What is Asia for Us and Can We Be Asians? The New Asianism in Contemporary Japan

SIMON AVENELL

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What is Asia for Us and Can We Be Asians? 
The New Asianism in Contemporary Japan*

SIMON AVENELL

School of Culture, History and Language, ANU College of Asia & the Pacific, The Australian National University, ACT, Australia 2601
Email: simon.avenell@anu.edu.au

Abstract

This paper traces the development of the ‘New Asianism’ in Japan over the past quarter of a century. It identifies three broad trajectories or normative positions in the debate: those advocating the replication of a Japanese model in Asia, those in favour of a genuine community of equals, and those who see Asia as the only future for Japan and as a solution for the country’s economic and social problems. The paper argues that the evolution and shifting prominence of each trajectory over time is indicative of the ways globalization and regionalization are impinging on imaginations of the nation and facilitating novel perspectives on East Asia in Japan. Although the nation-state is, and will probably remain, an important force behind Japan’s relations in Asia for the foreseeable future, the New Asianism may be indicative of its gradual relativization and the beginning of a new, more multidimensional understanding of Asia in Japan.

Introduction

Given the historical character of debates about Japanese identity, it is likely that Japan’s Asian ‘revival’ will be extremely difficult regardless of the prevailing circumstances or motivations. We must also recognize how

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immensely difficult it will be to relativize ‘Japan’, which is the essential precondition for any consciousness of Asia.\(^1\)

After nearly 50 years in the intellectual wilderness, in the mid-1980s discussions about East Asian integration, community, culture, and values began to burgeon in Japan, as too did proposals for the country’s reengagement—sometimes as leader—in an emergent and revitalized East Asian sphere. Numerous factors stimulated and fuelled this so-called ‘New Asianism’ in Japan: the end of the Cold War in Europe, the rise (and demise) of the Japanese economy, the emergence of new East Asian powers and their growing intraregional connections, and regionalist responses to globalization in other parts of the world. More specifically, the direct catalyst for the New Asianism was a mid-1980s reconfiguration in the global monetary system. With the substantial appreciation of the Yen against the U.S. dollar after the 1985 Plaza Accord, many Japanese businesses were forced to relocate production facilities offshore, resulting in a massive influx of Japanese investment into East Asia (and elsewhere). Early inflections of the New Asianism primarily sought to legitimize this economic expansion by appealing to shared East Asian values, culture, and modes of behaviour, or Japanese-inspired models of East Asian ‘flying-geese’-style developmentalism. But, as the economic and strategic balance of power in East Asia shifted, and as controversies erupted over the interpretations of Japanese school history textbooks and the provocative actions of rightist politicians who visited controversial war shrines and denied wartime atrocities by the Japanese army, so too did the debate. The often shrilly chauvinistic New Asianism of the early 1990s was moderated and relativized by a new cadre of Japanese regionalists, some of whom envisioned a future of reconciliation and genuine community building, and others who warned that, if a stagnant and insular Japan was to survive, it would have no choice but to join in the historic transformation which was underway in East Asia.

Those familiar with modern Japanese history, of course, will recognize that these debates about ‘leading’, ‘joining’, ‘reengaging’, or otherwise ‘rediscovering’ East Asia were by no means new. Japanese history from the mid-nineteenth century is littered with the ruins of repeated and often futile attempts to either engage or disengage with

an Asia rigidly defined and operationalized from the perspective of the nation.\(^2\) As the historian Hamashita Takeshi suggests (above), the dispositional transformation from a national mindset to a regional one has been repeatedly confounded by the relentless grip of the nation on identity in Japan (and elsewhere) and the complications of repositioning the country within East Asia after so many years ‘outside’ the region under the cozy embrace of an American patron.

But, difficult though the process of ‘relativizing’ (or regionalizing) the nation may be, the evolution of the New Asianism from the mid-1980s suggests that globalization and regionalization are helping to destabilize long-held mythologies about Japan and its position in the world and, moreover, to facilitate substantive consideration of regional integration and community. Very few—if any—envisage a withering away of the nation for a new regional community, and regionalist advocates still face the constant resistance of popular nationalism. But, in the New Asianism, we witness how global reconfigurations and their regional effects can disrupt—if not subvert—the exclusivist claims of the nation vis-à-vis identity and value. Although few participants in this New Asianism debate have proposed a recalibration of national sovereignty in relation to a regional community, all participants implicitly recognize that the ongoing viability of their nation—both politically, economically, and perhaps even ideologically—hinges on some kind of self-initiated reengagement with the East Asian region. It is in the specifics of this reengagement, of course, where opinions diverge.

This paper analyses the origins and development of the New Asianism in Japan over the past quarter of a century. As discussed

in greater depth below, earlier treatments of this discourse have consistently dismissed it as a form of Japanese cultural nationalism shrewdly masquerading behind the cloak of Asianism. Whilst such appraisals were right on target for the earliest articulations of the New Asianism, this paper will show how the debate has diversified and become far richer in recent decades. Three broad trajectories or normative positions are identified in the debate: Asia as Japan, Japan in Asia, and Asia for Japan. Although remarkably different in their approach, their politics, and their proposals, what unites each of these trajectories is an ever intensifying recognition—even if only implicitly sometimes—that regionalization and globalization are unstoppable processes which are chipping away at the sovereignty of the nation-state and which the Japanese must address through a renewed engagement with the Asian region. The critical differentiating criterion among the positions, however, is in the role they envisage for Japan within Asia and this has much to do with the differing ideological orientations of each of the trajectories as compared with Asia and the political sentiments within Japanese society to which they appeal. In broad terms—and at the risk of oversimplifying a complex field of ideas—Asia as Japan advocates are motivated by, and speak to,
a nationalist agenda which ebbs and flows in response to international and domestic political conditions; *Japan in Asia* proponents to a progressive-communitarian project; and *Asia for Japan* supporters to an instrumental strategy deeply attentive to the rise of China as a regional and global power.\(^5\)

