social order extending down to the depths of the social world. Empire not only manages a territory and a population but also creates the very world it inhabits. It not only regulates human interactions but also seeks directly to rule over human nature. The object of its rule is social life in its entirety, and thus Empire presents the paradigmatic form of biopower.<sup>74</sup>

---

<sup>74</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, p. xv.

Imperialism in the premodern era implies direct exploitation of natural resources, military conquest, and enslavement of the indigenous populations; these are doubtless important constitutive components of the imperialist project. However, these are trans-historical characteristics of imperialism. Crucially, imperialism in the epoch of capitalism operates on an abstract and elusive and yet permeating level. From the eighteenth century on, imperialism became a thoroughly different form of domination. As Michel Foucault has pointed out, this form of “biopower” is a “set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species became the object of a political strategy, of a general strategy of power.”<sup>75</sup> This form of domination is like a capillary, which reaches the smallest part of the furthest extension of society. In other words, what characterizes imperialism in the epoch of Capitalism is an unprecedented pervasiveness, which penetrates into the deepest level and most elusive aspect of people’s life and imposes an abstract imperative on human daily activities. Imperialism in the late nineteenth century did not only get deeper, it also got broader in scope. Lenin in his classic study of imperialism noted that by 1910:

The characteristic feature of this period is the final partition of the globe...the colonial policy of the capitalist countries has completed the seizure of the unoccupied territories on our planet. For the first time the world is completely divided up, so that in the future only redivision is possible; territories can only pass from one ‘owner’ to another, instead of passing as unowned territory to an ‘owner’.<sup>76</sup>

Since the partition of the globe and the reorganization of the world according to capitalist logic were completed, there would be no more alternative. The new relation between capitalism and the partitioned globe was characterized by a structure of totality,

---

<sup>75</sup> Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, p. 1

<sup>76</sup> Harrison M. Wright ed. *The “New Imperialism”*: Analysis of Late Nineteenth-Century Expansion, p. 29

under which all components were internally connected and complemented each other. Because of the interrelatedness under the totalizing whole, all components constitute each other and function as each other's necessary condition.<sup>77</sup> One could argue, the only possible thing would be the ceaseless operation of deterritorialization and reterritorialization within the totality of global capitalism.

---

<sup>77</sup> Christopher J. Arthur, *The New Dialectic and Marx's Capital*. p. 25

## 6. The Temporal and Spatial Dimensions of Modernity: Capitalist Time and Global Space

A bright moon is born upon the sea,  
At the opposite end of the earth we have this moment to share.  
--Zhang Jiuling (673–740), *Thinking of a Distant Lover While Gazing at the Moon*

In order to adequately understand the emerging notion of “Asia” as both cultural imagination and geopolitical reality in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century China, one must grasp this emerging new regionalism in the process of spatial-temporal re-conceptualization of the world that the Chinese intellectuals went through. Of course, this reconceptualization was by no means a unified and homogeneous process; different thinkers and writers usually developed distinctive insights about this course of reorientation, which reflected, more than anything else, the Chinese intellectual’s individual encounter with the capitalist global space and the modern “homogenous, empty time”<sup>78</sup> of simultaneity. Benedict Anderson described simultaneity as “transverse, cross-time, marked not by prefiguring and fulfillment, but by temporal coincidence, and measured by clock and calendar.”<sup>79</sup>

It is also of crucial significance for us to understand the introduction of “simultaneous existence of uneven and different national territories and space” into the minds of Chinese intellectuals who had initiated a structural re-conceptualization of the world, as well as China’s place in it. For the first time, the world, or, to be more precise, the global capitalist world system, was presented to the Chinese in both its temporal and spatial dimensions. Hence, the Chinese re-conceptualization of the modern world was fundamentally dominated and conditioned by a new spatiotemporal notion of “global,

---

<sup>78</sup> Benjamin Walter, *Illuminations*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1970), p. 261

<sup>79</sup> Anderson Benedict, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006), p. 24

universal time” and “stable and coherent self-identity by means of a territorial nation.”<sup>80</sup>

It was only through this spatiotemporal reorientation, that China “became thinkable as specifically national” and “consciously worldly”<sup>81</sup>

### Capitalist Time

Writing after the shocking fiasco of the Sino-Japanese War of 1895, philosopher Tan Sitong, in his *Ren Xue (An Exposition of Benevolence)*, described his first-hand experience of the transformative power of modern technology:

With steamship and railroad... one could achieve many days' work within a single day, and many years' work could be done within a single year. With the aide of telegraph, postal service and machinery, working process and verbal communication would be facilitated. When all of these have been accumulated together, what people could achieve in one generation worths many generations' efforts.<sup>82</sup>

For Tan and his contemporary Chinese thinkers in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, it had increasingly become commonplace knowledge that the Western powers and Meiji Japan were able to develop in such an astonishing pace because the widespread adaption of mechanization. Nevertheless, Tan distinguished himself from others by making the adequate observation of the emergence of a new sense of temporality. He commented:

The governance of the Western countries emulated that of the three dynasties within a very short span of time. They had no other methods except time saving, hence they never fell short of time, and this is like putting into one man the energy of a few dozen men. It is written in the *Great Learning*: “let the production be rapid.” Only machines could achieve this.<sup>83</sup>

---

<sup>80</sup> Xiaobing Tang, *Global Space and the Nationalist Discourse of Modernity: the Historical Thinking of Liang Qichao*. (California: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 2

<sup>81</sup> Rebecca Karl, *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), p. 151

<sup>82</sup> Tan Sitong, *An Exposition of Benevolence: The Jen-Hsueh of T'an Ssu-T'ung*. (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1984), p. 80

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, p. 132–33; translation modified

Speaking from a nationalist perspective, he continued to warn his countrymen: “when time is dallied away, not only one’s state would be conquered, the more fearful consequence is that one’s race would be perished.”<sup>84</sup>

At a different level, Tan’s observation and remark are conditioned by the capitalist temporality to which China, and other places, were beginning to adapt to. In Tan’s understanding, timesaving and efficiency became the key to a nation-state’s success in the overall competition of the global market. Viren Murthy has properly pointed out that Tan connected China’s past with “the temporal category of speed, saving time, and machines. By linking these concepts to Confucianism, Tan presents them as normative and compatible with a nationalist narrative.”<sup>85</sup> Through juxtaposing Western progress and the Confucian ideal world of “the three dynasties”, Tan was trying to recover a temporality that he believed had already existed in ancient China. In the Confucian classis of *Great Learning*, it is stated “there is also a clear Way for the production of wealth. When producers are many and consumers are few; when production is rapid and use is slow, then there will always be enough. (生财有大道，生之者众，食之者寡。为之者疾，用之者舒。则财恒足矣。)”<sup>86</sup> Tan made the observation of a simple and outright principle that emphasises the necessity of rapid and high efficiency in production. He made the gesture toward an understanding of a form of time that fundamentally diverges from the form of time with which Tan and his contemporary Chinese intellectuals were familiar. In what follows, a reorientation in the perception of temporality will be examined in the light of global capitalist modernity. The homogenization of traditional forms of temporalities into capitalist time is a basic aspect

---

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, p. 80

<sup>85</sup> Viren Murthy, *The Political Philosophy of Zhang Taiyan: The Resistance of Consciousness*. (Leiden: Brill, 2011), p. 145

<sup>86</sup> English translation by A. Charles Muller, <http://www.acmuller.net/con-dao/greatlearning.html>, accessed on May 7<sup>th</sup>, 2012

of the modern experience in capitalism. By situating China and Asia in an unprecedented form of global simultaneity, we are allowed to make the connection between the transformation of temporality and the capitalist modernity, which has enabled this transformation.

Chinese novelist Dai Sijie, in his *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise*, captures the moment within which life in a pre-modern Chinese village was transformed by the introduction of a clock, a symbolic instrument of simultaneity and temporal precision:

Before, in this village, there had been neither alarm, nor watch, nor clock. People had always lived by the rising or setting of the sun. We were surprised to see how the alarm assumed a veritable power over the peasants, almost sacred. Everyone came to consult it, as if our house were some kind of temple. Every morning the same ritual: the chief strode around our house, smoking his bamboo pipe, as long as an old rifle. He did not stop looking at the alarm. And at 9 o'clock precisely, he gave a long, deafening whistle, to send the villagers off to the fields. - It's time, you hear me! He shouted out to the houses around. It's time to work, you good-for-nothings! What are you waiting for?<sup>87</sup>

Prior to the arrival of the Capitalist model of production, peasants' lives in traditional societies remained untouched by the "empty, homogenous" temporality. Temporality in pre-modern societies was interwoven with people's substantial and concrete daily activities. In other words, their temporality was regulated by natural rhythms, such as the movements of moon and sun, the passage of seasons and years, and life cycles. Hence in pre-capitalist societies "temporal measures and course of action are still completely convergent."<sup>88</sup> For example, one finds, in Madagascar, the existence of temporal measurements like "the time it takes to cook rice" or "to roast a locust"<sup>89</sup>. Even in contemporary China, temporal units like "the time it takes to drink a cup of hot tea", "the time it takes to smoke a pipe of tobacco" or "the time it takes to burn a stick of incense" remain commonplace usages in people's casual conversation.

---

<sup>87</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000)

<sup>88</sup> Reinhart Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002) p. 103

<sup>89</sup> Ibid

In the pre-capitalist East Asian world order, a shared temporality was incarnated in the institutions of the tributary system. It manifested itself as an expression of dynastical time of the Chinese emperor's reign title. The transformation from the "dynastical time" to the "world time" marked the most important temporal re-configuration in East Asia, and helped the creation of global simultaneity.

In communicating with the Chinese court, the tribute states were required to use the ruling Chinese emperor's reign titles, which claim the supremacy of the Chinese emperor in the "Sinicized temporal space, not just for his Chinese subjects but for other peoples in the sinocentric world as well."<sup>90</sup> This principal ideal reflected the Chinese cosmological order and imposed simultaneity on the participating tribute states to maintain the regional order of East Asia. However, this particular simultaneity was ritualistic in nature. It helped in the imagination of a synchronized East Asian community in the pre-capitalist era.

In the 1690 edition of the *Qing Collected Statutes*, section on "General Regulations for the Presentation of Tribute at Court" states that:

Whenever memorials and official dispatches ought to be presented, they should all be dated by the Ching dynastic reign-title. On the occasion of imperial birthdays, New Years days, and winter solstices, they should present a memorial in the imperial presence and offer a tribute of local products, and present a (congratulatory) tablet to the Empress and the Heir-apparent and offer a tribute of local products, sending an official delegate to the Court congratulations.<sup>91</sup>

The three mandatory tribute missions of imperial birthdays, New Years days and winter solstices were intended to reinforce the synchronized temporality, or the universal time, shared by both the suzerain and its tribute states. By imposing the Chinese

---

<sup>90</sup> JaHyun Kim Haboush, "Contesting Chinese Times, Nationalizing Temporal Space", in Struve Lynn ed. *Time, Temporality, and Imperial Transition: East Asia from Ming to Qing* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), p. 129

<sup>91</sup> John King Fairbank and S. Y. Teng. "On the Qing Tributary System." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 2(June 1941), p. 164

dynastical temporality upon its tributary states, “Chinese imperium” maintained a Sinicized temporality in the political and ritual spheres.

This sinocentric political and ritual temporality was forced on East Asian communities externally. However, it only reached the outer layer of the political and ritual spheres. Most significantly, the sinocentric temporality did not intervene and regulate people’s daily activities. Moreover, it began to fracture as East Asia was deeply entangled in the capitalist world system, and was eventually replaced by capitalist temporality, which subjugated other forms of time to its abstract emptiness and homogeneity.

The expansion of capitalist modernity was accompanied by a process of reconceptualization of time caused by the new mode of temporality. It is of crucial significance that this new, capitalist temporality also brought about an unprecedented homogenization and simultaneity. In this process, the heterogeneities of time in pre-capitalist societies were surpassed by the emptiness and homogeneity of time in capitalism.

Closely related to the capitalist temporality is the concept of socially necessary labor time, which Marx defines as “the labor-time required to produce any use-value under the conditions of production normal for a given society and with the average degree of skill and intensity of labor prevalent in that society.”<sup>92</sup>

Socially necessary labor-time, for Marx, is a temporal category limited to a given national/geographical unit. The difference in socially necessary labor-time is expressed in the form of political/economic unevenness between nation-states. In a broader horizon, namely the global capitalist world, it is crucial to recognize that, as the capitalist mode of production expanded from Western Europe to the rest of the globe, the ceaseless

---

<sup>92</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 129

proliferation and self-valorization of capital have invariably imposed their own socially necessary labor time upon the “peripheral” societies, through various means, including colonization and commerce. This effect of subjugating to the capitalist temporality has created a process within which people in the peripheral societies must abandon their own, or traditional, temporality and adopt a temporality that is fundamentally embodied in the core of capitalist modernity. Hence, previous models of temporalities that had existed in various pre-capitalist societies, with their respective encounters with modernity and the capitalist world, now must be subsumed to a new temporality, which is abstract and homogeneous in nature.

Built in 1893, the enormous clock sat atop the Shanghai Maritime Customs House was the largest clock in Asia at the time. It was “the chimes sounding” of this exact copy of Westminster’s Big Ben that “set the tone for Shanghai in the first half of the twentieth century.”<sup>93</sup> Six years later, another gigantic clock was built in Nantong, a town north of Shanghai. The new clock in Nantong was a gift from the British manufactory, J. Hetherington & Sons of Manchester. Clocks like the one in Nantong, as a constitutive part of the modern factory system, had inaugurated a transition of temporal sense in China. Jesuit missionaries and merchants brought watches to China. Emperor Qianlong (1711–1799) was in possession of more than four thousand timepieces. However, watches and clocks were treated as mere curious oddities, symbols of social status and decorative items. Only with the transformation brought by capitalism, did clocks begin to function in Chinese society as mechanical instruments of temporal precision.

While this simultaneity is measured by clock and calendar, it is reinforced by newspaper and radio. Benedict Anderson asserts in his *Imagined Communities*, “the date

---

<sup>93</sup> Wen-Hsin Yeh, *Shanghai Splendor: Economic Sentiments and the Making of Modern China, 1843-1949* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), p. 79

at the top of the newspaper, the single most important emblem on it, provides the essential connection—the steady onward clocking of homogeneous, empty time.”<sup>94</sup>

Hence, reading the newspaper acquires a ceremonial significance, in which the readers realize that what “he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion.”<sup>95</sup>

Interestingly, by the nineteenth century, people had already accumulated considerable geographical knowledge of the external world and had produced accurate cartographies since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. What hindered people from grasping the world as a global stage was the absence of a sense of simultaneity and presentness. A Zionist social critic, Max Nordau (1849–1923) warned his contemporaries about the fragility of human nervous system, which he believed “ was not evolved enough to handle the overwhelming density of simultaneous information brought by newspaper, radio and telegraph, and other instant transmitters of information.”<sup>96</sup> Nordau claimed that if a villager reads a dozen square yards of newspaper daily, being constantly called to the telephone, thinks simultaneously of the five continents of the world, he “interests himself simultaneously in the issue of a revolution in Chile, a bush-war in East Africa, a massacre in North China, a famine in Russia”, are serious injury to the nerves is almost inevitable.<sup>97</sup> Although Nordau’s primary concern was that the human brain could not handle the information from all over the world, nonetheless, one unstated factor behind his observation was that a synchronized global time began to form. By negating such a simultaneity, Nordau’s anxiety confirmed the emergence of this global simultaneity.