First, those advocating *Asia as Japan* envisage the region primarily as a vehicle for the reproduction of the nation. Echoing wartime versions of Pan-Asianist rhetoric, they appeal to so-called Asian values, practices, and other supposed commonalities, and they very often imagine an Asian hierarchy with Japan at the apex as a benevolent forerunner. ‘Asia’ in this trajectory is more often than not a convenient substitute for ‘Japan’, and the discussion is less about East Asia and Japan than it is about Japan and its relationship with Europe and America. Early proponents in this trajectory such as Ogura Kazuo, for instance, called on Japan to take the lead in a world-historical ‘Asianization’ of the globe but, as Japan’s economic fortunes worsened in the 1990s, nationalistic New Asianists such as Shindō Eiichi began to recalibrate the argument, recasting Japan as a kind of martyr for Asia in the face of Western military and economic penetration. Second, those advocating *Japan in Asia* attempt to situate the nation within a regional imaginary. Theirs is very often a therapeutic project aimed at healing past wounds through contrition and building communities of trust and direct human interaction. Advocates in this trajectory try to problematize nationalism and national identity by identifying a history of intraregional fluidity, exchange, and interaction in multiple spheres of activity. The idea of a ‘common house of northeast Asia’ promoted by progressive intellectuals such as Wada Haruki and Kang Sang-jung from the 1990s, and Hamashita Takeshi’s depictions of Japan within a maritime Asia, best encapsulate this perspective. Finally, those advocating *Asia for Japan* present an instrumentalist vision of regionalism based on national strategy. They hold steadfast to the concept of national sovereignty guaranteed by the U.S.-Japan security alliance, reject outright or downplay the existence of any East Asian identity, yet recognize the necessity for more dynamic engagement accompanied by a limited or ‘open’ regional institutional infrastructure. There is a sense of crisis or, at the very least, urgency, in their writings: Japan simply has no choice but to engage more fully with East Asia or it will be left behind. The region, they argue, is

\(^5\) I thank one of the reviewers for suggesting the phrase ‘critical differentiating criterion’.
witnessing waves of regionalization and regionalism of historic import in which Japan must be involved. Illustrative of this perspective are the proposals of political scientist Shiraishi Takashi who calls on Japan to leave behind the chauvinistic Asianism of old for a new, realistic, and pragmatic regionalist outlook based on the reality of Asia’s stunning economic emergence. Some in this instrumentalist trajectory even envisage a new role for Japan in which the country straddles and mediates between Asia on the one side, and the Atlantic world on the other. It is suggested that the growing diversity of the New Asianism evident in its new trajectories and ongoing conceptual recalibrations evidences the influence of regionalizing forces on the country and perhaps even the possibility of a new, more multidimensional appreciation for, and relationship with, Asia.

**The context of the New Asianism: globalization, the nation, and regional effects**

In their ominously titled 1996 book, *Asia in Japan’s Embrace*, Walter Hatch and Kozo Yamamura warned that ‘unless U.S. and European MNCs establish themselves more firmly in Asia, they may be gradually squeezed out by the increasingly tight and exclusive nature of this highly competitive Japanese production alliance’. Japan was, they argued, ‘actually flying further and further ahead of the regional flock’ and ‘like a good surfer’ had ‘learned to ride the crest of the product cycle in Asia’. Such concerns proved unfounded as the Japanese economy faltered and then stagnated in the 1990s. But the regionalization of Japanese investment and production throughout East Asia, coupled with Japan’s dismal economic performance, actually helped to stimulate a renewed consideration of Asia in the country. Publications on Asia and discussions in the mass media burgeoned after 1985, not only in response to greater economic interdependence but also because of increased intellectual and scholarly exchange, and the greater numbers of Japanese either living or visiting Asian countries as students, tourists, or expatriates. From the early 1990s Japanese scholars began publishing multi-volume collections with titles such as *Thinking From Asia* (7 vols, 1993–1994), *Lectures on Contemporary Asia* (4 vols, 1994), *Portraits of Contemporary Asia* (15 vols, 1996), *A World History of Regions* (12 vols, 1997–2000); Series:

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International Exchanges (7 vols, 1999–2001); Maritime Asia (6 vols, 2000), The Asian New Century (8 vols, 2002), and Contemporary South Asia (2002–2003). Such developments evidence how regionalism and regionalist thought in contemporary Japan were, in the first instance, stimulated by the regionalization of the Japanese economy. Ironically, however, the economic expansion of Japan into East Asia resulted not in the replication of a national model, as some Japanese elites and nationalists had hoped, and as some Americans had feared but, on the contrary, in an unanticipated feedback effect in which regional consciousness impinged on previously exclusivist national imaginaries, forcing a rethinking of the nation-region dynamic.

Of course, although this regionalization of the Japanese economy from the 1980s represents the most immediate contextualizing factor behind the New Asianism, it would be wrong to assume that the debate materialized out of thin air after a 40-year void in thinking about Asia in Japan. There were intellectual and institutional processes throughout the early postwar period both within and from outside Japan that fed into, and helped to shape, the New Asianism from the late 1980s. Three specific phenomena warrant mention: the Japanese Sinologist, Takeuchi Yoshimi and his ideas about Asia; various initiatives amongst Asian nations to adopt the ‘Japanese model’ in the early 1980s; and the discourse on Asian values of the 1980s and early 1990s.

Takeuchi Yoshimi, the sinologist and scholar of Chinese writer Lu Xun, appears again and again in discussions amongst the New Asianists. His appeal for them stems not only from his position as one of the few high-profile thinkers on Asia in postwar Japan, but also because of his evaluation of Japanese Pan-Asianism in the 1930s and


8 It is also worth noting his impact on Asianist thought beyond Japan. See, for instance, Kuan-Hsing Chen. (2010). Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization, Duke University Press, Durham.
1940s and his proposals for Asia (including Japan) in world history. As Saaler and Szpilman have recently noted, Takeuchi condemned Japanese wartime Pan-Asianism as an inauthentic form of Asianism based not on engagement but on a fundamental rejection or ‘shedding of Asia’ (datsu-A) for ‘Western methods’. In Takeuchi’s opinion, wartime Pan-Asianism ‘had nothing to do with the “Eastern spirit” or Eastern cultural practices or political norms. It was a natural, if deplorable, consequence of the Westernization of Japan’. In its stead Takeuchi preferred an ambiguous Asianism which ‘always appears as a tendency in association with systems of thought that possess their own individuality’, and without ‘an independent existence’ of its own other than a vague aspiration for ‘solidarity among [the] peoples of Asia’. Rather than a phenomenon with ontological properties, Takeuchi proposed Asia as a ‘method’ by which the Orient would ‘re-embrace the West’ and ‘change the West in order to realize the latter’s outstanding cultural values on a greater scale’. He argued that ‘such a rollback of culture or values would create universality’ and ‘further elevate those universal values that the West itself produced’.

Takeuchi’s disassociation of wartime Pan-Asianism from authentic Asianism, combined with his recognition of a sense of Asian solidarity and a role for Asia in world history, have made his thought a convenient reference point for contemporary New Asianists in Japan in search of legitimate sources of Asianist thought in their country. Moreover, as explained below, because Takeuchi’s thought is ambiguous it has been profitably mobilized by New Asianists with remarkably divergent agendas. His ideas have been fodder for those committed to a culturally-driven regionalism as well as those who reject identity for functional integration.

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12 Matsumoto Ken’ichi, the public intellectual and scholar of Takeuchi Yoshimi is one of the more creative interpreters of Takeuchi’s ideas. For example, in a 2000 work
The New Asianism—especially the earliest trajectory of Asia as Japan—also built on attempts both within and outside Japan in the 1970s and early 1980s to replicate the so-called ‘Japanese model’ and to define a set of ‘Asian values’. In terms of regionalization, Japanese influence in Asia increased dramatically after 1985 but, in terms of regionalism, its influence appears to have begun earlier, as various countries throughout the region looked to the economic giant of Northeast Asia as a role model for Asian economic success. Malaysia and Singapore are cases in point. In 1981 Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad instigated his country’s ‘Look East’ policy which encouraged Malaysian citizens and businesses to replicate the successful Asian practices of Japan and other high-performing Northeast Asian economies such as South Korea. Mahathir placed equal emphasis on both cultural learning and on technology transfer, encouraging Malaysians to adopt Japanese ‘diligence and discipline in work, loyalty to the nation and to the enterprise . . . and [prioritization] of group over individual interests’.13 Around the same time, Singaporean elites began a similar ‘Learn From Japan’ campaign which, although not an official government policy, involved concrete initiatives to learn from Japanese business and employment practices, and systems of community policing. Throughout the 1980s numerous missions travelled from Singapore to Japan to study factory operations, human resource management, and quality control circles.14

on Takeuchi’s influential essay, ‘Japan’s Asianism’, Matsumoto interprets Takeuchi’s notion of the East ‘repackaging’ the ‘West’ to mean that the East will take the West’s will to power, which is apparently something intrinsically Western, and repackage it as ‘love’ (ai), since love is apparently one of the cultural essences of the East. Matsumoto asserts that such repackaging or rewrapping of Western ‘power’ as Asian ‘love’ is an example of the Asian value of ‘symbiosis’ (kyōsei) which has developed organically because of cultural diversity in the region. See Ken’ichi Matsumoto. (2000). Takeuchi Yoshimi ‘Nihon no Ajiaishugi’ Seidoku, Iwanami Shoten, Tokyo, p. 189. For a critique of Matsumoto’s over-interpretation of Takeuchi see Uemura, Ajia wa ‘Ajiateki’ Ka, pp. 261–266.


Whilst most of these learn from Japan, initiatives met with mixed success in practice, the notion of a non-Western, Asian model of economic, political, and social modernity implicit in such borrowing fed into both the New Asianism in Japan and broader processes of regionalism in East Asia thereafter. Most directly, in the 1990s Mahathir Mohamad, Singapore’s Lee Kuan Yew, and Japanese rightist politician Ishihara Shintarō spearheaded the provocative, if conceptually-brittle, discourse on ‘Asian values’. They pointed to East Asian preferences for community over individualism, ‘order and harmony over personal freedom’, the infusion of religion into ‘other spheres of life’, a tendency for saving and frugality, a commitment to hard work, ‘respect for political leadership’, ‘an emphasis on family’, and ‘a belief that government and business need not necessarily be natural adversaries’. Moreover, as Milner notes, they asserted that such values were the bedrock of economic activity in the region, and were fuelling an East Asian economic miracle which heralded a historic shift from the ‘West’ to the ‘East’. The Asian values discourse ultimately proved as fragile as the Japanese model rhetoric of the early 1980s, especially after the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997, but as rudimentary conceptualizations of an East Asian region, both discourses helped lay the foundation for more sophisticated regional

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Milner, What happened to ‘Asian Values’?, p. 57.

Ibid.
imaginaries from the 1990s onwards. Indeed, we can trace a direct line from the Japanese model and Asian values rhetoric to the New Asianism and to visions of an East Asian Community prominent from the late 1990s.

In sum, then, such earlier ideational engagements with East Asia meant that Japanese advocates of the New Asianism would not begin with a tabula rasa. Along with the ideological baggage of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity sphere, their Asianism also grew out of, and built upon, a complex ideational legacy informed on the one side by Takeuchi’s illusive yet alluring ideas about Asia as ‘method’ and, on the other, by rather crude notions of the Japanese model and Asian values.