---

<sup>94</sup> Anderson Benedict, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006), p.33

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, p. 35

<sup>96</sup> Stephen Kern, “Timing History Without a Clock”, *Social Science Information* (June 1990), 29 (2), p. 389

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

The global simultaneity created by capitalist time purposes a conceptual framework that is capable of explaining the modern experience in capitalist modernity. At a higher level of abstraction, modernity now could be understood as a relational connectedness and a global synchronism. It “calls attention to the experience of sharing the same temporality, that whatever and however a society develops, it is simply taking place at the same time as other modernities... What coeval suggests is contemporaneity yet the possibility of difference.”<sup>98</sup>

The view of modernity as a contemporaneity in spatiotemporal term liberates us from a Eurocentric teleological modernity, and allows us to see the modern experience from a perspective of global capitalist development. However, the shared temporality in capitalism does not imply an equal and even development or the eradication of difference. Rather, the temporal unevenness, or the “synchronicity of the nonsynchronous”, as Ernst Bloch coined the term, is an inherent feature of global capitalist development. Bloch further observed: “not all people exist in the same *Now*. They do so only externally, by virtue of the fact that they may all be seen today. But that does not mean that they are living at the same time with others.”<sup>99</sup> Not every one has reached the same hour on the great clock of capitalist development. Reflecting an uneven moment of social development, residuals of the past persisted, pre-capitalist and capitalist exist in the same spatiotemporal sphere, “handicrafts alongside the great cartels, peasant fields with the Krupp factories or the Ford plant in the distance.”<sup>100</sup>

At the beginning of this chapter, an analysis of citations from philosopher and reformer Tan Sitong allowed us to grasp the preliminary understanding of capitalist temporality in late Qing China. Tan also alluded that he understood that the unevenness

---

<sup>98</sup> Harootunian Harry, *Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture, and Community in Interwar Japan*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. xvi-xvii

<sup>99</sup> Ernst Bloch Nonsynchronism and the Obligation to Its Dialectics. p. 22

<sup>100</sup> Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism: Post-Contemporary Interventions*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), p. 307

in temporality had begun to prevail in China and the West. With modern technologies, Tan asserted, “A journey that takes more than ten days can be covered in one day, a piece of work that takes more than a decade can be completed in a year. Together with electric wires, a postal system, machine manufacturing, the simplicity of work, and the efficiency of communication, what is achieved in one generation, taken as a whole, can equal dozens of generation, and what is experienced in a year is like what has been experienced in several scores of years.”<sup>101</sup>

China’s backwardness in late Qing hence was articulated in temporal terms. What took China ten days, a decade, or several generations to accomplish would be done in one day, one year or one generation in the West. Interestingly, in Tan’s view, modern technology, and more basically, capitalist development, apparently promised eventual even development. In other words, all societies would reach the same level of development. Despite the fact that China suffered from the structural unevenness of global capitalism, Tan, nonetheless optimistically believed, “ambitions will be allowed fulfillment, talents will emerge, vistas will be opened up, and harmony will prevail. Is it wrong to say this is the prolongation of life?”<sup>102</sup>

With the introduction of the capitalist “empty, homogenous time”, a sense of simultaneity shared by coexisting, unevenly developed societies allowed the Chinese to grasp a synchronic global space, where the hitherto both spatially scattered myriads of communities were henceforth transformed and remolded into national societies, which are spatially imagined territorial sovereigns.

### Global Space

---

<sup>101</sup> Tan Sitong, *An Exposition of Benevolence*. p. 132

<sup>102</sup> Ibid

People's experience with time and place constitute a fundamental component of modernity. The above section describes how the transformation brought by an "empty and homogenous" capitalist temporality created a sense of simultaneity, which helped the imagination of a synchronized global space. In what follows, the spatial aspect of the modern transformation will be discussed in relation to the temporal transformation.

The reorientation of spatial conceptions in China involved not only the development of a geographical knowledge of the world, but on a more important level, this reorientation brought about a new worldview. A discursively articulated global space, consisting of unevenly developed nation-states, began to take shape among Chinese intellectuals at the turn of nineteenth century. The production of global space in Chinese discourse is conditioned and supported by the incursion of capitalist modernity. As Henri Lefebvre explains: "each society is born within the framework of a given mode of production, with the inherent peculiarities to this framework molding its space. Spatial practice defines its space, it poses it and presupposes it in a dialectical interaction."<sup>103</sup> Hence, instead of being naturally "received and transmitted", space is socially produced, and, just like the Marxian concept of socially necessary labor-time, it varies from one society to another. This spatial variety ultimately manifests itself in the form of unevenness between nation-states.

Geographical tradition initiated by scholar-officials like Wei Yuan (1794-1857) and Xu Jiyou (1795-1873) in the late Qing placed its primary focus on the utilization of geographical knowledge in national defense planning. According to this tradition, Korea and Vietnam were mere tributary subjects that served as the Middle Kingdom's frontier defense. By taking these surrounding tributary states into consideration, a more strategically comprehensive plan could be formed. In other words, in the early scholar-

---

<sup>103</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *State, Space, World: Selected Essays* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), p. 187

officials' perception, tributary states, Korea and Vietnam in particular, were potential sources in the Qing Empire's struggle with the escalating European incursion. Gradually, this view of "All Under Heaven" must change and acquire an understanding that would allow them to initiate a view of global capitalist space comprised of unevenly developed nation-states.

While it is a truism that each civilization developed its distinctive view of cosmological order, one must not take the notion of "globe" as the totality of all these different views of cosmological order added together. In other words, a global space that comprises the entire earth is not yet thinkable before global capitalism. It is true that by the fifteenth century human beings had already accumulated a considerable amount of geographical knowledge of the outside world and were in an accelerated pace of exploration; nonetheless, different parts of the world were still mutually unrelated and autonomous. It is an undeniable fact that commercial activities, by this time, had woven webs of trades, which embraced transcontinental exchange of goods. Theorists associated with the world system school in particular like to see these commercial webs as the archetype of globalization. On the other hand, it is necessary to see that globalization only became possible through the ceaseless expansion of capitalism.

Marx famously claimed, in the *Communist Manifesto*, that capitalism driven by the "need of a constantly expanding market for its products," is chased "over the entire surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connexions everywhere."<sup>104</sup> The ceaseless proliferation of capitalism "compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilization into their midst, i.e., to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it

---

<sup>104</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), p. 224

creates a world after its own image.”<sup>105</sup>

What Marx described here is the contradiction between global space and nation-state. As the capitalist mode of production became the prevalent and dominant mode around the world, what it created, through colonization and commerce, is an unprecedented circulation of commodities and way of commodification. Through a web of markets, capitalism’s ceaseless proliferation began to emerge on a global scale, and the notion of a globe, or a global world system, became thinkable for the first time.

DeLeuze and Guattari have described this process in the following passage:

There is the twofold movement of decoding or deterritorializing flows on the one hand, and their violent and artificial reterritorialization on the other. The more the capitalist machine deterritorializes, decoding and axiomatizing flows in order to extract surplus value from them, the more its ancillary apparatuses, such as government bureaucracies and the forces of law and order, do their utmost to reterritorialize, absorbing in the process a larger and larger share of surplus value.<sup>106</sup>

The “two fold movement” of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, put differently, is the operation within which the global world and the nation-states are created simultaneously. This contradiction is inherent to the logic of capital: for on one hand, nation-states, as the basic component of global world, fulfill and complete the global world; on the other hand, nation-states, each with their own distinctive political boundaries and cultural traditions, are also a resisting force to the globalizing process.

In the case of late Qing China, what was “deterritorialized” was the Chinese cosmological order of “Tian-Xia” or All Under Heaven. The “reterritorialization” process, on the other hand, produced the global space and nation-states that constituted the global space. The transmutation of boundaries, especially that between China and its former

---

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. 34-35

tributary states like Vietnam and Korea, is one manifestation of this process of “deterritorialization and reterritorialization”.

Capitalist time and global space together form the significant premise of a new worldview for Chinese at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Radically different from the traditional sinocentric cosmological order, the new worldview was intimately associated with and conditioned by global capitalism. Through the temporal-spatial reorientation inaugurated by global capitalism, for the first time, historical events and geographical existences beyond and within the Middle Kingdom were connected together in an unprecedented way. Whereas the tributary system was an incarnation of the traditional cosmology, the new worldview presented a conceptual framework in which Chinese nationalism and the regionalization of Asia become possible. Regionalization implied a process in which cultural imaginations became actualized as geopolitical realities; at the same time the geopolitical realities reflect the cultural imaginations. In order to inscribe itself as a nation-state in the global capitalist world, China had to “both accept a new global, universal time and to claim a stable and coherent self-identity by means of a territorial nation.”<sup>107</sup>

---

<sup>107</sup> Xiaobing Tang, *Global Space and the Nationalist Discourse of Modernity*. p. 2

## 7. Commodity Form and the Nation-state

Nation-states and nationalism are essential components of capitalist modernity. It is only with a synchronized global space that a world constituted by individual nation-states becomes possible. Accordingly, the emergence of nation-states is closely linked to the logic of capitalism and the commodity form. Inherent to commodity form is an antinomy, namely a constant opposition between exchange-value and use-value. In capitalist modernity, a series of antinomies derive from the overarching antinomy of exchange-value and use-value. By considering nation-state as one manifestation of the commodity form, this chapter will reveal the paradoxical nature of the nation-state. Echoing the discussions of modernity and imperialism, this chapter brings the nation-state into the narrative and shows the radical impact of global capitalism, which continues to lay the theoretical foundation for my study of the tribute system and Asianism.

In an article entitled “Does India Exist?”, Immanuel Wallerstein made the following important ontological query: does India exist? For him, India came into existence concurrently with the expansion of the Western capitalist world-system. This ever-expanding world-system sporadically conquered other geographic bodies and eventually incorporated new zones into it. As a result, non-Western geographic zones were relentlessly drawn into a modern world-system dominated by the ideal of the West. In the context of East Asia, the blurred political boundaries of pre-modern empires and tribute states were redrawn into the precisely defined boundaries of sovereign nation-states. This process has been continuous for several centuries since the seventeenth century. The result, in Wallerstein’s words, is that “the ‘stateness’ of the ‘sovereign states’

has been increasingly clearly defined and their powers specified and enhanced.”<sup>108</sup> This process, according to Wallerstein, eventually created sovereign nation-states, or at least what we might think of as “candidate sovereign states—the colonies.” In other words, Western conquest has “reinvented” non-West territories like China and India, and brought them into both global and national consciousness.

Like other theorists of world system theory, Wallerstein expressed a rather static dichotomy of West/ non-West in order to explain the invention of Non-Western historical societies. These West/non-West relations are also manifested in the core- periphery antinomy, famously formulated by the world system school. However, at one level, these binary constructions “suppress ambiguous or interstitial spaces between the opposed categories” and “entail a violent hierarchy, in which one term of the opposition is always dominant...the binary opposition itself exists to confirm the dominance.”<sup>109</sup> At a more fundamental level, world system theory failed to take into consideration the fact that the capitalist world system is by no means a static antinomy of core and peripheries. The intrinsic disjunction and unevenness of global capitalism renders a clear-cut dichotomization impossible and problematical.

Although Wallerstein has shown that his understanding of global capitalism was rather partial and is in an unsystematic manner, his writing nonetheless pointed to a more fundamental logic of capitalism. Wallerstein made some seemingly contradictory statements regarding the emergence of India as a nation-state. He first claims that all he has said regarding India “would equally be true if I substituted Pakistan, or England, or Brazil, or China for India. What I have to say about India is not specific to its history. It is generic about all currently existing sovereign states...”<sup>110</sup> after speaking of a universal

---

<sup>108</sup> Immanuel Maurice Wallerstein, *Unthinking Social Science: The Limits of Nineteenth-century Paradigms*. (Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 2001), p. 131

<sup>109</sup> Ibid. p.19

<sup>110</sup> Ibid, p. 131

principle that equally governs all nation-states equally, Wallerstein switched his position and asserted that:

Is there nothing special about India, nothing specific to the Indian case? Of course there is. India as a concrete entity is different in multitudinous and important ways from every other state or nation or people or civilization. The real social world is a complex entity composed of incredibly complex groups and individual. Everything is specific.<sup>111</sup>

On one hand there is a form of concrete specificity, embodied in the particular form of Indian historical culture. On the other hand, Wallerstein spoke of something universal, something applicable to all other “currently existing sovereign states”. Wallerstein’s argument pointed to a paradox that is inherent in nation-states.

The nation-state is the most competitive and compatible form of political organization in the resistance to global capitalist world system. Paradoxically, at the same time, it also functions to fulfill the capitalist world system as an indispensable constituting component. The paradox, moreover, also manifests itself in the spatial and temporal dimensions of the nation-state. Spatially, a nation-state is a geographical existence with definitive boundaries; this differed in a fundamental way from the imagination of the Chinese empire as a limitless universality. Temporally, it carries historical justification as well as the potential of the future.

As Prasenjit Duara has argued, a nation-state faces backward to its historical root and forward to its potential in modernity simultaneously: “The nation actually both lives in history and also at the end of it. It simultaneously legitimates itself as an essence that continues through History, but as also free from its hold—modern self-consciousness is, after all in every way, the end of history.”

---

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, p. 134

Most importantly, Duara points out the underlining contradiction of that characterized nation-state in the modern capitalist world, namely it has to preserve the historical national essence (particularity in the form of national culture) and at the same time embrace modernity (universality in civilizational form). Duara describes this dynamic between ancientness and newness as a process of double movement, in which the nation-state, as the subject of history “must daily reproduce the project of recovering its national essence—to secure its transparency as the already-always of the nation-space—especially in the face of internal and external challenges to this claim.”<sup>112</sup> Paradoxically, on the other hand, the nation-state is constantly committed to the negation of national past and remnants of tradition, since “the Enlightenment discourse of modern civilization has made its imperative for all societies to affiliate themselves with modernity.”<sup>113</sup> Thus,

While on the one hand, nation-states glorify the ancient or eternal character of the nation, they also seek to emphasize the unprecedented nature of the nation-state, because it is only in this form that the people-nation has been able to realize itself as the self-conscious subject of History.<sup>114</sup>

Another instance that supports Duara’s observation could be found in the Chinese history and geography textbooks published in the early Republican era (1911-1949). One could discern two simultaneous and yet somewhat contradictory trends in the writings of these school textbooks. On one hand, historians and compilers of the textbooks presented China as a historically unified nation-state deploying “description of an iconic, cohesive national territory whose fixed boundaries corresponded to an idealized version of the

---

<sup>112</sup> Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China*, p. 29

<sup>113</sup> Ibid

<sup>114</sup> Ibid

Qing”<sup>115</sup>. On the other hand, the incompleteness of China as a nation-state was also a salient feature in these textbooks. China was “more of a potential than a fully realized nation-state.”<sup>116</sup> Historically, China was a unified entity with internal cultural diversity. The historical unification of cultural diversity had been transformed into the essence of the Chinese nation-states. However, China has a partial nation-state, its incompleteness was a consequence of imperialist encroachment and uneven capitalist development.

While these two features of the Chinese nation-state are seemingly in contradiction, this contradiction of historical unification and present incompleteness, more than anything else, reveals a fundamental paradox the Chinese intellectuals encountered in the creation of a nation-state. This dilemma is what Duara has described as a “double movement” of the contradictory nature of the modern nation-state. It enables us to see that while on one hand, the national past provides concrete particularity of each nation-state; on the other hand, all nation-states, at the same time, were entangled in a universal and monotonous form of development and struggle. Historical unification was understood in relation to the present condition of incompleteness.

While Duara and others have provided a brilliant account of the contradictory manifested in the modern nation-state; he has also noted that this contradiction represents a dichotomy between the particular and the universal, and in Asian study between East and West. Nonetheless, he has limited his inquiry to scratching the surface. What, we must ask, is the inherent logic behind this contradictory nature of nation-states? How do we explain the binary oppositions like universal and particular, abstract and concrete, quantity and quality, homogeneous and heterogeneous, tradition and modern? After all, these pairs of binary oppositions, or dichotomies, have increasingly become the

---

<sup>115</sup> Robert Culp. *Articulating Citizenship: Civil Education and Student Politics in Southeastern China, 1912-1940*. p. 55

<sup>116</sup> Ibid

dominating model of thinking in the understanding of modern capitalist modernity. As Fredric Jameson has argued, in the modern mind, things are sorted out “into paired groups of ever widening comprehensiveness” and “...all meanings are organized...in pairs of oppositions or determinate difference.”<sup>117</sup>

This dual and contradictory nature of modern mind should be recognized as a derivative of the commodity form. The logic of commodity form, which Marx presented in the first chapter of *Capital*, points to a solution to the contradiction between universality and particularity. Marx writes about the two-sides of commodity form, namely use-value and exchange-value in *Capital*:

The utility of a thing makes it a use-value. But this utility is not a thing of air. Being limited by the physical properties of the commodity it has no existence apart from that commodity. A commodity...is therefore, so far as it is a material thing, a use-value, something useful.<sup>118</sup>

The above passage reveals the concrete, particularity and objective nature of the use-value. On the other hand, exchange value represents something subject, universal and abstract, Marx writes:

Exchange-value, at first sight, presents itself as a quantitative relation, as the proportion in which values in use of one sort are exchanged for those of another sort, a relation constantly changing with time and space. Hence exchange value appears to be something accidental and purely relative, and consequently an intrinsic value.<sup>119</sup>

As use-value, commodities are, above all, of different qualities, but as exchange-value they are merely different quantities.<sup>120</sup>

Marx emphasises the qualitative and quantitative opposition between use-value and exchange-value. However, if we take one step further, the two-sides of commodity form are closely linked to the dichotomous nature of modern capitalist society. It is a major characteristic of capitalist society that thinking is usually conditioned and shaped by pairs

---

<sup>117</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Ideologies of Theory*, Volume 1, p.11

<sup>118</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital*. ed. David McLellan. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 13

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, p. 14

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, p. 15

of conceptual antinomies. The use-value side and exchange-value side of the commodity form manifest themselves as the inherent logical antinomies in capitalism.