*Asia as Japan*

Among the three trajectories of Japan’s new Asianism, those advocating Asia as Japan have attracted the most attention from foreign observers, who have consistently dismissed the discourse as nothing more than a cleverly concealed form of Japanese cultural nationalism. In 1993, for example, the historian Carol Gluck branded the discourse ‘one-country Asianism’ pointing to its invention of a ‘cultural identity… with too little reference to the viewpoint of the Asians themselves’. In 1995, Laura Hein and Ellen Hammond concluded that the New Asianism was a ‘direct successor to Nihonjinron in its use of ethnic identity… to naturalize harmonious relations between Japan and other Asian nations…’. They identified a ‘close fit’ with the ‘neo-nationalist agenda’ in Japan, noting a common thread that Japan had ‘an eternal right to leadership of Asia’ and that ‘Japanese interests’ could substitute seamlessly ‘for the interests of the

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18 By the mid-1990s Mahathir had all but abandoned the Look East policy and was now singing the praises of French industry. Mahathir explained that ‘We want to learn from the French, for instance, in design, sophistication, and so on. We don’t want to remain bound to one source’ (i.e. Japan). Quoted in Walter F. Hatch. (2010). *Asia’s Flying Geese: How Regionalization Shapes Japan*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, p. 206.


region’. And, in 1998, historian Tessa Morris-Suzuki observed how the New Asianists were ‘trapped in Orientalist dichotomy and “unable to expand their horizons to encompass demands for political and social recognition from places which are neither “West” nor “East”’.22

For the *Asia as Japan* trajectory, at least, such evaluations were right on target. As noted in the Introduction, advocates here have been primarily interested in mobilizing Asianism as a tool to reproduce ‘Japan’ throughout Asia as well as to solidify Japanese preeminence and leadership in the region. Little attention is given to the development of meaningful relations between Japan and other Asian nations and proponents here are often more concerned about America and Europe than they are about Asia. Scant attention is given to history either and, when it is mentioned, Japan’s record in World War II is often discounted as a delusional and unfortunate ‘Western’ diversion from the country’s true Asian nature. But, that being said, over the years regionalizing pressures have forced even this rigidly nationalist version of the New Asianism to change: what began as a crude attempt to justify Japanese economic leadership in the region on the basis of cultural proximity has evolved into a discourse on Asian hybridity and a bizarre narrative of Japanese ‘sacrifice’ for Asia.

Among the *Japan as Asia* advocates, Ogura Kazuo, the diplomat and later Japan Foundation President, was the earliest and undoubtedly the most provocative, with his calls for an ‘Asian revival’ and the ‘creation of a new Asia’ throughout the 1990s. He attracted the most attention and criticism from early observers of the New Asianism.23 In a famous 1993 essay, ‘A Call for a New Concept of Asia’, Ogura described Asia as an idea that had been ‘abused, distorted, and worn out’, mostly by Westerners who had ‘manufactured’ it ‘to suit themselves’ throughout the modern period.24 But ‘in the past few years’ (post-1985) Ogura had identified a transformation. The ‘negative’ values long ‘associated with Asia’ were ‘finally’ receding for ‘positive ones’ and Asians were now searching for ‘common directions and a common destiny’. Indeed a ‘new Asia’ had been born, but this time it was ‘something with a real presence instead of . . . an empty

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21 Hein and Hammond, ‘Homing in on Asia’, p. 11.
concept created by people in the West’. Ogura identified Asian culture and values as the backbone of Japan’s economic miracle which had now become a ‘model for the world’. He invoked the words of Malaysia’s Mahathir who, in the controversial 1970 book, *The Malay Dilemma*, identified the ‘work ethic of the Japanese and Koreans’ based on ‘discipline, loyalty, and diligence’, and the ‘group’ and ‘country’ over the ‘individual’ as the key dynamics fuelling such countries’ ‘economic and social development’. In other words, even Asian leaders were now looking to Japan as the font of Asian values.

More controversially, Ogura envisaged a world-historical role for Asia in which the united region would gradually ‘Asianize’ the world. In a clever re-invocation of Takeuchi Yoshimi’s ideas of the 1960s, Ogura urged Asia to ‘thoroughly absorb what the West has offered’ and ‘develop a new set of values’ that it could ‘transmit to the world’. He pointed to the supposed Asian love of nature, the natural group harmony of Asians, and the sophisticated arts of the Japanese tea ceremony all as potentially useful exports to a world crippled and degraded by ‘mechanical civilization’. By the ‘world’, of course, Ogura meant the United States which he said must ‘Asianize itself’ just as ‘Asia has Americanized itself’. The United States, he insisted, must ‘understand’ and ‘learn’ from Asia and ‘accept some Asian values’. And, as he clarified in an essay some years later, Japan would have to ‘shoulder’ a ‘large part of the leadership’ in the creation of a new Asia and the subsequent Asianization of the world.

In hindsight, of course, Ogura’s designs for global Asianization led by Japan seem almost delusional, but in the context of Japanese success they made perfect sense. Until around the mid-1990s it was still possible for the New Asianists to conceive of an economically powerful Japan elevating Asia—and its values—to an unprecedented historical level capable of resisting the incursions and demands of America. Ishihara Shintarō and Mahathir Mohamad expressed this sentiment most vehemently in their 1996 book, *The Voice of Asia: Two Leaders Discuss the Coming Century*, which expanded to the whole of Asia Ishihara’s earlier nationalist tract, *The Japan That

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26 Ibid.
27 Ibid., p. 41.
28 Ibid., p. 44.
Can Say No: Why Japan Will Be First Among Equals. But countless other New Asianists in Japan at the time echoed similar ideas, if in more mannered terms. In 1991, for instance, President of the U.S.-Japan joint-venture Fuji-Xerox Corporation, Kobayashi Yotarō, caused a stir when he called on Japan to ‘share leadership’ in Asia not with the America but with China. Kobayashi juxtaposed the ‘emotional orientation’ of Japanese and other Asians to the ‘logical orientation’ of Americans. Sakakibara Eisuke, former official in the Ministry of Finance, wrote in the 1990s of Japan’s ‘non-capitalistic market economy’ and the broader Asian ‘respect’ for ‘nature and the environment’ and traditions of ‘peaceful coexistence between civilizations’ as solutions to the environmentally destructive anthropocentrism of Western civilization. In 1996, the scholar of Chinese philosophy Kaji Nobuyuki suggested that people in the ‘Confucian cultural sphere’ felt uncomfortable with ‘the Christian brand of altruistic love’ which left them feeling ‘somehow empty’. In Confucian Asia, explained Kaji, blood ties determined behaviour.