During the late Qing era, China entered the global world system as a result of the expansion of the capitalist world system. By historicizing this moment on an abstract level, it enables us to grasp the moment that capitalist modernity was introduced to the Qing Empire. As a result of capitalist expansion, a significant philosophical transformation at a deeper level of abstraction occurred, namely the prevalence of philosophical antinomies. These antinomies, such as subject and object, abstract and concrete, particularity and universality, all reflect the contradictory structure of the commodity form. While exchange value represents the object, concrete and universality, use value represents subject, abstract and particularity. Chris Arthur summarizes this contradictory of commodity form in the following passage:

The value form of the commodity posits a split between value as the identity of commodities premised on an abstract universal posited through equivalent exchange and their enduring particularity, differentiating them from each other as use values.<sup>121</sup>

While use-value represents concrete experience and is often associated with authenticity or particularity against the homogenizing forces of modernity<sup>122</sup>, it suggests a different perspective to look at the controversies over the issue of Chinese nation-state and modernity. On one hand, the fulfillment of the Chinese nation-state requires something uniquely and essentially Chinese; on the other hand, the nation-state is a political form that disperses all over the globe, hence acquires universality.

Another instance of the contradictory nature of the nation-state is that internally, it represented a homogenizing force. It requires its entire population to share a common essence, be it racial and biological traits or cultural practices. On an international scene,

---

<sup>121</sup> Christopher J. Arthur. *The New Dialectic and Marx's Capital*. p. 81

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid*, p. 94

however, individual nation-states become an embodiment of heterogeneity. they legitimize themselves through claiming national uniqueness.

In *Beyond the Bronze Pillars: Envoy Poetry and the Sino-Vietnamese Relationship*, Liam Kelly deliberately avoids the usage of “nation-state” and the nationalist teleological terms like “China” or “Vietnam”. Rather, he discovers an alternative term from the Confucian classics, “the domain of manifest civility”, which he believes more accurately reflects the historical self-identity of the states in premodern East Asia, where the world was envisioned as comprising *unequal* “domains of manifest civility”.<sup>123</sup>

The southern Kingdom (Vietnam), as they sometimes called this domain, was different from a modern nation-state in that it was not perceived to be the equal of all other domains of manifest civility. It also differed from the modern nation-state in that its inhabitants did not actively attempt to maintain a distinct culture of their own, one that would set them apart from peoples in other domains of manifest civility. Instead, they sought to achieve a kind of cultural unity with other such domains by engaging in the same cultural activities and ritual practice as did people in the preeminent domain of manifest civility, what we today call China.<sup>124</sup>

In Kelly’s account of the traditional East Asian world, cultural homogeneity transcended the uniqueness of the nation-state. His claim also points to a deeper logic. Kelly captures a basic characteristic of premodern, pre-capitalist countries: unlike modern nation-states in the capitalist world system, traditional East Asian kingdoms were not preoccupied by the logic of commodity form. Hence the constant struggle of national uniqueness and universality was not a prevailing concern in premodern, pre-capitalist Asia. It was only in the era of capitalism that a formal equality of nation-states and unique national essence becomes the opposite end of a dichotomy, of which the other end is the universality of modernity. This radical discontinuity from pre-capitalism to capitalism allows us to see the rupture that global capitalism has brought to Asia. China

---

<sup>123</sup> Liam Kelly *Beyond the Bronze Pillars: Envoy Poetry and the Sino-Vietnamese Relationship* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005), p. 28

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37

and its intellectuals were forced to think in terms of the antinomies that derived from the commodity form in capitalism, and posit the Chinese nation-state in the global space and capitalist temporality. In Viren Murthy's view, the dilemma that nation-states face is precisely a manifestation of the commodity form:

The nation embodies both sides of the opposition of the commodity form. All nations are equal, just like commodities from the standpoint of exchange-value. However, at the same time, each nation attempts to assert its particularity by referring to emotive resources in premodern texts and practices.<sup>125</sup>

Hence, in the capitalist world system, individual nationalists might vacillate between resistance and cooperation, nonetheless, in the end, every nation-state invariably enters this overarching logic of capital. The nation-state, in order to be a nation-state, must first enter this apparently contradictory logic embodied in capitalist commodity form, where "every part has to be complemented by others to be what it is; hence internal relations typify the whole. A thing is internally related to another if this other is a necessary condition of its nature."<sup>126</sup> Hyun Ok Park comments this contradictory relation of resistance and cooperation by noting that "capitalism...draws together colonialists and their nationalist counterparts to work for a common goal—capitalist development of a given territory—but for different reasons"<sup>127</sup>

---

<sup>125</sup> Viren Murthy, *The Political Philosophy of Zhang Taiyan*. p. 30

<sup>126</sup> Christopher J. Arthur. *The New Dialectic and Marx's Capital*. p. 24-25

<sup>127</sup> Hyun Ok Park. *Two Dreams in One Bed: Empire, Social Life, and the Origins of the North Korean Revolution in Manchuria*.

## 8. The Case of Phan Boi Chau: *Wang Guo* (Lost State) and *Tongwen* (Common Culture)

Phan Boi Chau was unquestionably one of the most preeminent individuals among the early generation of Vietnamese nationalists. As a transitional figure, Phan carried on the resistance tradition of the *Can Vuong* movement,<sup>128</sup> and the end of his anticolonial career in 1925 marked the transition to that of Ho Chi Minh. In the conventional historiography, Phan Boi Chau was repeatedly presented as a wholehearted admirer of Meiji Japan who sought to “create a new Vietnam in the image of Meiji Japan.”<sup>129</sup> According to this view, his advocacies of Vietnam following the Japanese path were systematically materialized in his *Dong Du* movement (1905-1909), which encouraged Vietnamese youth to learn the secret of modernization in Japan.

These views are invariably built on an unstated presumption of a single, normative Eurocentric modernity, which inexplicitly equates modernization with westernization. According to this view, since Japan was the only Asian country that managed to successfully modernize itself through Westernization, hence the Japanese method naturally served as the only legitimate model for the liberation of the rest of Asia. Accordingly, weak nations of Asia invariably longed for Japan’s tutorage and alliance. An arbitrary understanding of Asianism, which completely overlooks the elements that opposed the Japanese imperialism, has also derived from this distorting and oversimplifying logic.<sup>130</sup> What is even more problematical is this interpretation reinforces

---

<sup>128</sup> For continuity and similarity between the Can Vuong movement and Phan Boi Chau’s Modernization Society, see David G. Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism, 1885-1925*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), p. 105

<sup>129</sup> Vinh Sinh, ed., *Phan Bội Châu and the Đông-Du Movement*. (New Haven: Yale Center for International and Area Studies, 1988), p. 102

<sup>130</sup> On this point, Wang Hui notably remarks that “modern Japanese Asianism was first directed at ‘reviving’ or stimulating Asia, but soon became intertwined with an expansionist ‘continental policy’ and the imperialist scheme of ‘Great East Asia.’ Under this shadow, the intellectuals and revolutionaries of China, Korea, and other Asian countries were never able to express any interest

the Eurocentric teleological view of modernity, which basically assumes a linear progressive development that begins with weaker Asian nations; after successful Westernization they would reach the level of Japan; and eventually every nation would be evenly developed by reaching the historical destination of all nation-states, namely, becoming Europe.

This rhetoric is abundantly present in Tran My-Van's "Japan through Vietnamese Eyes (1905-1945)", Shiraishi Masaya's "Phan Boi Chau in Japan" and Vinh Sinh's "Phan Boi Chau and Fukuzawa Yukichi: Perception on National Independence", the two essays collected in *Phan Boi Chau and the Dong-Du Movement*, also follow suit of this rhetoric. A central theme common to all three articles is an emphasis on the ostensible connection between Vietnam and Japan at the turn of the nineteenth century. When it comes to Phan Boi Chau, these articles all argue that Phan launched the *Dong-Du* movement because of his sheer admiration of Japan as the model for Asian liberation, and Phan's early effort was to make Vietnam like Japan by articulating an intimate connection. They claim that the modernization movement in Vietnam "was greatly influenced by the rise of Japan in the eastern hemisphere, especially following Japan's victory in the Russo-Japanese war." For Vietnamese anticolonial comrades, Japan was "a source of inspiration and began to be perceived as a model, a stimulant and even as a possible savior of Vietnam."<sup>131</sup>

Positing Phan Boi Chau's historical experience in such a framework not only misconceives the meaning of modernity in the context of early twentieth century East Asia, it also represses the possibility to scrutinize the intricate intra-Asia interactions and the emerging meaning of Asia derived from these interactions.

---

in any of the many varieties of 'Asianism' that developed in modern Japan." Wang Hui, "The Politics of Imagining Asia." p. 29. However, this alienating factor is always overlooked by Vietnam scholars who emphasis Phan Boi Chau's "admiration" of Japan and the Japanese-Vietnamese connection.

<sup>131</sup> Tran My-Van, "Japan through Vietnamese Eyes (1905-1945)". *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (March, 1999), p. 126

While it has become commonplace rhetoric for historians to argue that Phan Boi Chau chose Japan for his *Dong-Du* movement mostly for the ideal of “common culture, common race”, few realize that this perceived sameness in culture that Phan believed to exist among East Asian countries of Vietnam, China, Japan and Korea was fundamentally reinvented and conditioned by the global capitalist modernity. “*Tongwen Tongzhong* (common culture, common race)” as a widely applicable notion at the turn of the twentieth century is taken for granted for most scholars who examines the intra-Asian relation, as if a “common culture” and “common culture” had always served as a mediating power in the East Asia regional order. “Common culture” is mostly expressed as the tie of Confucianism. In this understanding, Confucianism, as the dominating moral principle and political doctrine for more than two thousand years, creates a form of transhistorical connectedness in East Asia. When encountering the critical conjuncture of Western imperialism and colonialism, East Asian intellectuals began to utilize this Confucian connectedness that they believed had existed prior to the escalation of Western encroachment as a historical resource to form the starting point of an anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist Asian solidarity.

Phan Boi Chau’s understanding of the modern capitalist world is at best an unsystematic synthesis of remnants of Confucianism, incomplete Social Darwinism, archetype of Pan-Asianism, constitutional monarchism and later on republican democracy. In most cases, the originality of his thought is rather a creative application of Liang Qichao’s thoughts in a Vietnamese context.<sup>132</sup> Despite this lack of profundity and consistency in his thought, Phan Boi Chau’s affiliation with eminent Japanese and Chinese intellectuals and politicians, his travels in Vietnam, China, Hong Kong, Thailand

---

<sup>132</sup> On the lack of consistency in Phan’s thought, Masaya Shiraishi notes that Phan had only one goal throughout his life, namely restore independency in Vietnam. He “could easily accept any idea which would assure him of foreign aid.” Hence Phan vacillated between countries like Japan, nationalist China, Germany and socialist Russia. See Shiraishi, “Phan Boi Chau and Japan”, *South East Asian Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 3, December 1975, p. 437

and Japan, and his floating experiences in East Asian provides a “site of intense intraregional transculturation”<sup>133</sup>, with which we are enabled to scrutinize the re-conceptualization of Asia in late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Phan Boi Chau’s connection, exchange and interaction with other East Asians also demonstrate the existence of a “contact zone”. As noted above, Phan frequently travelled between colonial Vietnam and Hong Kong, semi-colonial China and Thailand, and imperial Japan. The contacts and travels between these radically divergent and yet homogenous spaces reveal, more than anything else, the deep-seated unevenness in a synchronized global space.

This chapter utilizes the three crucial concepts that have been developed in the previous chapters, namely capitalist modernity, spatiotemporal reorientation and the antinomies embodied in the commodity form. Within the theoretical framework formed in the previous chapters, a fundamental rethinking of the tributary system and its relation to Asianism in global capitalism becomes possible to be articulated.

This chapter will first survey Phan Boi Chau’s life in colonized Vietnam and his connection with Chinese reformers and revolutionaries. By showing how the Chinese connection crucially influenced and shaped Phan’s thought, the first section debunks the prevailing preconception, which holds that Asianism equates a unification of Asian nations centered on Japan. The second part scrutinizes two important notions, namely Wangguo (lost/perished state) and Tongwen Tongzhong (common culture, common race) and examines the way in which the two notions acquired new meaning in global capitalism at the turn of the twentieth century. Finally, this chapter links the tributary system with an emerging discourse of Asianism, which promotes and emphasizes the

---

<sup>133</sup> Karen Thornber, “Early Twentieth-Century Intra–East Asian Literary Contact Nebulae: Censored Japanese Literature in Chinese and Korean”, *The Journal of Asian Studies* Vol. 68, No. 3 (August) 2009, p. 750

internal heterogeneity. In this particular form of Asianism, the tributary system, which is seen as the incarnation of Asian heterogeneity, becomes a crucial intellectual source for Asianists, including Sun Yat-Sen and Phan Boi Chau himself.

#### Phan Boi Chau and the Colonized Vietnam

Phan Boi Chau was born in December 1867 to a scholar family in the province of Nghe An. Phan immersed himself in classical Chinese studies during his formative years. In his autobiography, Phan portrayed himself as a talented and imaginative pupil when judged by the traditional Chinese standard.<sup>134</sup> Although the study of Confucianism did not provide him with direct inspiration in his national independence movement, Phan nonetheless acknowledged that strict training and immersion in classical Chinese became a definitive asset in his later years. On one occasion Phan was frustrated by his limited language skill and admitted that the only possible means of communication with the Japanese and Chinese scholars is “brush conversation”. He mocked himself by saying that “the most awkward thing was that I did not understand Japanese and was not well versed in spoken Chinese; brush-conversation and talking by gesture were very troublesome. What a great shame for diplomat!”<sup>135</sup> Nevertheless, it was this troublesome brush conversation that opened up the window to the outside world for Phan Boi Chau.<sup>136</sup>

In July 1885, forced by the French military threat, King Ham Nghi fled from the royal capital of Hue to the northern part of central Vietnam. While in hiding, King Ham Nghi issued the Royal Edict on Resistance. He stressed the desperate situation by stating that none of the three alternatives of military strategy, namely to fight, to resist, and to negotiate, were practicable under the current circumstance. King Ham Nghi, although

---

<sup>134</sup> Boi Chau Phan, *Overtaken chariot: the autobiography of Phan-Bôi-Châu*. Translated by Vinh Sinh and Nicholas Wickenden. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999), p. 48

<sup>135</sup> Phan, *Overtaken Chariot*, p. 84

<sup>136</sup> Shiraishi Masaya expressed similar view, *Sinh ed., Phan Bội Châu and the Đông-Du Movement*. p. 56

unwillingly, admitted that the Vietnamese found themselves “in a thousand difficulties in ten thousand hardships” and could only “resort to expedients.”<sup>137</sup>

The major purpose of the Royal Edict was to mobilize the scholars, gentry and the bureaucracy, and obtain their active support. It is a very traditional Confucian concept that the scholars and gentries form the founding stone or backbone of a society and ranks first in the social hierarchy. In order to appeal to the designated audience, the Royal Edict lists various historical heroes from the Chinese and Vietnamese past who had resisted foreign invasion and rescued their own countries. These were used as example of patriots. All the eight heroes mentioned in the edict possessed some traditional Confucian virtues, such as loyalty, courage and righteousness.<sup>138</sup>

The edict had effectively touched the well-educated literati, such as Phan, who confessed in his autobiography: “From the days when I was but a small child I read books that our ancestors had handed down to us and every time I read the stories of how our ancestors were eager to die for the righteous cause, I soaked the book with a flood of tears.”<sup>139</sup>

The royal edict had a similar effect on other scholar gentries and bureaucracies. Soon the Vietnamese patriots rose up and launched an all-out struggle against the French colonizers. This armed resistance became known as the Can Vuong movement. The movement encouraged the Confucian ideal of relying on the scholars, gentries and bureaucracies to defend the country. This concept was profoundly indoctrinated to Phan Boi Chau. Phan wrote most of his works in classical Chinese and adopted a highly

---

<sup>137</sup>Truong Buu Lam, *Patterns of Vietnamese Response to Foreign Intervention: 1858-1900*. (New Haven: Southeast Asia Studies, Yale University, 1967), p. 117

<sup>138</sup> It is noteworthy that among the eight heroes presented in the royal edict, seven are Chinese.

<sup>139</sup> Phan, Boi Chau and Ho Chi Minh, *Reflections from captivity*. (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1978), p. 11-12

sophisticated literature style. In William Duiker's criticism<sup>140</sup>, the using of Chinese language was a Phan's fault, which further alienated himself from the Vietnamese mass. Phan's intended readers, whom he specifically tried to appeal and motivate, were obviously the well-educated elites and scholar-gentries. For many upcoming years in both Vietnam and oversea, Phan devoted himself securing solidarity among the gentries as the foremost priority of his revolutionary activities.<sup>141</sup>

Another example of Phan Boi Chau's Confucian nature is his idea of relying on external aid. The very idea that Japan and China were morally and politically obligated to rescue Vietnam is Confucian in nature. In such a context, Japan and China were seen as father/ elder brother, and Vietnam was a younger sibling. International relations became an extended familial relation, in which father or elder brother carry the responsibility to protect and ensure the wellbeing of the younger. This idea was expressed again when Phan Boi Chau and others established the *Chan-Hoa Hung-A Hoi* (*Association for the Revitalization of China and the Regeneration of Asia*) in 1912. In the opening section of the manifesto of the organization, Phan wrote:

China is the largest country in size, the richest in resources, and the greatest in population in Asia. In addition, as the country with the oldest civilization in East Asia, undoubtedly it ought to act as the eldest brother (*huynh-truong*) of all Asia. In fulfillment of its responsibilities as the eldest brother of all Asia, it is China's unique mission to help the weak and small Asian countries to become independent.<sup>142</sup>

When exploring Phan Boi Chau's thought, one must be bear in mind that the Confucian education Phan received during his formative years shaped his basic outlook. He could hardly have seen the outside world beyond the Confucian framework. Phan was

---

<sup>140</sup> William J. Duiker, "Phan Boi Chau: Asian Revolutionary in a Changing World." *The Journal of Asian Studies* Vol. 31, No. 1 (Nov., 1971), p. 87, footnote #38

<sup>141</sup> Phan, *Overtured Chariot*, p59. Phan Boi Chau stated here that when he first started to organized revolutionary activities with his comrades, the first stage was to establish contact with the remnants of the Can Vuong movement, who were primarily scholar gentries and bureaucrats. This shows that Phan Boi Chau's foremost concern was to organize the elite class.

<sup>142</sup> Phan, *Overtured Chariot*, p201

a Confucian in nature and he remained a Confucian for his entire life. He belonged to the last generation of scholar gentries who identified themselves closely with China and internalized traditional Confucian values and morals. This closeness with China formed a part of Phan's rhetoric of Asianism.

In his twenties and early thirties, Phan Boi Chau devoted himself "single-mindedly to self-improvement."<sup>143</sup> It is possible that during this period, Phan first had access to the new books, which were written by progressive Chinese intellectuals. The new books had been first smuggled into Vietnam either through the local Chinese communities, or by Chinese traders along the Vietnamese coastline.<sup>144</sup> Scholars would painstakingly copy and recopy the Chinese new books, and transfer them to other villages and provinces.<sup>145</sup> The circulation of new books in Vietnam was the first wave of enlightenment for Phan Boi Chau and his fellow contemporary Vietnamese scholars. Historian David Marr stated that almost all Vietnamese scholars preferred the Chinese version of new Western ideas instead of receiving them directly from the French.<sup>146</sup> It was through the reading of the new books that Phan Boi Chau first learned about Liang Qichao and his works.

#### Phan Boi Chau and the Chinese Reformers: Liang Qichao

Prior to his arrival in Japan, Phan Boi Chau had already read several works by Liang Qichao, including *Wu-Xu Zheng Bian (The 1898 Reform)*, *Zhong-Guo Hun (The Chinese Spirit)* and *Xin-Min Cong-Bao (Journal of the New Citizen)*. When Phan was introduced to Liang, he wrote the following: "After ten years of reading your writing, I

---

<sup>143</sup> Ibid, p52

<sup>144</sup> Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism, 1885-1925*, p100, 125

<sup>145</sup> The printing of books was particularly difficult in Vietnam at this moment. First because that the Nguyen dynasty monopolized and centralized the printing of books at its capital. Second, the printing industry in Vietnam was not as advanced. Alexander Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese model: a comparative study of Vietnamese and Chinese government in the first half of the nineteenth century*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 186. "Compared to Chinese printing enterprises, the Vietnamese printing industry... was relatively primitive"

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, p. 100

feel as if you are my old acquaintance.”<sup>147</sup> In their first meeting, Liang Qichao gave Phan Boi Chau several recommendations. First, Liang made it clear to Phan that seeking military aid from Japan was not a feasible enterprise. Liang, who had lived in Japan for more than seven years by that point, provided his insight on Japanese imperialist potential. He warned: “once Japanese troops had entered within your country’s borders, it would surely be impossible to find an excuse to drive them out; that would amount to wishing to restore the country but instead hastening its destruction.”<sup>148</sup> Instead of obtaining Japanese aid, Liang suggested to strengthen and enlighten the Vietnamese people’s mind. He stressed that the strength of a country depended upon “the intelligence of its people, the vitality of its people, and the talents of its people.”<sup>149</sup> All of these strengths, Liang believed, came from education.

During their second meeting, Liang Qichao, through a “detailed and exhaustive” brush-conversation, offered Phan Boi Chau two plans, which profoundly altered Phan’s mission in Japan.

First, Liang urged Phan “to use impassioned and heart-rending writing to describe the tragedy of the loss of your country.”<sup>150</sup> Liang was trying to let Phan propagandize Vietnam’s situation to the outside world and to motivate the Vietnamese people within. At this moment, the idea of mass media such as newspapers and pamphlets were still new to the Chinese and Vietnamese people. Liang had been a pioneer in the mass media enterprise. He already managed and published three journals and newspapers since his arrival in Japan, such as the *Journal of Disinterested Criticism (Qing-Yi Bao)*, *New Novel (Xin Xiao-Shuo)* and *Journal of New Citizen (Xin-Min Cong-Bao)*.<sup>151</sup> Liang clearly saw

---

<sup>147</sup> Phan, *Overtured Chariot*, p. 85

<sup>148</sup> Phan, *Overtured Chariot*, p. 86

<sup>149</sup> Ibid

<sup>150</sup> Ibid, p. 90

<sup>151</sup> Hao [Zhang](#), *Liang Ch ‘i-ch ‘ao and intellectual transition in China, 1890-1907*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 133

the value of newspapers as an effective propaganda tool, and skillfully utilized this new tool to attack the Empress Dowager and her regime. He also commented on current affairs and criticized his revolutionary counterparts in Japan.<sup>152</sup>

Liang's suggestion to Phan had a two-fold meaning; first, to increase Vietnamese nationalistic and patriotic sentiment; second, to obtain international sympathy. Liang told him that a concentration on writing was meant to fulfill the goal of "rallying those in your country with their heart in the right place"<sup>153</sup> and "to expose to the world France's baneful scheme to annihilate the people of your country"<sup>154</sup> Upon hearing Liang's plan, he felt "the horizons of his consciousness and vision had suddenly broadened."<sup>155</sup> Since newspaper publishing was under strict French censorship in Vietnam, Phan Boi Chau devoted a great amount of his energy to pamphlet writing for the rest of his life.<sup>156</sup> Phan Boi Chau wrote many of his best known works during his stay in Japan, including *Viet Nam Vong Quoc Su (The History of Vietnam the Lost State)*, *Viet Nam Quoc Su Khao (An Inquiry into Vietnamese History)*, *Hai Ngoai Huyet Thu (Letter From Abroad Written in Blood)* and *Tan Viet Nam (New Vietnam)*. Among them, *Viet Nam Vong Quoc Su* was the most important one.

With Liang Qichao's help, *Viet Nam Vong Quoc Su* was first published in Liang's own newspaper, the *Journal of the New Citizen*, and then again by Shanghai Guangzhi Press in September 1905. Copies of *Viet Nam Vong Quoc Su* were smuggled back into Vietnam secretly for many years. The impact on Vietnamese minds were significant. As Phan and Liang had hoped, *Viet Nam Vong Quoc Su* stirred up widespread patriotic and nationalistic sentiment throughout Vietnam. The circulation of *Viet Nam Vong Quoc Su*

---

<sup>152</sup> [Zhang](#), *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and intellectual transition in China*, p. 134

<sup>153</sup> Phan, *Overtured Chariot*, p. 95

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid*, p. 90

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>156</sup> It is noteworthy that Phan Boi Chau later on became an editorial contributor of the Yunnan Zazhi (Yunnan Magazine) in 1907. His journalistic interest was probably motivated by Liang Qichao.

was not limited to Vietnam, but was also disseminated throughout overseas as well. When Phan Boi Chau later met Sun Yat-Sen for the first time, Sun told him that he had read *Viet Nam Vong Quoc Su* and ascertained a basic understanding of Phan Boi Chau's monarchist stance. It was clear that Phan's book, with Liang Qichao's aid, circulated widely in Japan and China. *Viet Nam Vong Quoc Su* was considered by many historians as "the most important book to appear in the course of Vietnamese anti-colonial effort."<sup>157</sup> In addition to printing and publishing Phan's book, Liang also contributed a preface to *Viet Nam Vong Quoc Su*. It is possible that Liang Qichao had handled the printing and publication of *Viet Nam Vong Quoc Su* single-handedly, as latter on the editors of Liang Qichao's work mistakenly attributed the authorship of *Viet Nam Vong Quoc Su* to Liang.<sup>158</sup>

The second plan Liang Qichao offered Phan Boi Chau was even more important for the Dong Du movement. He suggested to Phan "to urge many of the youth to come overseas for study in order to revitalize the people's spirit and enlighten the people's mind."<sup>159</sup>

The reform of education institutions was a crucial component of any self-strengthening movement. Liang and his comrades attempted to carry out a thorough reorganization of the education system during the 1898 reform. Liang Qichao argued that the civil examination system and the school system attached to it were completely outdated, and no longer sufficient to train adequate talents to deal with the rapid changing situation. He also argued that the system failed in preparing students to cope with the Western challenge. The education system aimed "to conserve certain kinds of knowledge

---

<sup>157</sup> Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism, 1885-1925*, p. 114

<sup>158</sup> *Viet Nam Vong Quoc Su*, written in classic Chinese, under the Chinese title of 越南亡国史, is found in the collection of Liang Qichao's work, Yin-Bing-Shi Wen-Ji (Collection of the Ice Drinking House, 饮冰室文集), volume 3, p. 1748-1766

<sup>159</sup> Phan, *Overturned Chariot*, p. 90

rather than to change them.”<sup>160</sup> Liang suggested two remedies for education reform: radical renovation by adding more practical subjects and including variety of talents to the education program; or a complete abolition of the existing examination system by replacing it with a nationwide school program.<sup>161</sup> Liang stressed the importance of education to a country, and “urged intellectual enlightenment of the Chinese people as of the first order of importance for the revitalization of China”<sup>162</sup> Liang passed on this emphasis on education to Phan Boi Chau. Another reason why Liang Qichao suggested sending young Vietnamese student to Japan was that a serious education reform was impossible to implement in Vietnam. In China, the corrupted and stagnated bureaucrats were the unbreakable obstacles in education reform. In contrast, the French authorities in Vietnam would not allow a beneficial education reform to actualize.<sup>163</sup> Because of the difficulties at home, the expedient would be sending students overseas in order to receive trainings in practical statesmanship.

While Phan Boi Chau initially came to Japan seeking Japanese military and financial aid, he gradually switched his priority. Under Liang Qichao’s influence, Phan Boi Chau formed the idea of sending Vietnamese youth to be enlightened and receive training in Japan. It is safe to conclude that, after reviewing Liang’s suggestions to and influences on Phan, while the Japanese politicians agreed to provide the material necessities for the Vietnamese students, it was Liang Qichao who initially inspired Phan Boi Chau to launch the Dong Du movement.

Liang Qichao’s influence appeared again many years later in 1912. In a letter written to Sun Yat-Sen in 1900, Liang proposed that after achieving their common goal,

---

<sup>160</sup> Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese model*, p. 185

<sup>161</sup> Zhang, *Liang Ch’i-ch’ao and intellectual transition in China*, p. 79

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid*, p. 91

<sup>163</sup> Phan Boi Chau attack the lack of education freedom bitterly by saying that “in our country, educational authority is entirely wielded by foreigners...private schools are prohibited.....in no matter of education do we have the slightest freedom.” Phan, *Overturned Chariot*, p194

namely the removal of the Empress Dowager's regime, a republic could be found and the Emperor Guang Xu could be elected the new president. Liang naively believed this proposal could solve the issues between the monarchist and the revolutionaries. To his disappointment, Sun Yat Sen did not reply.<sup>164</sup> Phan Boi Chau implemented Liang's proposal in his own enterprise. When Phan reorganized his *Duy Tan Hoi* into the Vietnamese Restoration Society (*Viet Nam Quang Phuc Hoi*) in 1912, he installed Prince Cuong De as the chairman, who was initially chosen to be the Emperor once Vietnam gained full independence. It is unlikely that Phan Boi Chau had read Liang's proposal since it was a personal correspondence between Liang and Sun. Nevertheless, it is possible that Liang Qichao's advice inspired Phan Boi Chau, and gave him the idea that the concept of constitutional monarchy and a republican president were two interchangeable and transferable heads of government.

Phan Boi Chau recalled that during his stay in Japan, he observed that the Indian revolutionaries who took refuge and sought aid in Japan were often declined by the Japanese government. Phan was aware of that because of the Anglo-Japanese Treaty of 1902, "the Indians in the movement were not welcomed by Japan."<sup>165</sup> The Indian revolutionaries' experience in Japan did not discourage Phan, but soon, Phan Boi Chau, Prince Cuong De, and their followers would suffer a similar fate.

There was a gradual change of attitude among the Japanese politicians and policy makers. Japan was eager to join the Imperialist club. Instead of allying itself with the oppressed Asian peoples against imperialist encroachment, Japan's ambition of expansion in Asia became increasingly unchecked. David Marr observes that "Pan Asianism as a living policy alternative was fading rapidly"<sup>166</sup> Phan Boi Chau and his

---

<sup>164</sup> [Zhang](#), *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and intellectual transition in China*, p139

<sup>165</sup> Phan, *Overtured Chariot*, p196

<sup>166</sup> Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism, 1885-1925*, p. 141

followers in Japan started to sense this change of attitude, especially after June 10<sup>th</sup> 1907. This was when the Franco-Japanese Treaty was formally signed. An important part of the treaty was that Japan and France recognized each other's "territorial rights" in Asia. This ensured Japan's acknowledgement to French colonial rule in Vietnam. Soon after the Franco-Japanese treaty, the Japanese Interior Ministry asked the Vietnamese students to be dispersed from Japanese schools in 1908. Phan Boi Chau himself left Japan with Prince Cuong De in early 1909. His departure from Japan marked the fruitless end of the Dong Du movement.

The entire Dong-Du Movement lasted barely three years, from the middle of 1905 to early 1909. During Phan Boi Chau's stay in Japan, he mostly contacted the Japanese politicians for very realistic reasons, namely seeking immediately and substantial diplomatic and military aid. He never met the famous enlightener and educator Fukuzawa Yukichi in person. Fukuzawa's name was not even mentioned once in Phan Boi Chau's autobiography. Although Vinh Sing devotes an entire article on the contrast and comparison of Phan and Fukuzawa, it nonetheless demonstrates very limited comparable characteristics between the two figures.<sup>167</sup> It is safe to conclude that Fukuzawa Yukichi's influence on Phan was very indirect. On the other hand, Liang Qichao was the one with whom Phan eagerly met once he arrived in Japan. Phan Boi Chau, been a constitutional monarchist himself back then, found Liang's guidance very valuable and practical. These recommendations formed a crucial part of Phan Boi Chau's ideology in his revolutionary activities.

Given the above account of Phan's career in the anti-colonial project, it is difficult to conclude that Japanese influences played any overwhelming part in the formation of Phan's political thought. It is an oversimplification and borderline cliché to say that Phan

---

<sup>167</sup> *Sinh ed., Phan Bội Châu and the Đông-Du Movement*, p. 101-149

Boi Chau sought to modernize Vietnam in the model of Meiji Japan. Phan's feelings toward Japan were much more complex than sheer admiration. Prior to his departure for Japan in 1905, Phan had known of Japanese ambitions in Asia. In his work *A New Booklet on the Ryukyus Written in Blood and Tears (Luu-cau Huyet-le tan thu)*, Phan Boi Chau "gave a painful account of the humiliation brought about by the loss of the country and the sapping of its liberties"<sup>168</sup> This clearly expressed that Ryukyu, which was annexed by Japan, was the future of Vietnam should the Vietnamese choose not to change. He also became aware of the Sino-Japan war of 1895 through reading new scholarship. It was in this conflict that China suffered a complete defeat and ceded Taiwan to Japan.