But, for the most resplendent articulation of the early New Asianism, we might look to the Commission for A New Asia, established by the conservative Sasakawa Peace Foundation in 1992. The Commission, which included prominent figures such as Kobayashi Yotarō and senior Mahathir advisor Noordin Sopiee, produced two reports in 1994: Outlook for A New Asia authored by an Asian subcommittee, and Outlook for A New Asia and Japan’s Response authored by an all-Japanese group. Similar in tone to Ogura’s Asianism, the reports referred to a ‘tide of Asian resurgence’ and called on Asia to ‘rise to its feet’ and contribute to the ‘advancement of human civilization’. Asia, the Commission argued, ‘must lead the way’, teaching the world the

‘golden mean’.35 In this vision a ‘proper balance’ would be struck between individual and community, the family would be ‘nourished as the sacred sanctuary’, ‘strong and responsible government’ would be a ‘virtue’, and unbridled market capitalism would be checked by ‘the social mores of the traditional Asian village’.36 Importantly, the reports not only perceived a ‘historic opportunity for Asians to define Asia’ but also for Japan to shed its ‘Asia-or-the-West dilemma’ in favour of a ‘more weighty responsibility commensurate with its stature in global society’.37

As already noted, such ideas became fodder for critics of the New Asianism, who tended to dismiss the phenomenon as a dressed-up version of Japanese cultural nationalism on to which they projected concerns about what Japan was ‘really’ up to. But, as Japan’s economic fortunes worsened and as those of other Asian nations improved, Asia as Japan advocates were forced to make creative modifications to their story. They enhanced simplistic notions of Asian values and traditional culture with ideas about Asian hybridity and fortified explanations of Asian community with theories on social capital. Some began to discuss Asia as the cure for Japan’s contemporary malaise, whilst others, still wedded to the idea of Japan as the lead actor in Asian history, constructed incredible narratives in which the country sacrificed itself economically to save Asia.

The 1998 volume, What Are “Asian Values”?, edited by the conservative scholars Aoki Tamotsu and Saeki Keishi, is an excellent example of the growing sophistication of cultural arguments by advocates in the Asia as Japan trajectory from around the late 1990s. In his essay for this volume, ‘The Principle of “Many As One” and Japan’s Choice’, the Kyoto University historian Yamamuro Shin’ichi put forward hybridity (konsei) as the core value of East Asia, and he argued that its disappearance in modern Japan was the cause of the country’s malaise. Yamamuro called for a more complex and dynamic understanding of Asian values than the static categories of familism, groupism, and benevolent governance, earlier trumpeted by Lee Kuan Yew and Mahathir Mohamad. Instead, Yamamuro described Asian values as no more than ‘working hypotheses’ which

35 Ibid., p. 3
36 Ibid., pp. 6–9.
pointed towards ‘issues for the coming century’ and hinted at ‘new principles of order and modes of individual existence’. According to Yamamuro, the seeming lack of structure throughout Asia—for example, the chaos of many Asian cities—was not an indication of disorder but a manifestation of the Asian ability to seamlessly resolve opposites. For example, a stretch of railroad tracks by day may at night metamorphose into a food-stall market only to revert back to the railroad in the morning. Although such arrangements were ‘anti-structural’ (hankōzō), for Yamamuro this did not equate to ‘anti-order’ (hanchitsujo): on the contrary, behind the fluidity and lack of stability a ‘concealed principle of order’ was at work which constantly knits together disparate elements into a diverse, yet mellifluous chorus.\footnote{Shin’ichi Yamamuro. (1998). “‘Ta ni shite Ichi’ no Chitsujo Genri to Nihon no Sentaku” (‘The ordering principle of “one in the many” and Japan’s choice’) in ‘Ajiateki Kachi’ to wa Nanika, Tamotsu Aoki and Keishi Saeki (eds), TBS-Britannica, Tokyo, p. 48.} Pointing to Zhuangzi’s concept of ‘double walking’ or ‘walking two paths’ (liangxing; ryōkō), Yamamuro suggested that, when faced with an opposition, the Asian solution was to create a new condition by equally incorporating the opposites. Asian culture resembled the phenomenon of a ‘hybrid system’ in nature which was capable of incorporating more and more subsystems within its structure.\footnote{Ibid., p. 58.} As contemporary examples of such dynamic and flexible hybridity in Asia, Yamamuro noted China’s ‘one-country two-systems’ policy in Hong Kong and the ASEAN principle of mutual non-interference and non-use of military force.\footnote{Ibid.}

But, different to earlier advocates in this trajectory, Yamamuro did not (by the late 1990s he could not) wind his theory of Asian hybridity into a nationalist tract on Japan’s natural right to leadership in the region. On the contrary, for Yamamuro, hybridity-*lost* became the motif for contemporary Japanese stagnation and psychological discontent: the growing interest amongst Japanese in Asia, he argued, had to do with a longing or nostalgia for a Japan lost to hyper-modernity. Wartime standardization and regulation, followed by occupation and reconstruction, high-speed economic growth, and the energy belt-tightening of the 1970s standardized and homogenized daily life in Japan, simultaneously stifling diversity to a point where
ordinary people began to long for a return of ‘chaos’ and ‘disorder’. Yamamuro argued that the end of the economic bubble in 1990 provided an opportunity for the Japanese people to look at Asia in an authentic way for perhaps the first time in history. What they discovered was a space replete with hybridity. On the one hand, Asia had clearly become a space of ‘economic dynamism’ and the emergent centre of the world economy for the coming century. Yet on the other hand it was a place where the deep strata of human culture and nature lost to Japan and the West seemed to be preserved. In post-Economic miracle Japan, suggested Yamamuro, these images refracted the Japanese loss of self-confidence and sense of restriction becoming mirror images both of what the country had once been and what it had degenerated into. As Yamamuro lamented, there was even a view that ‘these days Asia has everything Japan has, and the things Japan does not have, Asia has’. Indeed, Yamamuro himself imagined Asia as a fantastic mixture of the ‘pre-modern’, the ‘modern’, and the ‘hyper-modern’, all of which reacted, ‘giving off sparks’, to produce the ‘fascination’ of a ‘wonderland’ far more authentic than the ordered monotony of urban life in contemporary Japan.

Of course, not all Asia as Japan advocates came to romanticize Asia in this way. In the same volume, Saeki Keishi identified Asia as an ethical battle ground. Whilst agreeing with Yamamuro that economic development was ‘liberating’ Asia from ‘the historical structure’ in which it was ‘configured as something subordinate to the West’, Saeki argued that economic growth in the region, together with economic and cultural globalism, had produced a consumer culture and an urban lifestyle which was not specifically Asian any more. In a sense, suggested Saeki, the moment ‘Asia became Asia’ the idea itself was ‘fated to vanish’, and ‘no longer would it be possible to drag out “Asia” as the fictional resistance to Europe’. According to Saeki, because of its 1980s growth, East Asia now found itself at the very cutting edge of the post-modern experience where a battle raged not between ‘Western civilization’ and ‘Asian culture’ but between the ‘defense of an ethical lifestyle’ and a ‘post-modern global economy and culture which had discarded all ethical values’. Although he

42 Ibid., p. 57.
43 Ibid., p. 55.
44 Ibid., p. 56.
46 Ibid., p. 41.
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does not explicitly say so, it is clear that Saeki sees Japan as the most important site of this battle and, hence, charged with the historic role of defending ethics (Asia) from modern consumerism (the West).

This sense of Asia under siege from globalization is a common theme amongst Asia as Japan advocates from the late 1990s and reflects the way this discursive trajectory evolved in response to real changes in the East Asia-Japan dynamic: although Japan could no longer lead Asia, it could be part of a civilizational struggle between the global and the regional. The economist Hara Yōnosuke’s provocatively-titled 2002 book, A New Treatise on East Asia, is a case in point. Contrary to Francis Fukuyama and the ‘end of history’ advocates, here Hara argued that the end of the Cold War and the terrorist attacks on the United States in September 2001 marked not the end of history, but its ‘revival’. In Hara’s telling, ‘all the modern West produced was a concrete-filled, puny, self-absorbed ego’. The progressivism of the Western age was about exclusion: it tried to create the future by destroying the past or by absorbing the past into the present. But this world had ended and now nobody—especially those in the non-Western world—could envision their future as an ‘extension of Western society’. Hara argued that the secularism and political ideology of the previous century was being challenged now by a ‘completely different’ and ‘richer’ concept of the ego as something embedded in community. Likewise, globalization faced opposition from regional formations based on ‘interpretive, life-world civilizations’—like East Asia—which accepted multiple worldviews, superimposing them, one on top of the other. In the midst of this ‘clash’ between the global and the regional, Hara called on Japan to seriously think about its position within Asia. The taboo about discussing Asianism in the country for the past half-century had made it all too easy for Japan to rely on globalism (read ‘Americanism’) but, with the collapse of the Cold War order, Japan and East Asia had begun a ‘silent fusion’. Japan now had to play its part in the construction of a new civilization, a ‘polymorphic’ world

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48 Ibid., p. 12.

49 Ibid., p. 21.

50 Ibid., p. 12.

51 Ibid., p. 24.

52 Ibid., pp. 32–33.
order in which Western liberalism was no longer the default principle of organization.  

But for the most expansive, recent, and, in many ways, fantastic articulation of Japan as an East Asian civilizational ‘warrior’, we might consider the ideas of international relations scholar, Shindō Eiichi who attributes his ‘discovery’ of Asia to interaction with exchange students from the region during the 1980s. In Shindō’s narrative, East Asia is in the midst of a ‘Confucian Asian Renaissance’ led by a contemporary East Asian-inspired ‘civic Confucian capitalism’ which he juxtaposes against ‘American-led casino capitalism’. Drawing on Robert Putnam and Western theorists of social capital, Shindō points to the crisis in Western civilization—especially Anglo-American neoliberalism—in which competition and individualism have supposedly eroded social ties and trust, and fatally wounded the institutions of marriage and the extended family. By contrast, argues Shindō, Confucian capitalism embodies the successful alternative of a burgeoning, ‘mature Asia’. No longer a tool of feudal business conglomerates or despotic rulers, Confucian capitalism belongs to the people and has become a ‘civic’ device for their empowerment. Careful to avoid the term democratic, Shindō characterizes the new situation as a Confucian Asian Renaissance. Indeed, in East Asia, we are apparently witnessing the rediscovery of human ties lost to the modern West in its charge for world domination. But for Shindō civic Confucianism becomes much more than an Asian version of social capital (i.e. something of Western origin). Echoing Takeuchi Yoshimi, Shindō suggests that civic Confucianism enriches the social capital idea of Western theory by infusing it with the very best of Confucian ethics. When filtered through a modern civic lens, Mencius’ four fundamental principles of benevolence, virtue, propriety, and wisdom spontaneously flower into modern East Asian expressions of trust, civility, value for education, self-discipline, and peaceful socio-economic development. In fact, in Shindō, the ‘clash of civilizations’ is sublimated in to a novel regional dynamic founded on a fusion of the old and the new; the East and the West; and primed to become a set

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53 Ibid., p. 31.
55 Ibid., p. 241.
56 Ibid., p. 244.
57 Ibid., p. 242.
58 Ibid., p. 243.
of values with global-historical importance—the region transforming the world.