During the early 1920s, Phan Boi Chau published another work, which presented a complete switch of attitude toward Japan. In his work entitled *Phap-Viet De-Hue Chinh-Kien Thu (A Letter of Opinion on Franco-Vietnamese Harmony)*, Phan predicted that the coming military conflict between the Western Powers and Japan would "inevitably spill over into Indochina," given what Korea and Taiwan had suffered from Japanese colonial rule, Phan claimed that "French rule was preferable to that of Japan."<sup>169</sup> He went further by advocating that Franco-Vietnam cooperation should be established in order to fight off the Japanese expansion in Indochina. Although Phan Boi Chau regretted his softened stance against the French later on, the image of Japan Phan presented in *Phap-Viet De-Hue Chinh-Kien Thu* revealed his true suspicious feeling toward Japanese government and his disappointment of Japan after the failure of Dong Du movement.

#### Phan Boi Chau and the Chinese Revolutionaries: Sun Yat Sen

---

<sup>168</sup> Phan, *Overtaken Chariot*, p. 66

<sup>169</sup> Duiker. "Phan Boi Chau: Asian Revolutionary in a Changing World." P. 84

Having been inspired by the 1911 Republic Revolution in China, Phan made a significant ideological change. He abandoned monarchism and embraced the idea of democracy and republic. This event marked the beginning of Phan's second phase, and henceforth Sun Yat-Sen and his republican ideas influenced Phan Boi Chau the most. Phan Boi Chau was clearly aware of the discrepancies between the constitutional monarchists and the revolutionaries. As early as his first trip to Japan in 1905, he met a Chinese student on a train. Phan dared not to tell the Chinese student that he was going to meet Liang Qichao since this Chinese student was a member of the revolutionary cause. Phan said: "the revolutionary and the monarchist parties were just like ice and hot coals."<sup>170</sup> His contact with the Chinese revolutionaries traced back as early as to his Dong Du years. However, during this period Phan was mostly influenced by Liang Qichao, and his relation with the revolutionaries was overshadowed.

By the end of 1911, news of the successful Chinese Republican revolution reached Vietnam. Phan recalled: "the call for the restoration of China beat upon my ears like thunder" and his "old action-loving temperament was rekindled."<sup>171</sup> Phan's first step to resume a Vietnamese independence movement was to reorganize the Modernization Society (*Duy Tan Hoi*) into something more in step with the Chinese revolutionary party, the Vietnamese Restoration Society (*Viet Nam Quang Phuc Hoi*). Phan justified his abolition of the Modernization Society and the founding of the Vietnamese Restoration Society by saying that circumstances had changed profoundly in Vietnam. The program and framework of the monarchist Modernization Society were no long effective in dealing with current affairs.

According to Phan, who was familiar with democratic ideas and republican theories long before 1912, the seed of democracy and republic had long been planted in his mind.

---

<sup>170</sup> Phan, *Overtured Chariot*, p. 85

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid*, p186-187

Two major sources of republican influences were identified in Phan's autobiography. The first was the Chinese translation of Rousseau and Montesquieu's works, which were probably provided to Phan by Liang Qichao. The second major influence came from Phan's Chinese comrades. The only reason that he allowed the constitutional monarchist idea to linger this long was that he had to uphold the banner of monarchy in order to win the support and to attract followers from the traditional Vietnamese society. Despite Phan's own justification, Western scholars suspected Phan's true motivation of founding the Vietnamese Restoration Society. William Duiker argued that the new Vietnamese Restoration Society was organized mainly to obtain sympathy and aid from Sun Yat-Sen and other Chinese revolutionaries.<sup>172</sup>

The agendas of the Modernization Society and the Vietnamese Restoration Society, both drafted by Phan Boi Chau, showed no essential difference. Both set the restoration of Vietnamese independence as their ultimate goals.<sup>173</sup> The only minor difference is found in the structures of the two societies. The Modernization Society shared many common elements with the traditional Vietnamese secret societies and could be seen as a continuation of the Can Vuong movement.<sup>174</sup> In contrast, the Vietnamese Restoration Society was modeled after Sun Yat-Sen's own organization, the *Tong Meng Hui*.

In April 1912, shortly after the founding of the Vietnamese Restoration Society, Phan Boi Chau went to Nanjing, hoping to meet with Sun Yat-Sen. Unfortunately, Phan went to China only to observe the transfer of power from Sun to Yuan Shikai. Unable to

---

<sup>172</sup> Duiker, William J. *Historical Dictionary of Vietnam*. (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1989)

<sup>173</sup> Phan, *Overtaken Chariot*, p. 60. On the goal of Dui Tan Hoi: "our goal was exclusively to restore Vietnam and to establish an independent government. Apart from this, there was as yet no other idea."

Ibid. p. 191. On the goal of the Vietnam Restoration League "its objective was to restore Vietnam's independence and establish her as a democratic republic. This was the sole objective of the league."

The simple agendas of the Modernization Society and the Vietnam Restoration Society reveal, as some scholars had criticized, the lack of ideology in Phan Boi Chau's organization.

<sup>174</sup> Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism*, p. 105

meet with Sun, Phan turned to Huang Xing, who was the second most important man in the Chinese Nationalist party. Huang Xing, while expressing that China at this moment could not offer any substantial aid, suggested to Phan that he send selected Vietnamese students to Chinese schools and army camps. With the memory of the failed Dong Du movement still fresh, Phan was frustrated and rhetorically declined Huang's offer. Phan then turned to Chen Chimei, an old acquaintance of his and the governor of Shanghai in the Republican government. Chen eventually made some concrete contributions to Phan's movement, and gave him four thousand piasters and thirty grenades, which were used in subsequent revolutionary activities.

In the following years, until his arrest in 1925, Phan Boi Chau devoted himself to violent uprisings; unfortunately, he achieved only very limited success. The last major enterprise Phan Boi Chau undertook was the founding of the Vietnamese Nationalist Party (*Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang*) in 1924, which was "by and large modeled on that of the Chinese Kuomintang, with some modification, in order to adapt the means of revolution to the times."<sup>175</sup> The Vietnamese Nationalist Party was Phan Boi Chau's legacy to his fellow Vietnamese nationalists.

In a sense, Phan Boi Chau's anti-colonialist career constantly struggled with two notions: wangguo (lost state) and tongwen (common culture). Through his life, his aim had always been the restoration of the lost Vietnam. In this particular struggle, the means to alliance was to appeal to the idea of "common culture." Notably, the concepts of wangguo and tongwen, initially entered the discourse of Asianism as indigenous categories, but became transformed and acquired new meaning and significance as Asia was incorporated into global capitalism. After their categorical transformations, wangguo and tongwen could be used in the project of interpreting and resisting global

---

<sup>175</sup>Phan, *Overtaken Chariot*, p. 260

capitalist modernity. These categories were also used to help Asian intellectuals to grasp the colonial and semi-colonial conditions they were facing at the turn of the twentieth century.

### Wanguo (亡国): From Dynastical Cycle to Colonization

While wang 亡 means perish or death, and guo 国 means country or state, the combination of wanguo denotes the extinction of one's country. The earliest significant articulation is Gu Yanwu (1613-1682)'s distinction between wanguo (extinction of country) and wangtianxia (extinction of all under heaven), elucidated in his *Record of Daily Knowledge* (日知录), which was first published in 1670. For Gu, wanguo is the change of the ruling house of a dynasty and its reign title; wangtianxia is the degeneracy of moral principles, which lead to the chaotic situation of "animal eating human, and human eating human". Gu was born in the last years of the Ming dynasty, and he vigorously participated in the Anti-Manchu resistance in Southern China. For him, the situation in late Ming was unprecedented in the sense that it was not a transition of throne from one Han Chinese dynasty to another. Gu's primary disquiet was the conquest of China by the barbarous Manchurian tribes, which represented a force that perishes the Chinese high culture that was embodied in the Tianxia or "All Under Heaven" cosmological order.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, a new meaning was added to wanguo, which now "came to denote a national condition of being colonized by a foreign power."<sup>176</sup> What is also noteworthy is the emerging conceptualization of the nation-state. In 1904,

---

<sup>176</sup> Rebecca Karl, "Slavery, Citizenship, and Gender in Late Qing China's Global Context" in Karl and Zarrow ed. *Rethinking the 1898 Reform Period: Political and Cultural Change in Late Qing China*. p. 217

Chen Duxiu published an article entitled “On Wangguo” in his *Anhui Vernacular News*. In this essay he asserted that very few Chinese understood the meaning of “nation-state”. Chen argued: “a nation-state is the common property of the entire population, not the emperor’s private property...we Chinese do not understand the difference between a nation-state and a dynasty.” For the first time since Gu Yanwu’s well-known formulation, wangguo is associated with the loss of nation-state in Chen’s contemporary articulation of the idea. According to Chen, most Chinese understood wangguo as dynastical change; they failed to recognize the real consequence of wangguo was the loss of nation-state:

Historically, when the surname of our emperor changed, we called this wangguo...but this is merely a change of dynasties, it cannot be called “wangguo”. Not only are wangguo and dynastic changes not the same, but wangguo does not even require a change of dynasties. It just requires that the territory, vested economic interests, and sovereignty of the nation be seized and occupied by foreign powers...this is when there is true wangguo.<sup>177</sup>

Phan Boi Chau struggled through this particular transitional process, which Chen Duxiu described as the transition from dynastical change to the loss of nation-state. Dynastical change is a particular form of historical dynamic that is only common to Confucian East Asian societies, including, China, Korea and Vietnam. Each society in history had gone through several major and brief dynasties. Phan’s early activities clearly shows that he identified himself as a subject of the Nguyen dynasty, and a great portion of his early endeavors was to restore the dynastic order in Vietnam.

In his autobiography, Phan posited the situation in Vietnam as wangguo and associated the wangguo condition of Vietnam with the personal sphere of his experience:

When my father was thirty-six, I was born; that was five years after the loss of Cochin China. My first cry as a babe sounded like an ominous warning: “you are already *one whose country has been lost*.”<sup>178</sup>

---

<sup>177</sup> 陈独秀：安徽白话报《亡国篇》，Chen Duxiu, “On Wangguo”, *Anhui Vernacular News*, vol. 8, p. 1-2, 1904. Translation partly taken from Karl Rebecca, “Slavery, Citizenship, and Gender in Late Qing China’s Global Context” with amend.

<sup>178</sup> Phan Boi Chau, *Overturned Chariot: The Autobiography of Phan-Bou-Chau* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999) p. 47

In a sense, Phan's birth almost became the incarnation of the dead state of Vietnam. While the state was lost, the race still survived. As a new generation was born into the colonized state, the hope of restoring the nation-state was enkindled.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, wang guo (perished/lost state) became both a category which Asian intellectuals utilized to understand the colonial condition they were facing, and a popular form of literature genre. Liang Qichao noted: "recently, the worried and indignant scholars depict the sad situation of lost states in their poetries and fictions. Readers from all over the world are astonished by their writings."<sup>179</sup>

In May 1908, a screenplay entitled *The Tragic Demise of Vietnam* was published on the *Orthodox Patriotic Journal* (正宗爱国报), founded by Ding Baochen (1876–1913). While the screenplay was primarily based on Phan Boi Chau's *Viet Nam Vong Quoc Su* (越南亡国史 The History of Vietnam as a Lost State), its author or adaptor remained anonymous.

The drama presented a relentless dramatization of the colonial violence that Vietnam encountered. By the end of the play, the writer used King Nguyen's solo to dramatize the pain of lost state. On his deathbed, King Nguyen learned that the French had destroyed his ancestral temple, symbol of the royal lineage. He bewailed the loss of Vietnam:

Thinking of Vietnam, I cannot help shedding tears of blood and wailing in grief. We escaped abroad hoping to find a plan to save our country. Who would know that the venomous French would dig up tombs and disinter corpses with such godless barbarism? They treat us, the people of a conquered nation, without the least compassion. My mother and father, I cry out (he spits blood): you all must return for me to beg forgiveness and repair their tomb. And do not rest for a moment; those French intend to exterminate the Vietnamese people. In the future there may be no tombs to visit. Now that we have escaped abroad, we must not tarry long, but head to Guangdong and from there take a boat overseas to study practical learning in order to take a step toward saving our country. Truly, you

---

<sup>179</sup> Zhang Zhenkun ed. *Sources of Sino-French War*. Vol. 7. (Beijing, Zhonghua Press, 2006), p. 513 张振鹑编, 中法战争资料, 第七卷, 中华书局, 2006

must clench your teeth against despair; to restore the glory of the motherland is heroic.<sup>180</sup>

King Nguyen's aria expressed, in a sense, a tension between Confucianism/ancestral worship/tradition and practical learning/modernity. It seems that the hope of restoring the broken royal lineage (symbolized by the destruction of ancestral tomb and temple) could only be found overseas. The drama had a great appeal to the Chinese audience. The tributary relation with Vietnam was now transformed into a shared fate of wangguo, and common resistance to colonization. For the publisher Ding Baochen, "Chinese dramatic forms remained universally applicable and appropriate for representing global relations."<sup>181</sup>

At the same time, another former tributary state of China, the Choson kingdom of Korea, was brought into the narrative of wangguo. Liang Qichao's "The Pain History of the Loss of Korea" (朝鲜亡国痛史) was published in 1910. In the opening paragraph, the author mourned the perish of the essence that had made Korea a unique entity:

Alas! Korea was lost both formally and substantially. From now on, there would be nothing on the peninsular east of China, west of Japan. There would be no state, no monarchy, no government, no nation, no language, no religion, no institution, ritual nor relic. What had accumulated for two thousand years on that peninsular now are been scoured into the Yalu River.<sup>182</sup>

Not only the ruling Yi dynasty had fallen, but Korea as a nation-state sank to the rank of a Japanese colony. As Rebecca Karl has commented, the notion of wang guo had increasingly become "a reflection of the deep anxiety and terror raised by the threatened loss of political/economic sovereignty and the 'enslavement' of the 'national people'."<sup>183</sup>

At the turn of the nineteenth century, Asian intellectuals vacillated between two

---

<sup>180</sup> Joshua Goldstein, *Drama Kings, Players and Publics in the Re-creation of Peking Opera, 1870-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), p. 102

<sup>181</sup> Ibid, p. 103

<sup>182</sup> Liang Qichao, "The Pain History of the loss of Korea", in Ice-Drinker's Collection. p. 1767

<sup>183</sup> Rebecca Karl, "'Slavery', Citizenship, and Gender in Late Qing China's Global Context" p. 218

kinds of sentiments. On the one hand, they mourned the loss of the residuals of dynastic order; on the other hand, they also optimistically hoped that a new form of political community, namely a nation-state, would eventually rise from the ruin of the lost dynasty/country. As China and Asia became progressively entangled in the capitalist world system, the notion of wangguo expanded beyond Asia and acquired meaning in other parts of the globe. Africa, for example, increasingly occupied Chinese intellectuals' attention. The desperate situations in Africa served as warning, where both state were lost and nations enslaved.

Lin Shu (1852~1924), the Chinese translator of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, expressed his concern about being colonized/enslaved in his preface to the 1901 edition of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by noting that “recently the treatment of blacks in America has been carried over to yellow people.” He told his readers that the Chinese labourers migrated overseas in order to support their impoverished families; however, they encountered abusive racism in the United States, where “the yellow people are probably treated even worse than the blacks.”<sup>184</sup> China, being a weak country, was not able to protect its citizens overseas.

Lin found that the miserable conditions of the “black slaves” paralleled what the Chinese labourers experienced. Lin reminded his readers that in his translation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*:

The miseries of black slaves are depicted in detail. This is not because I am especially versed in depicting sadness; I am merely transcribing what is contained in the original work. And the prospect of the imminent demise of the yellow race has made me feel even sadder...I did not strive to describe sorrow for the purpose of eliciting useless tears from readers. It was rather that we had to cry out for the sake of our people because the prospect of enslavement is threatening our race.<sup>185</sup> In a more visual and spatial manner, Lin compared the stockades on Angle Island

immigration station, where Chinese immigrants and indentured labourers were detained

---

<sup>184</sup> R. David Arkush and Leo O. Lee. ed. *Land without Ghosts: Chinese Impressions of America from the Mid-nineteenth Century to the Present*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p. 78

<sup>185</sup> Ibid, p. 78 and 79

and interrogated, to the “slave quarters” depicted in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. In the United States, Chinese were treated not differently from the “black slave.” Lin reminded his readers: “a person without a country will be treated like a barbarian even by civilized people,” he lamented: “Do we Chinese have a nation or not?”<sup>186</sup>

Lin Shu’s trope of a slave without a country and his warning of the extinction of the Chinese nation carry two distinctive characteristics. First, Lin’s contemporaries usually emphasized China’s internal trauma. Lin, on the other hand, adopted the view of a rather marginalized group, namely the overseas Chinese labourers. By putting the suffering of the overseas Chinese on the central stage, Lin expanded the notion of *wang guo* to a global scope. In Lin’s narrative, then, *wang guo* acquired a meaning that is deeper than losing the Chinese state; moreover, *wang guo* also implied the extinction of the Chinese nations, including its diasporas. Second, the “black slave” became Lin’s primary referent. Once again, a connection was discursively articulated between China and Africa through a shared resistance to *wang guo*/enslavement/colonization.

Jean-Paul Sartre, writing in his satirized style, illuminated how the Africans and the Chinese were differentiated from the European perspective:

The Negroes did not worry me; I had been taught that they were good dogs. With them, we were still among mammals. But the Asians frightened me, like those crabs in the rice fields which dart between two rows, like those locusts which descend on the Great Plains and devastate everything. We are lords of the fishes, lions, rats and monkeys; the Chinese are superior arthropods. They rule over the arthropods.<sup>187</sup>

Whatever else Sartre might have meant, it is conceivable that he is describing the capitalist world system, in which Africa was already a constitutive part of the periphery, pulled into it through means of colonization and imperialist conquest. China, on the other hand, remained relatively autonomous from the coercive order of capitalist world-economy and existed outside of the orbit of it. Hence the Chinese were “crabs”, “locusts”

---

<sup>186</sup> Ibid, p. 79

<sup>187</sup> Jean Paul Sartre, *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*. (New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 23

and “arthropods”, species of alien quality than the mammals. Sartre’s metaphors of good dog and arthropods grasp Chinese intellectuals’ anxiety of wang guo at the turn of the twentieth century. For the majority of them, the fate of “domestication”/ colonization was exactly their central struggle. While Africa was completely colonized and been “domesticated” into Europe’s “good dog”, China, despite in deterioration, still endeavoured to maintain its status as an independent nation-state. Sartre’s metaphor allows us to see the intricate relation between the arthropods/Chinese and the “good dogs”/Africans. At this point, wang guo’s connection to colonization was reinforced; it was rearticulated as the condition of colonization in the unevenly developed capitalist world.

#### Tongwen (同文): From Common Culture to Common Struggle

In the previous section I describe how Wangguo, under the new condition of global capitalist modernity, acquired new meaning and was retranslated as colonization. These questions are all intrinsically related to the emergence of the nation-state in the condition of global capitalist modernity.

By examining the changing significance of Wangguo at the turn of the twentieth century, it should be clear by now that Wangguo had become “a modern process of racial, linguistic, cultural, and political annihilation”<sup>188</sup>. Simultaneously, another concept, namely Tongwen (Common culture), increasingly became an ideal that Asian intellectuals constantly referred to in their discourse on Asianism. At the turn of the twentieth century, the intricate interplay between nation-state (Wangguo/lost state) and culture (Tongwen/common culture) provided the basis upon which an ideal of Asia could be imagined.

---

<sup>188</sup> Rebecca Karl. *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), p. 69

In pre-capitalist East Asia, the tributary system provided a contact zone, where Confucian literati from various parts obtained a sense of shared cultural community. Tribute missions, always constituted by the finest literati in each vassal domains, had the opportunity to meet men like themselves in the Chinese capital of Beijing. Communication between envoy members, usually in the form of exchanging poems written in Chinese script, reinforced the sense of “common culture”.

A prominent example could be found in 1597, when the Vietnamese scholar Phang Khac Khoan (冯克宽) met with the Korean historian Yi Su-Gwang (李粹光) in Beijing. Both of them were serving as the tribute envoys and performing their diplomatic duties in Beijing. Their exchanges of poems became well known and were often cited by historians to show the awareness of other Confucian paralleling states in East Asia.

In a poem Li presented to Khoan, it reads,

“Do not say that our garments, caps, or rites are different,  
For we both follow the patterns of the *Poetry* and *Documents*.”<sup>189</sup>

In reply, Khoan wrote:

“Although we are from regions separated by mountains and seas,  
Our source is the same—the writing of the ancient sages.”<sup>190</sup>

While the tributary system brought the envoys from geographically distant states to Beijing, both literati identified the Confucian classics (the *Poetry* and *Documents*, the writing of the ancient sages) as the source of their “common culture”.

Almost three hundred years after the gracious exchange of poetries, unprecedented changes forcefully swept over Asia. The harmonious poetic exchange was rendered impossible in this critical conjuncture. Since the Anglo-Chinese Opium War in 1839 and

---

<sup>189</sup> Liam C. Kelley, *Beyond the Bronze Pillars: Envoy Poetry and the Sino-Vietnamese Relationship*. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005), p. 183

<sup>190</sup> Ibid, p. 185. A different translation of the same poem is available in Huynh Sanh Thong, ed. And tran. *The Heritage of Vietnamese Poetry*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 15. Thong has rendered the poem as “Mountains and seas divide your land from mine/ The scriptures we both read come from one source.”

1842, intrusions of capitalism and imperialism had been escalating. During the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the threat of colonization transformed “common culture” into a shared anxiety.

In 1881, in the northern Chinese city of Tianjin, the Korean envoy Kim Yunsik met for the first time with the General Manager of Business and Investment Bareu, Tang Tingshu. Kim recorded the “brush conversation” between them and published it in his travelling diary.

Kim inquired: “Although Vietnam is small in size, but I have heard it had been able to maintain independence. How it has declined so rapidly...Annam is a tribute state of China, what makes the French think they could intervene? This situation may cause trouble for China as well.....What constrained the French from further military expansion? Are they afraid of China’s military power? Or are they afraid of public opinion? Are Burma and Thailand in a better position in defending their own countries and avoid humiliation?”

Tang replied: “Marquis Zeng (Zeng Jize) is struggling through diplomatic means in Pairs now. This is one reason. Second, the French are now out of pretext—they had already captured Tonkin for revenge to Liu Yongfu. Thailand is better than Vietnam, but the situation in Burma is even more devastating. It is only a matter of time before Burma fall into the hands of the Englishmen.”<sup>191</sup>

It is noteworthy that traditional Confucian scholars like Kim began to develop a particular curiosity and concern of the highly Indianized Southeast Asian states like Thailand and Burma, which in their mind form a remote periphery of the Confucian East Asia civilization. To Kim Yunsik, whose fatherland was also under constant pressures

---

<sup>191</sup> Liu Shunli. *Dialogues Between Dynasties*. (Ningxia, Ningxia Renmin Press, 2006) p. 241. 刘顺利：王朝间的对话，宁夏人民出版社。

from Western and Japanese incursion, he probably perceived of a shared destiny of Korea and Vietnam. The colonization of Vietnam sends an alarming and awakening message to Korea.

Upon hearing this, Kim lamented that “the Western power is furious and rampant. What a shame that East Asia has been encroached by them!”<sup>192</sup> Tang and Kim witnessed the unfolding of the collapse of the tributary system. One after another, vassal states of the Qing Empire turned into colonies of European powers. Little did Kim know, thirty years after his brush conversation about the colonization of Vietnam, in 1910, Korea itself fell into the rank of colony.

In explaining Phan Boi Chau’s decision of going to Japan, Shiraishi Masaya emphasized the concept of “*Dong-chung, Dong-van, Dong-chau*” (same race, same culture and same continent). Shiraishi argues that Phan believed in the racial, cultural and geographical connections between Vietnam and Japan. However, one should not forget that when seeking for external aid, China was always the first to consider for Phan Boi Chau and his contemporary Vietnamese.<sup>193</sup> In terms of racial and cultural ties, Phan Boi Chau claimed there was a strong ethnic and cultural closeness shared by China and Vietnam. This view was explicitly expressed in his *Viet Nam Quoc Su Kao* (An Inquiry into Vietnamese History). Further, Phan stated that the Chinese and the Vietnamese resemble each other in terms of appearance, speech, names and historical records. Phan described that similarity in appearance by saying that “with our clothes removed and hair styles excerpted, our outward appearances have no difference between them (the Chinese)” and that “we Vietnamese today are part of a race that is an extension of the Chinese. The barbarians of Giao Chi who tattooed themselves have become a branch of

---

<sup>192</sup> Ibid. p. 242

<sup>193</sup> Lam, *Patterns of Vietnamese Response to Foreign Intervention*, “Document 18: A petition to China”, p132-136

the Chinese who wear clothes and hats and are elegant and refined.”<sup>194</sup> Such ethnic connection and cultural closeness was not articulated between the Vietnamese and the Japanese. However, this notion of “common culture” and “common race” would soon to be transformed to a radically different discourse of shared struggle.

Nguyen Dinh Nam (阮鼎南) was a Vietnamese envoy detained in China after the cession of Vietnam to France. His *The Reflection on the Loss of Vietnam* (越南亡国鉴) was published in China in 1915. The most revealing characteristic of his writing is that he wrote the humiliating history of Vietnam as a conversation with a certain Mr. Min from Korea (三韩闵氏). In the beginning, Mr. Min told Nguyen: “Although our countries (Korea and Vietnam) are different, our languages and customs are distinctive from each other, but our countries share the same title of lost country.”<sup>195</sup>

By linking Vietnam and Korea in an imagined conversation, Nguyen reinforced the East Asian interconnectedness of “Tongwen.” However, this interconnectedness is radically different from the exchange of poetry in 1597 between the Vietnamese and Korean tribute envoys in Beijing. It should be noted, in the conversation between Mr. Min and Nguyen, distinctions of language and customs were emphasized. This distinction reveals a national consciousness, which appeal to a unique national cultural essence. What Vietnam and Korea have in common is the condition of lost state, or the fate of being colonized in the global capitalist world. Hence, at the turn of the twentieth century, Tongwen thoroughly ruptured from its meaning of the homogenizing ideal of Confucian virtues and the related political doctrines, and became translated into a shared anxiety in global capitalism. Tongwen, a rhetoric of common culture, a historical and

---

<sup>194</sup> William F. Pore, “Literati voices on the loss of national independence in Korea and Vietnam A transnational perspective, 1890—1920.” PhD dissertation., (The George Washington University, 2006), p320-321

<sup>195</sup> Yin Ruli ed. *Reflection on the Lost States*, (Taidong Book Bureau, 1915), p. 1-2. 殷汝骈编, 亡国鉴, 泰东图书局, 1915

cultural connectedness from the past, at the turn of the twentieth century, become the bond between semi-colonial (China), colonial (Vietnam and Korea) and imperial (Japan) entities.

Zhang Zhidong in his writing published in 1898, articulated “Asia” in the following passage:<sup>196</sup>

On the south, lying on the sea, are Annam, Siam, and Burma; on the west the Three Indias; on the east are seagirt Corea and Japan (separated by channels). And these countries comprise the continent of Asia, the people of which are known as the Yellow race, and all have once been under the far famed instruction of China's ancient Emperors. The people of Asia are the descendants of the gods...the Chinese are the same race as other Asiatics.<sup>197</sup>

In addition to the geographical and ethnographical ties Zhang had outlined, Asia also shared a linguistic bond. Zhang claimed that “the language, literature and customs of the Japanese are more closely allied to ours than those of any European country”<sup>198</sup>, hence it would make the transmission of modern knowledge much easier if one choose to learn from the Japanese, who had already acquired considerable comprehension of western technologies and had developed on the essence of this knowledge.<sup>199</sup> However, this linguistic tie of Chinese script from the Confucian past now had been transformed into an asset that pointed to the future, to modernization, to practical western knowledge. The Chinese script was no longer an elegant poetic language, with which tribute envoys

---

<sup>196</sup> Zhang Zhidong (1837-1909) was a prominent governor-general, and later premier of the Qing dynasty. He was a powerful supporter of the Self-Strengthening Movement and other modernization projects.

<sup>197</sup>张之洞: 《劝学篇,内篇, 知类第四》, Chang Chih-tung, *China's Only Hope: An Appeal*. p. 50-51. Trans. By Samuel Woodbridge. Edinburgh and London: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1901

<sup>198</sup> Ibid. p. 93

<sup>199</sup> Liang Qichao expressed the very same idea that Japanese language is easier to master for the Chinese. He believed smart students could acquire elementary reading comprehension of Japanese within one or two months, and with one year training, students could read Japanese without encountering any barriers. See Liang, “Bibliography of Japanese Publications” (东籍月旦), 1902. In late Qing, Japan represented a short cut to western knowledge.

wrote sophisticated prose. Now it had become the remedy for China and Asia's weakness.

While the Asianists constantly appealed to the notion of "common culture", they may or may have not realized, that the very content of "common culture" was no longer Confucianism and Chinese script. They have been replaced by a shared anxiety and struggle in global capitalism. As Homi Bhabha has pointed out, "in signifying the present, something comes to be repeated, relocated and translated in the name of tradition, in the guise of a pastness that is not necessarily a faithful sign of historical memory but a strategy of representing authority in terms of the artifice of the archaic."<sup>200</sup> In the discourse of early twentieth century Asianism, Tongwen was neither an appeal to Confucianism, nor to the Chinese script, although both were commonly comprehensible to all educated East Asian literati. Rather, Tongwen should be understood as what Sun Yat-Sen has described as "the kingly way", a form of alliance of weaker nations in the resistance to the European hegemonic way.

---

<sup>200</sup> Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*. (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 35

## 9. Resisting the Homogenizing Europe: Asia as an Alignment of Heterogeneity

### Uneven development in Capitalism and Asian Heterogeneity

In 1907, Liu Shipei, a Chinese anarchist based in Tokyo, published “On The Current Condition of Asia (亚洲现势论)” on the *Natural Justice* (天义报). He surpassed most of his contemporary thinkers of Asianism by linking the Asianist struggle with the global anti-capitalist movement. Despite his initial assault on the “white race” and “Europe”, Liu did not limit his critique to dichotomies of Europe and Asia, or the white race and yellow race. Liu saw the sufferings of Asia as a consequence of the maladies of capitalist development. Capitalism had an equal impact on the Asian colonized and the Euro-American proletariats, namely they were both exploited in the process of capitalist expansion.

Liu asserted that if all Asian colonies revolt at the same time, it would cause the metropolitan countries to spend more money on military. Increasing military expenditure would in turn raise the tax rates and eventually devastate people’s livelihood in the metropolitan centers. Socialist and anarchist parties needed to grasp this destabilizing opportunity, to mobilize the masses and ultimately overthrow the capitalist governments of the colonizing powers. Simultaneous actions of both colonized Asians and Metropolitan proletariats are directly connected in the movement of human emancipation. Liu concluded: “the independence of weak Asian nations not only resist the hegemonic yoke imposed on them, it also resist the hegemony over the socialist and anarchist elements within the European societies.”<sup>201</sup>

By connecting the struggles in Asian colonies with those of Euro-American proletariats, Liu Shipei discovered a prevailing unevenness of capitalist development.

---

<sup>201</sup> Liu Shipei, *Collected Works of Liu Shipei*. (刘师培, 刘师培文选, 上海远东出版社), p. 230

The world system theory suggested that the unevenness of capitalism existed as a static power relation between developed and developing nation-states, namely the core and the peripheries. Liu's observation in 1907 opposed the view of the world system theory and pointed to a deeper level of the unevenness of capitalism, which Liu believed not only existed in the peripheries like Asia, but was also internalized in core societies.

Hence Liu brought the discourse of Asianism to an unprecedented level of abstraction. On the one hand, Liu attempted to posit the discourse of Asianism in a broader context of uneven capitalist development. On the other hand, Liu's ideal of Asia debunked the rhetoric of Tongwen Tongzhong, which the Japanese would promote for the purpose of their Pan-Asianist expansion. Instead, Liu shifted the emphasis to the heterogeneity internalized in Asia.

In "On The Current Condition of Asia (亚洲现势论)", Liu Shipai argued: "today's world is dominated by hegemonic might. To expel the white race's hegemony, it must first expel their hegemony from Asia."<sup>202</sup> In Liu's list, British colonization of India and Burma, French colonization of Vietnam and Thailand, American colonization of the Philippines, British-Russo expansion in Persia and, most significantly, Japanese colonization of Korea, were all examples of "white race" hegemony in Asia.