Yet, as overstated and fanciful as this vision appears, it pales in comparison to Shindō’s explanation of Japan’s role in the rise of civic Confucianism, which revolves around two instances of national sacrifice for Asia in 1945 and again in 1985. According to Shindō, as an Asian forerunner, Japan has repeatedly fallen prey to the ‘spell of alliances’ with Western powers—first with Germany, later with America—which in both cases resulted in national destruction but also effectively liberated Asia. Here Shindō echoes a very old refrain in the history of Japanese nationalist thought: namely, the ‘Japanese’—often conceived of as the authentic ethnic nation (minzoku)—are repeatedly victims of elites who control government and business and also of an international system dominated by Western interests. Since the state apparatus and capitalism are essentially considered foreign institutions (not natively Japanese) in such narratives, the bottom line asserted by Shindō and other nationalists is that Japan—because it developed first in Asia—must bear the cross of Western infiltration. According to Shindō, the prewar and postwar institutional make-up were similar in as much as power was concentrated in the hands of the elite. The country’s initial or first war defeat (daiichi no haisen, World War II) was due to the ‘foreign’ Meiji Constitutional system which fused politics, bureaucracy and zaibatsu into a military-led system which, in turn, made possible the ‘spell of alliance’ within the German-Italian-Japan Axis. The second war defeat (in the Plaza Accord), this time a ‘war’ against American money, was due to the postwar constitution which fused politics, bureaucracy, and business, in turn making possible the ‘spell of alliance’ within the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty.59

But although these alliances with the West preordained Japanese defeat, Shindō believes they set in motion processes that liberated Asia. As he explains, ‘if one disregards the presence or absence of physical destruction, what becomes clear from the first defeat in a military war and the second defeat in an economic war, is that in both defeats Japan not only surrendered to the Hegemonic American enemy but also brought about East Asian Liberation’.60 Shindō says that the Asia-Pacific War which began with the Manchurian Incident of 1931 was, in essence, a battle for ethnic liberation from the Western colonial

59 Ibid., p. 60.
60 Ibid., p. 57.
powers. Japan, ‘assisted’ the ‘rebellion from below’—‘the eruption of Asian ethnic nationalism’—by assisting revolutionary Asians in their ‘struggle for ethnic self-determination’, even whilst the Japanese set about ‘oppressing these same people’.61 Japan’s ‘second war defeat’ apparently happened with the Plaza Accord when an appreciated Yen gutted Japanese manufacturing competitiveness. But, just as the Japanese wartime empire and its demise resulted in the liberation of Asia and burgeoning of movements for de-colonialization (the East Asian civil society), Japanese corporate expansion into Asia after the Plaza Accord, Shindō argues, not only helped to nurture capitalism in East Asia but also the stimulated civil society again—this time as civic Confucianism. And, as with Japanese national destruction for Asia in 1945, after its ‘war defeat’ in the currency war of 1985, Japan once again served as a kind of Christ-like figure (in Shindō’s narrative, at least), sacrificing its financial vitality and existence for the economic liberation of Asia.62

Shindō’s ideas are extreme to put it mildly, but it is worth noting his status amongst the mainstream elite in Japan and beyond. He has been a member of the Network of East Asian Think-tanks (NEAT) attached to the official inter-governmental ASEAN Plus Three framework and has been active in the Council on East Asian Community (CEAC) supported by the Japanese government and headed by Liberal Democratic Party stalwart and former Prime Minister, Nakasone Yasuhiro. Of course, his views are moderated and relativized by a virtual cacophony of other pronouncements on East Asian community in the country. But the reality is that his ideas retain a legitimate position in the mainstream debate in Japan, which may be a worry for those who recall how, historically, cultural nationalism in Japan has repeatedly undermined authentic engagement with the East Asian region. But, as argued thus far, the recent civilizational discourses posited by Hara, Saeki, Shindō and others simultaneously evidence how the region has impinged on the nation. Advocates of Asia as Japan have been forced to abandon early hierarchical imaginaries of Japan leading the flock of Asian geese either for nostalgic notions of Asian hybridity or fantastic scenarios of civilizational conflict and national sacrifice for the region.

61 Ibid., p. 57.
62 Ibid., p. 63.
Advocates in the *Asia as Japan* trajectory have captured the bulk of public and scholarly attention thanks to their appeals to a shared Asian culture and identity and their mobilization of conventional nationalist tropes. But the discursive field of the New Asianism has been much wider almost from the outset of the debate, and it has arguably been widening even further as the dynamics of East Asian regionalization and regionalism have developed throughout the 1990s and 2000s. The increasing prominence of the *Japan in Asia* trajectory is indicative of such shifting dynamics. Different to their culturalist counterparts, those advocating *Japan in Asia* explicitly attempt to challenge and destabilize internalist discourses by superimposing regionalist interpretations onto national narratives. Their aim is to both challenge the primacy of national agency in history and to open a vista onto more fluid geographical interactions, as well as to facilitate—in a therapeutic way—new modes of regional communication through the construction of shared narratives and the mutual recognition of past injustices. Surprisingly—or perhaps realistically—as much as they criticize the destructive historical legacy of the nation-state in East Asia, the many progressive advocates of *Japan in Asia* accept (if grudgingly) the ongoing role of the nation-state in the region. Rather than pursuing the European Union approach of slowly chipping away at notional sovereignty, advocates in this trajectory opt for a more conservative approach in which East Asian nations build a community capable of overcoming the excesses of nationalism and national identity yet retain the institution of the sovereign nation-state.

The former Tokyo University professor and high-profile public intellectual Kang Sang-jung has been amongst the most eloquent spokespersons for the *Japan in Asia* trajectory since the early 1990s. A resident-Korean, Kang’s perspective on East Asian regionalism is deeply coloured by his perspective as a member of a minority ethnic group in Japan and as an intellectual deeply concerned with relations between Japan and the two Koreas. Kang points to pervasive discrimination against Asian minorities within Japan as a root cause of the country’s deeply distorted understanding of the region. He describes how, in the postwar era, resident Koreans, Chinese, and Taiwanese have subsisted in a liminal realm as ‘internal others’ (*uchi naru tasha*), burdened with the role of representing ‘backward Asia’ in ‘advanced
Japan’.63 ‘Asia’ in this context has served as a kind of barometer of modernity for Japan, similar as the West has throughout the modern period, only reversed: until very recently Asia has symbolized backwardness and, by implication, become a convenient tool for Japan to advance its own position on the modernity ladder. Asia, argues Kang, was most often understood by Japanese as an instrument or ‘means’ for some ‘objective’, ‘but not once in modern Japanese history’ did ‘Asia itself’ become the ‘aim’ for Japan.64