Among the suffering Asian countries, China was the most deteriorated one, which had fallen to the space of competition for the Western powers: "Russia occupied the Northern Manchuria, British invaded Tibet, German posed a potential threat to the Shandong peninsular, and France was covetous to Guangdong and Yunnan."<sup>203</sup>

Japan played an exceptional role in this struggle of Asian weak nations against European hegemony. Japan willingly allied itself with various European powers in their suppression of the Asian independent movements. Liu argued, Japan directly annexed

---

<sup>202</sup> Ibid, p. 222

<sup>203</sup> ibid, p. 223

Korea; indirectly it engaged in the partition and colonization of India, Vietnam, China and Persia by signing treaties with Britain, France and Russia. In Liu's words, the Japanese government was "not only the enemy to Korea" but also "the public enemy of India, Vietnam, China and the Philippines."<sup>204</sup> For Liu and others, Japan represents a disintegrating cause. As they witness the increasing discrepancies between Japan and the other East Asian countries, a suspicious sentiment toward the rhetoric of Tongwen Tongzhong began to develop among many Asian intellectuals. In the early twentieth century, there were two common recognitions among Chinese intellectuals in particular. First, the solidarity of the weaker yellow races is the only remedy to save Asian countries' independence from the white race's assault. Second, as Karl Rebecca has rightly claimed, Japan, at this point, represented a source of problems, rather than a solution.

Japan's role proposes a dilemma to the discourse on the alliance of weaker Asian nations: Japan represents a remarkable exception that renders the Pan-Asianist ideal of Tongwen Tongzhong a null rhetoric. After all, not all Asian nations were weak and would join the alliance of resisting the hegemonic European power. Liu equated Japan with Western powers, argued that the Japanese hegemony in Asia must be removed along with the European hegemonies.

The solution for "protecting peace in Asia, preserving independence in Asia" was the alliance of weaker races. Liu proposed his version of Asianism, which stressed on the heterogeneity internalized in Asia. He pointed out that Confucianism unites Korea, Vietnam, Thailand and Japan with China; India, Arabic world and Persia shared Buddhism, Hinduism and Islamism. These common religions provide a basis upon which a united Asia could be formed.<sup>205</sup> However, Liu's Asia also possessed another major

---

<sup>204</sup> Ibid, p. 224

<sup>205</sup> "朝鲜安南之地，本中国之版图，文字礼俗，大约相同，故其民恒与中国和亲。暹罗日本，其文化亦溯源中国。此亚东之易于结合者也。印度为佛教发源之地，流被东亚，数千

characteristic, namely it comprises diversified civilizations. Liang Qichao in his article “General View on the Asian Geography” (亚洲地理大势论), published in 1902, expressed a similar view by acclaiming the heterogeneity of Asia. For Liang, Asia is almost an all-comprehensive category, a cluster of heterogeneous entities. Asia is not only diversified in its geographical and climatic patterns, more importantly, Asia is diversified in its history and civilization:

Siddartha Gautama, Confucius, Jesus, Zoroaster and Mohammad were all born in Asia; Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, Islamism and Manichaeism were all products of Asia; Great ancient civilization like India, China and Assyria all raised in Asia. Western literature, philosophy, art and technology are invariably offspring of Asian civilizations, including Indian, Chinese, Babylonia, Phoenician, Persian and Arabic civilizations.<sup>206</sup>

Liang Qichao accredited the rapid ascend of the European civilization to its “permeability”. Europe, Liang claimed, has a shallow, small and identical structure, hence is easy to be centrally organized. On the other hand, Asia presents a gigantic and intricate structure, which is broad and deep.

What was the point that Liu Shipei and Liang Qichao were trying to make by stressing on the heterogeneity of Asia? What is the significance of the Asian heterogeneity in global capitalist modernity? How did Liu and Liang utilize the heterogeneous aspect of Asia to form an anti-capitalism discourse of Asia? To answer these questions, a reinterpretation of Takeuchi Yoshimi’s key text of “What is Modernity? The Case of Japan and China” is in order.

#### Takeuchi Yoshimi: Modernity in Asia and the “Heterogeneity contained in the Orient”

---

年于兹；厥后回教由亚拉伯输入，与波斯同；又波斯阿梨耶人，自遭亚拉伯蚕食，移民分散，自今犹散处印度；而回教及印度婆罗门教又由印度东被，及于南洋群岛...此亚西亚南之易于结合者也。” *ibid*, p. 227

<sup>206</sup> Liang Qichao, “General Discussion on Asian Geography.” 梁启超，亚洲地理大势论，《饮冰室文集》，p. 1795

Takeuchi Yoshimi's essay "What is Modernity? The Case of Japan and China" is the key text that elucidates the dialectical relation between Capitalist modernity and the emergence of Asia. In this text, Takeuchi uses "Europe" interchangeably with "capitalism". As a close reading of this key text would reveal that when Takeuchi describes a binary opposition of "Europe" and "Orient", he was in fact trying to situate Asia in an overarching logic, namely the capitalist modernity. We have to liberate Takeuchi's fundamental critique of Capitalist modernity from the disguise of a geopolitical and civilizational category, namely Europe. The essence of Takeuchi's critique is sometimes veiled by his usage of "Europe". Takeuchi grasps the movement of capitalist modernity at a very basic level, and for him, "Europe" and "Asia" are movements within this grand movement.

Viren Murthy has aptly pointed out that Takeuchi "misrecognizes the logic of capital as the logic of Europe", nevertheless, "this misrecognition points to a process operating at a higher level of abstraction than class conflict." And Takeuchi "explains the movement of European imperialism with reference to a logic of self-expansion."<sup>207</sup> It is also very likely that Takeuchi uses a language of Europe and Asia to discuss the logic of capital, the commodity form, and the dichotomy of heterogeneous and homogeneous.

At the very beginning of his essay, Takeuchi makes it clear that "Oriental modernity is the result of European coercion, or is something derived from that result."<sup>208</sup> Takeuchi suggests, "New things were born in the Orient that had never previously existed". This rupture with tradition occurred in Asia as a result of the introduction of capitalist "modes of production, social institutions, and the human consciousness that accompanies these".

---

<sup>207</sup> Viren Murthy, "The Tribulations of Temporality: Impossible Resistance in Takeuchi Yoshimi and Tosaka Jun" in *Whither Japanese Philosophy?* (Tokyo, The University of Tokyo Center for Philosophy, 2009), p. 110

<sup>208</sup> Takeuchi Yoshimi, *What is Modernity?: Writings of Takeuchi Yoshimi* (New York : Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 53

Only after this rupture of tradition does tradition becomes tradition, because following the invasion of capitalist modernity, modern self-consciousness begins to develop. This modern self-consciousness allows one to see tradition as tradition, and modern as modern. In other words, “tradition” is created and discovered by “modern”.<sup>209</sup>

In the following passage, Takeuchi shows the European interminable expansion is an intrinsic part of the movement of capital, which ceaselessly reproduces itself and functions as a self-valorizing value:

Europe’s capital seeks to expand markets while its missionaries are committed to expanding the kingdom of God. Through incessant tension, Europeans attempt to be their own selves. *This constant activity to be their own selves makes it impossible for them to simply stop at themselves. They must risk the danger of losing the self in order for the self to be itself.* Once liberated, people cannot return to their originally closed shells; they can only preserve themselves within activity. *This is precisely what is called the spirit of capitalism.*<sup>210</sup>

In the above passage, Takeuchi also describes a process of constant transformation from “Other” to “Self”. This is a process of homogenizing, in which the heterogeneous “Other” becomes subdued to the homogenizing “Self”, or the exchange value side of the logic of capital. Once brought into the movement of capital, one could not return to the “originally closed shell”, and has to move along with perpetually expanding capitalist modernity, and “preserve themselves within activity”. To be more precise, what exactly is the “spirit of capitalism” or “distinctive characteristics of modernity”? In Takeuchi’s own words, they are “a spirit of advancement that aims at the infinite approach toward greater perfection; the positivism, empiricism, and idealism that supports this spirit; and quantitative science that regards everything as homogeneous.”<sup>211</sup>

Here Takeuchi notes the homogeneous nature of Capitalist modernity and the exchange-value side of its logic. Intimately attached to this logic is a “thoroughgoing

---

<sup>209</sup> Ibid, p. 54: “What made tradition into tradition, was a certain self-consciousness. The direct moment that produced self-consciousness was the invasion of Europe.”

<sup>210</sup> Ibid, p.55

<sup>211</sup> Ibid, p. 55

rationalist conviction that all things can ultimately be objectified and extracted.”

Takeuchi points out there is no way out from the logic of capitalist modernity, since Oriental resistance itself is based on calculation and rationalization. Capital proliferates itself in the disguise of Europeanization. Asia’s resistance to Europeanization is orchestrated through the means of Capitalization. Hence, eventually, Asia “was destined to increasingly Europeanize”; its resistance only leads to the completion of the capitalization of the world.<sup>212</sup> In other words, it might be possible for Asia to resist Europeanization (the appearance), Asia nonetheless could never resist Capitalization (the core). Through constant capitalization as its form of resisting Europeanization, Asia achieves modernization. Therefore, “The history of resistance is the history of modernization, and there is no modernization that does not pass through resistance.”

Through capitalization/resistance/modernization, Asia enters world history as a valid subject.

The expansion of the exchange-value aspect of capitalism (reason, universality, abstract, homogeneity) ceaselessly entangles the world. It eventually brings all parts of the world into “the progress of world history”, constituted by the abstract and homogeneous temporality and spatiality.

Takeuchi describes the overarching logic of capitalism in the metaphor of chess pieces and chessboard:

The self-movement of spirit certainly seems recognizable...they are advanced like chess pieces. *But it seems that not only chess pieces advance, as the very board that sets the pieces in motion advances alongside them. Although this advancing is not uniform, those pieces that stop will always begin moving again. There is absolutely no final stoppage.* This is true of all pieces, such as reason, freedom, humanity, and society. Perhaps the concept of progress burst out of this movement in the form of self-representation.<sup>213</sup>

---

<sup>212</sup> *ibid*, p. 55. “Oriental resistance was merely the essential element that made world history all the more complete.”

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid*, p. 60

Through the subtle metaphor, Takeuchi makes his point clear: the various apparent phenomena of modernization (“reason, freedom, humanity and society”) are rather movements within a grandiose movement, namely the logic of capitalism. Capital expands itself as a “self-valorizing value”, therefore has “absolutely no final stoppage”.

And:

No such self-movement of spirit existed in the Orient; that is, spirit itself did not exist. Of course there was something resembling spirit that existed prior to modernity, as for example in Confucianism and Buddhism, but this was not spirit in the European sense of development. However, even this disappeared with the advent of modernity.<sup>214</sup>

The following passage suggests an intrinsic contradiction begin to emerge from the inside of Capitalism:

In the latter half of the nineteenth century a qualitative change occurred within the movement of European self-realization. This change was perhaps related to Oriental resistance, for it occurred when Europe’s invasion of the Orient was nearly complete. The internal contradictions that prompted Europe to its self-expansion came to be recognized. *At the same time that world history was approaching its completion with the comprehension of the Orient, the contradictions of this history surfaced through the mediation of the heterogeneity contained in the Orient. It was recognized that the contradictions that led to progress were the same contradictions that prevented progress.*<sup>215</sup>

Heterogeneity contained in the Orient, Takeuchi claimed, represented the possibility of resistance. Heterogeneity corresponds to the use-value side of the logic of capitalism. As a particular characteristic of Asia, heterogeneity could be utilized against the homogeneity (rationalization and the exchange-value side of Capitalist logic) of capitalism modernity. The contradictory commodity form is the inherent dynamic behind the incessant proliferation of capital; at the same time, it is also the basic bottleneck that Capitalism needs to overcome in order to continue its incessant proliferation. Hence

---

<sup>214</sup> Ibid, p. 60-61

<sup>215</sup> Ibid, p. 56

Takeuchi remarks: “the contradictions that led to progress were the same contradictions that prevented progress.” Takeuchi also seems to imply that the heterogeneity of Asia and the related use-value side of commodity form points to the overcome of Capitalist modernity.

It should be clear by now, that Takeuchi’s critique of “European modernity” could be read as a critique of Capitalist modernity. He is not confining the scope of his critique of modernity to one geographical/political/civilizational category, namely, Europe. It also suggests that it is not Takeuchi’s intention to create a dichotomy between Europe and Asia. Instead, he situates both Europe and Asia in the logic of global capitalism, within which Asia represents an element of resistance and heterogeneity.

A possible means of resistance, according to Takeuchi, is to discover “Heterogeneity contained in the Orient”.

#### Sun Yat Sen’s Great Asianism: Connecting The Tributary System and Asia

In the age of global capitalism, the nation-state has been firmly established as the only valid form of modern subject of world history in the capitalist world system. More important, the nation-state is the form of political organization that is most compatible with the capitalist system and therefore most effective in the global competition of world market. Nation-state acquires a dual meaning in the modern capitalist world: it is “the agency, the subject of History which will realize modernity”<sup>216</sup> and simultaneously, it is also a defining characteristic of capitalist modernity. At the turn of the twentieth century, Asian intellectuals in general invariably felt the incursive pressure from the Western nation-states, who claimed, as a basic ideal of their civilizing mission, “nations

---

<sup>216</sup> Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China*, p. 20

have the right to destroy non-nations and bring enlightenment” to “those non-nations such as tribal polities, empires, and others”.<sup>217</sup>

At the turn of the twentieth century, the primary struggle for Asia in general was to first achieve national independence, which usually means to throw off the European colonial yokes; second, to establish one’s own sovereign nation-state as a legitimate member the “family of nations”. The hierarchical and asymmetrical natures of the tributary system make it deviated from the grandiose ideal of formal equality between sovereign nation-states, and was not compatible with East Asian intellectuals’ eager pursuit of national independence and self-determination. Despite the fading away of tributary system in the narratives of Asianism, nonetheless, the absence of the tributary relation does not imply the renunciation of the tributary system among Asian intellectuals, rather, the tributary system functions as the point of departure in the renewed imagination of Asia.

On November 28, 1924, Sun Yat-Sen, the founding father of Republic China, delivered a speech in Kobe, Japan. This speech, which was originally entitled “Great Asianism”, has become a key text in the discourse of Asianism.<sup>218</sup> By analyzing Sun’s test, this section seeks to demonstrate that a relation between the tributary system and Asianism began to be constructed in the early twentieth century. Moreover, in order to understand how did the Asianist intellectuals utilize the legacy of the tributary system to

---

<sup>217</sup> Ibid

<sup>218</sup> Sun Zhongshan, “Speech to the Kobe Commercial Club.” 孙中山, “对神戸商业会议所等团体的演说”, 《孙中山全集》, 第十一卷, 北京, 中华书局, 1986. Translation taken from Sun Yat Sen, *China and Japan: Natural Friends, Unnatural Enemies*, Shanghai: China United Press, 1941

form a resisting narrative, this relation must be situated in the logic of capital, namely the commodity form.

At the beginning of his speech, Sun noted there was a switch of attitude toward the western modernity from admiration to suspicious. “Men thought and believed that European civilization was a progressive one—in science, industry, manufacture, and armament—and Asia had nothing to compare with it.” Hence Asian resistance was unthinkable. However, as a result of Japan’s victory over Russia in the Russo-Japanese War, as well as World War I, the notion of European civilization as a progressive one became increasingly under challenges from Asian intellectuals.

For Sun, European civilization meant “scientific materialism.” He claimed: “Such a civilization, when applied to society, will mean the cult of force, with aero planes, bombs, and cannons as its outstanding features. Recently, this cult of force has been repeatedly employed by the western peoples to oppress Asia, and as a consequence, there is no progress in Asia.”<sup>219</sup>

Although Sun criticized European materialism in an outright manner, we should not reduce Sun’s discourse of the antinomy of the kingly way and the hegemonic way to a simple dichotomy of Western materialism and Eastern spiritualism. Rather, we should posit Sun in the framework of Asian resistance to global capitalism.

In order to explain the tension between west and east, Sun developed a pair of concepts, namely the Asian kingly way, or the rule of right, and the European hegemonic way, or the rule of might. For Sun, the kingly way was a manifestation of the Asian virtues of “benevolence, justice and morality”. It “makes people respect, not fear it”. Significantly, Sun used the tributary system as a historical example of the kingly way. He argues:

---

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

Between 500 and 2000 years ago, there was a period of a thousand years when China was supreme in the world. Her status in the world then was similar to that of Great Britain and America today. What was the situation of the weaker nations toward China then? They respected China as their superior and sent annual tribute to China by their own will, regarding it as an honor to be allowed to do so. They wanted, of their own free will, to be dependencies of China. Those countries which sent tribute to China were not only situated in Asia but in distant Europe as well. But in what way did China maintain her prestige among so many small and weaker nations. Did she send her army or navy, i.e. use Might, to compel them to send their contributions? Not at all. It was not her rule of might that forced the weaker nations to send tribute to China. It was the influence of her rule of Right. Once they were influenced by the "Kingly Way" of China they continued to send tribute, not merely once or twice, but the practice was carried on from generation to generation. This influence is felt even at the present moment; there are still traces and evidences of it.<sup>220</sup>

The tributary system became the historical embodiment of Sun's notion of the kingly way. However, it is noteworthy that Sun's strategy of resistance was not a restoration of the tributary system and the sinocentric world order. Rather, he used the idealized imagination of the tributary system to promote a possibility of resisting European hegemony.

According to Sun's notion of Asia, the inherent unity of Asia is not Confucianism or any other unitary culture, but a political culture that accommodates different religions, beliefs, nationalities and societies. Wang Hui has insightfully pointed out that "Cultural heterogeneity was one of the main characteristics of this idea of Asia, and the notion of nationality provides the vehicle for the heterogeneity inherent in it. In Sun's usage, cultural heterogeneity provided the historical basis for a nation-state's internal unity and its capacity for resistance against external interference."<sup>221</sup>

Recall Takeuchi Yoshimi's claim that the key of Asian resistance lays in the discovery of the "Heterogeneity contained in the Orient." In global capitalism, in the eyes

---

<sup>220</sup> Sun Yat Sen, *China and Japan: Natural Friends, Unnatural Enemies*, Shanghai: China United Press, 1941. Quote from [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Sun\\_Yat-sen's\\_speech\\_on\\_Pan-Asianism](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Sun_Yat-sen's_speech_on_Pan-Asianism). Accessed on July 10th, 2012.

<sup>221</sup> Wang Hui, *The Political of Imagining Asia*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011) p. 31

of the Asianist, European civilization represented a homogenizing and universal force, which in turn was linked to the exchange-value side of the commodity form. As have shown in earlier sections, the discourse of Asianism at the turn of the twentieth century had always emphasized on the heterogeneity inherent in Asia. This trend is particularly notable in Liu Shipei and Liang Qichao's writings discussed above.

While Takeuchi Yoshimi further theorized the notion of Asian heterogeneity and the resistance to European modernity, Sun's link of the tributary system and Asia, more than anything else, provided a concrete exemplification of how the legacy of the tributary system was transformed into the new discourse of Asianism. In Sun's understanding, the tributary system is connected with the kingly way, the solution for Asian independent movement. Like Asianist thinkers before him, Sun Yat Sen believed the heterogeneity of Asia is the opposition to the homogeneity of Europe. Furthermore, what this heterogeneity implies is real equality (instead of formal equality), respect to particularity and multiplicity. In the early twentieth century, the Asianist believed these features formed the foundation of their resistance to European civilization.

Notably, this process of discovering the inherent heterogeneity also revived the imagination of tributary system, which was by then an obsolete system. This revival is particularly obvious in Sun Yat Sen's discourse of the kingly way and Great Asianism. The tributary system, because of its capacity of organizing multiplicities in politics and cultures, became a source of imagining a new Asia.

## 10. Conclusion

To clarify the overall argument presented in this thesis, it is necessary to retroactively review how each and every chapter presents an argument that are structurally connected to the effort of rethinking the meaning of Asia and its relation to the tributary system in the broader conceptual framework of global capitalism.

In order to adequately grasp the emerging discourse of Asianism at the turn of the twentieth century, a proper conceptual framework is crucially necessary. Thus this thesis attempts to critically reconceptualize the notion of modernity from the outset. It negates and seeks to revise the idea of multiple and alternative modernities by returning to the most basic and fundamental characterizations of modernity in global capitalism, namely the domination of human beings by an unprecedented form of quasi-objective dynamic of capital.

Global capitalism also introduced another unprecedented phenomena: a reorientation of temporality and spatiality. Capitalist temporality and global space allowed Asian intellectuals to imagine, for the first time, a synchronized globe, where Asia became consciously worldly.

Furthermore, this thesis interrogates the paradoxical nature of nation-states in capitalism, and traces the root of this paradox to the commodity form, constituted by exchange value and use value. While exchange value is associated with the universality and homogeneity, the use-value, on the other hand, represent particularity and heterogeneity. These antinomies are expressed as the logic of capital. The commodity form of exchange value and use value will form an important analytical category when analyzing the discourse of Asianism and its relation with the tributary system.

At the turn of the twentieth century, under the conditions created by global capitalism, Asian intellectuals began to reinterpret the indigenous categories such as Wangguo and Tongwen. As a result of the colonial condition of Wangguo (lost state), Asian intellectuals were urged to find a new meaning for Tongwen (common culture), in which they discovered, not a homogenizing common culture like Confucianism or Chinese script, but a shared anxiety in global capitalism and struggle of national independence.

The ideal of Asianism was to form a unity among independent and distinctive Asian nation-states. This unity could be utilized to resist the homogeneity and universality claimed by European hegemony, which represents the exchange-value side of the commodity form. The Asianists sought to revive an ideal of Asia, which embodies the heterogeneity and particularity of unique and diversified civilizations. Along with the revival of the Asian ideal, the tributary system was reimagined as the incarnation of Asian heterogeneity, a source that could be utilized in the common struggle of resisting European hegemony.

What the tributary system represented in the discourse of Asianism at the turn of the twentieth century, then, is a new possibility of relation between nation-states. In Sun Yat Sen's discourse in particular, the tributary system became a cultural source within which "mutual recognition of a multiplicity of cultures, ethnicities and religions" could be achieved.<sup>222</sup>

---

<sup>222</sup> Wang Hui, *The Political of Imagining Asia*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011). P.31

## Bibliography

- Arkush, R. David and Leo O. Lee. ed. *Land without Ghosts: Chinese Impressions of America from the Mid-nineteenth Century to the Present*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.
- Arthur, Christopher J. *The New Dialectic and Marx's Capital*. Boston: Brill, 2004.
- Balazs, Etienne. *Chinese Civilization and Bureaucracy: Variations on a Theme*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964.
- Benedict, Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso, 2006.
- Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2004
- Bottomore, Tom. ed. *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, Cambridge: Blackwell, 1991.
- Chang, Chih-tung, *China's Only Hope: An Appeal*. Trans. By Samuel Woodbridge. Edinburgh and London: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1901
- Chen, Duxiu, "On Wangguo", *Anhui Vernacular News*, vol. 8, p. 1-2, 1904. 陈独秀 : 安徽白话报 《亡国篇》
- Culp, Robert. *Articulating Citizenship: Civil Education and Student Politics in Southeastern China, 1912-1940*. Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2007.
- Dirlik, Arif. "Global Modernity? Modernity in an Age of Global Capitalism," *European Journal of Social Theory* 6 (3): 275–292
- Dirlik, Arif. "Revisioning Modernity: Modernity in Eurasian Perspective", *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*. Volume 12, Issue 2, 2011
- Duara, Prasenjit. *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995
- Duara, Prasenjit. "Civilizations and Nations in a Globalizing World", in *Multiple Modernities, European, Chinese and Other Interpretations*. Boston: Brill, 2002
- Duiker, William J. "Phan Boi Chau: Asian Revolutionary in a Changing World." *The Journal of Asian Studies* Vol. 31, No. 1 (Nov., 1971), pp. 77-88
- Duiker, William J. *The Rise of Nationalism in Vietnam, 1900-1941*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976
- Eisenstadt, S. N.. "Multiple Modernities," *Daedalus*, vol. 129, no. 1, (Winter, 2000), pp. 1-29

- Fairbank, John K. Reischauer, Edwin O. Craig, Albert M. *East Asia: Tradition and Transformation*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1976
- Fairbank, John King. ed. *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's Foreign Relations*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968.
- Fairbank, John King and S. Y. Teng. "On the Qing Tributary System." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 2(June 1941)
- Fairbank, John King. "Tributary Trade and China's Relations with the West", *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Feb., 1942), pp. 129-149
- Foucault, Michel. *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-1978*. New York: Picador/Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- Goldstein, Joshua. *Drama Kings, Players and Publics in the Re-creation of Peking Opera, 1870-1937*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.
- Hamashita, Takeshi. *China, East Asia and the Global Economy: Regional and Historical Perspectives*. New York: Routledge, 2008.
- Harootunian, Harry. *History's Disquiet: Modernity, Cultural Practice, and the Question of Everyday Life*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000.
- Harootunian, Harry, *Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture, and Community in Interwar Japan*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000
- Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri. *Empire*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000.
- Harvey, David. *Spaces of Global Capitalism: Towards a Theory of Uneven Geographical Development*. New York: Verso, 2006.
- Hevia, James L. *Cherishing Men From Afar: Qing Guest Ritual and the Macartney Embassy of 1793*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1995.
- Hostetler, Laura. *Qing Colonial Enterprise: Ethnography and Cartography in Early Modern China*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2005.
- Hostetler, Laura. "Qing Connection to the Early Modern World: Ethnography and Cartography in Eighteenth-Century China", *Modern Asian Studies* (2000), 34: pp 623-662
- Iriye, Akira. "Imperialism in East Asia." in *Modern East Asia: Essays in Interpretation*. New York, Harcourt, Brace & World, 1970.
- Jameson, Fredric. *The Ideologies of Theory, Volume 1*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988.

- Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism. Post-Contemporary Interventions*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1991.
- Jameson, Fredric. *Representing Capital: A Reading of Volume One*. New York: Verso, 2011.
- Kang, David. *East Asia Before the West: Five Centuries of Trade and Tribute*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.
- Karl, Rebecca. *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2002.
- Karl, Rebecca. “Slavery, Citizenship, and Gender in Late Qing China’s Global Context” in Karl and Zarrow ed. *Rethinking the 1898 Reform Period: Political and Cultural Change in Late Qing China*. Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2002.
- Kelly, Liam. *Beyond the Bronze Pillars: Envoy Poetry and the Sino-Vietnamese Relationship*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005
- Kern, Stephen. “Timing History Without a Clock”, *Social Science Information* (June 1990), 29 (2).
- Koselleck, Reinhart. *The Practice of Conceptual History*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002.
- Lam, Truong Buu. *Patterns of Vietnamese Response to Foreign Intervention: 1858-1900*. New Haven: Southeast Asia Studies, Yale University, 1967
- Laue, Theodore von. *The World Revolution of Westernization: The Twentieth Century in Global Perspective*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1989
- Lefebvre, Henri. *State, Space, World: Selected Essays*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009.
- Leibold, James. *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism: How the Qing Frontier and its Indigenous Became Chinese*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- Liang, Qichao. “General Discussion on Asian Geography.” in *Collection of Ice-Drinker House*. 梁启超，亚洲地理大势论，《饮冰室文集》
- Liang Qichao, “The Pain History of the loss of Korea”, in *Collection of Ice-Drinker House*. 梁启超，朝鲜灭亡惨史，《饮冰室文集》
- Liang, Qichao. “Bibliography of Japanese Publications” in *Collection of the Ice-Drinking House*. 梁启超，东籍月旦，《饮冰室文集》
- Liu, Shippei. *Collected Works of Liu Shippei*. 刘师培，刘师培文选，上海远东出版社

- Liu, Shunli. *Dialogues Between Dynasties*. Ningxia, Ningxia Renmin Press, 2006. 刘顺利, 王朝间的对话, 宁夏人民出版社
- Marr, David G. *Vietnamese Anticolonialism, 1885-1925*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971
- Marx, Karl. *Capital*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995
- Miyakawa, Hisayuki. "An Outline of the Naito Hypothesis and Its effects on Japanese Studies of China," *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, Vol. 14, No. 4, (Aug., 1955), pp. 533-552
- Murthy, Viren. "The Tribulations of Temporality: Impossible Resistance in Takeuchi Yoshimi and Tosaka Jun" in *Whither Japanese Philosophy?* (Tokyo, The University of Tokyo Center for Philosophy, 2009).
- Murthy, Viren. *The Political Philosophy of Zhang Taiyan: the Resistance of Consciousness*. Leiden: Brill, 2011
- Park, Hyun Ok. *Two Dreams in One Bed: Empire, Social Life, and the Origins of the North Korean Revolution in Manchuria*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005
- Phan, Boi Châu and Ho Chí Minh, *Reflections From Captivity*. Translated by Christopher Jenkins, Tran Khanh Tuyet, Huynh Sanh Thong, David G. Marr and Nguc trung thu. Athens: Ohio University Press, 1978.
- Phan, Boi Chau. *Overtaken chariot: the autobiography of Phan-Bôi-Châu*. Translated by Vinh Sinh and Nicholas Wickenden. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999
- Pore, William F. "Literati Voices on the Loss of National Independence in Korea and Vietnam: A Transnational Perspective, 1890—1920." PhD diss., The George Washington University, 2006
- Postone, Moishe. "Critique and Historical Transformation", *Historical Materialism*, volume 12:3 (53–72)
- Postone, Moishe. *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: a Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993
- Rowe, William T. *China's Last Empire: the Great Qing*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009.
- Sartori, Andrew. *Bengal in Global Concept History: Culturalism in the Age of Capital*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008
- Sartre, Jean Paul. *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*. New York: Routledge, 2001.
- Sayer, Derek. *Capitalism and Modernity: An Excursus on Marx and Weber*. London: Routledge, 1991.

*Sinh, Vinh, ed. Phan Bội Châu and the Đông-Du Movement. New Haven: Yale Center for International and Area Studies, 1988*

Struve, Lynn. ed. *Time, Temporality, and Imperial Transition: East Asia from Ming to Qing*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005.

Sun, Ge. "How does Asia mean? (Part II)" *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, Volume 1, Number 2, 2000, p. 320-341.

Sun, Zhongshan. "Speech to the Kobe Commercial Club." *Collection of Sun Yat Sen, vol.11*. Beijing: Zhonghua Press, 1986. 孙中山, "对神户商业会议所等团体的演说", 《孙中山全集》, 第十一卷, 北京, 中华书局, 1986

Tan, Sitong, *An Exposition of Benevolence: The Jen-Hsueh of T'an Ssu-T'ung*. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1984.

Tang, Xiaobing. *Global Space and the Nationalist Discourse of Modernity: the Historical Thinking of Liang Qichao*. California: Stanford University Press, 1996.

Thornber, Karen. "Early Twentieth-Century Intra-East Asian Literary Contact Nebulae: Censored Japanese Literature in Chinese and Korean", *The Journal of Asian Studies* Vol. 68, No. 3 (August) 2009.

Tran, My-Van, "Japan through Vietnamese Eyes (1905-1945)". *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (March, 1999)

Tran, My-Van. *A Vietnamese Royal Exile in Japan*. New York: Routledge, 2005.

Uhl, Christian. "Translation and Time: A Reminder of the Curvature of the Poststructuralist Plain", unpublished manuscript.

Wallerstein, Immanuel Maurice. *Unthinking Social Science: The Limits of Nineteenth-Century Paradigms*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001.

Walter, Benjamin. *Illuminations*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1970.

Wang, Hui. *The Rise of Modern Chinese Thought*. Beijing: Sanlian, 2009.

Wang, Hui, "How to Explain China and its Modernity" in *The Politics of Imagining Asia*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011.

Womack, Brantly. *China and Vietnam: The politics of Asymmetry*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Woodside, Alexander. *Vietnam and the Chinese Model: a Comparative Study of Vietnamese and Chinese Government in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988

Woodside, Alexander. *Lost Modernities: China, Vietnam, Korea, and the Hazards of World History*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006.

Wright, Harrison M. ed. *The "New Imperialism": Analysis of Late Nineteenth-Century Expansion*. Boston: Heath, 1961.

Yeh, Wen-Hsin. *Shanghai Splendor: Economic Sentiments and the Making of Modern China, 1843-1949*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.

Yin, Ruli ed. *Reflection on the Lost States*. Taidong Book Bureau, 1915. 殷汝骊编，亡国鉴，泰东图书局，1915

Yoshimi, Takeuchi. *What is Modernity? Writings of Takeuchi Yoshimi*. New York : Columbia University Press, 2005.

Zhang, Hao. *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and Intellectual Transition in China, 1890-1907*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971.

Zhang, Zhenkun. ed. *Sources of Sino-French War*. Vol. 7. Beijing, Zhonghua Press, 2006. 张振鹑编，中法战争资料，第七卷，中华书局