Although defeat in war represented a historic opportunity for genuine engagement, Kang suggests that historical forces—some intellectual, some institutional—intervened to shut out Asian consciousness from the Japanese psyche. On the one hand, he points to the shortcomings of Marxist and Modernist thought in the country, for example, the thought of Maruyama Masao and Ōtsuka Hisao, which tended to reinforce visions of a backward Asia. But the bilateralism of the U.S.-Japan alliance also played a role. Kang believes that from 1945 to the signing of the San Francisco Treaty in 1951 the Japanese had a historic opportunity for reconciliation and reconfiguration of the country’s relationship with Asia, but the United States Asia policy and the postwar Japanese government’s approach to Asia stymied such attempts.65 Instead of an EU-type community, for military-strategic reasons America constructed a hub-and-spoke framework of bilateral relationships in Asia which made it ‘structurally impossible for mutual bilateral friendships to develop’.66 As a result, says Kang, the Japanese came to understand their nation and the nature of its ‘internationalization’ primarily as ‘Americanization’. The country’s foreign policy was essentially driven by a concern to not upset policymakers and political heavyweights half a world away in Washington.67 Although the Japanese lost the war, no real consciousness of decolonization (that is, having lost the colonies and subsequently recognizing them as legitimate others) really developed either in government circles or among the people. Some government officials actually believed they might retain some of the Northeast

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65 Ibid., pp. 12–13, 14.


67 Ibid., p. 27.
Asian colonies, and most repatriates only had a consciousness of themselves as victims. Indeed, controversially, Kang suggests that, although it was certainly ‘distorted’, prewar consciousness of Asia in Japan was far richer and contained many ‘treasures’ which were either ‘cleared out’ or ‘put in storage’ after defeat.

Along with his Tokyo University colleague, the Russianist Wada Haruki, Kang has actively promoted the concept of a ‘common house of Northeast Asia’ as a way for the Japanese to overcome their amnesia towards, and misconceptions about, Asia, as well as becoming a vehicle for historical healing and genuine community-building in the region. Wada Haruki, architect of the idea, says that he began conceptualizing and advocating the concept of a Northeast Asian common house from the early 1990s, drawing originally on Mikhail Gorbachev’s call for the creation of a European Common House after the collapse of the Soviet Union. He also envisioned the common house concept as the absolute antithesis to wartime Pan-Asianism and, hence, a useful device to extinguish the memory of the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere through mutual engagement. Although Kang and Wada are certainly interested in Asia more generally, both see Northeast Asia, especially the Korean peninsula, as the central axis for designing regional stability. Wada’s ‘common house’, for instance, is not exclusively Asian in membership, including both America and Russia. He suggests that the weakness with many imaginations of East Asian community is that they often exclude North Korea, the United States, and Russia—yet all three will play a crucial role in any stable regional framework along with Japan and China. Kang also calls for a Northeast Asian common house ‘including America’.

Both Kang and Wada recognize that the main obstacle to Japanese integration into Northeast Asia is a deep-seated ‘distrust of Japan’ amongst Koreans, Chinese, and Taiwanese due to the country’s past

71 Ibid., p. 17.
72 Ibid., p. 28.
activities in the regions. They call on the Japanese to undertake genuine soul searching, apology, and reparations as the basic preconditions for healing. If Japan hopes to be truly integrated into Asia it will need to recognize the depth of the emotional and historical scars it has left on its neighbours and the ways these injuries have knitted into the very core of such nations’ collective identity. Arguments about whether or not Japan has apologized ‘enough’ are really beside the point in the case of genuine region building. For Kang, Wada, and other Japan in Asia advocates, at some stage Japan’s leaders will have to be courageous and magnanimous enough to offer an apology substantial enough to be accepted as genuine by its neighbours. This will certainly aid in the healing. But, from a more instrumental perspective, it may facilitate the construction of a robust East Asian Community.

Kang, for instance, foresees a central role for Japan if it can be successfully reintegrated as a trusted member of the Asia community. In a historic 2001 speech before a Japanese national Diet committee on East Asia, Kang argued that Japan, with its great wealth and vibrant consumer culture, could replace the United States as the consuming and ‘importing superpower’ (yunyū taikoku) of Asia if it manages to reform domestically. The country will also have to open its borders and accept many more of the foreign workers circulating around Asia. Kang also envisages a greater role for Japan in the financial governance of Asia, especially in the wake of the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997. Although the Americans thwarted calls for the creation of an Asian Monetary Fund led by Japan, Japanese officials masterminded creative alternatives such as the New Miyazawa Initiative of 1998 which injected about US$30 billion into struggling regional economies in the immediate months following the crisis. They followed up two years later with the Chiang Mai Initiative (2000) which put in place a framework for intra-Asian currency swaps during financial or other liquidity crises. In its most developed form, Kang, Wada, and others,

74 Wada, Shin Chiikishugi Sengen, p. 140.
75 Kang, Tōhoku Ajia, p. 33.
76 Ibid., p. 32.
such as the late-economist Morishima Michio, not only envisage an ideational community in Asia but also, and literally, a concrete one. They imagine Asia linked by a massive transport infrastructure: the Korean peninsula and Japan will be connected by an undersea Bullet Train tunnel, similar to the channel tunnel linking the United Kingdom and mainland Europe.78

Needless to say, for such historic transformations to become reality, the Japanese will have to fundamentally recalibrate—if not wholly discard—some of the basic tenets of the country’s postwar foreign policy. Kang and the Japan in Asia advocates recognize that Japan will need to develop ‘robust partnerships’ bilaterally, as ‘neighbours’ with nearby countries such as the two Koreas and China if it is ever to realize a truly ‘equal partnership’ with the U.S.A. and discard its client status.79 As Japan in Asia advocates realize only too well, the shift from a hub-and-spokes framework to the concept of an Asian community will require a paradigmatic shift in the way Japan imagines—or has failed to imagine—its place in East Asia.

Here the historian Hamashita Takeshi has led the way in his efforts to uncover a history of regional maritime engagements long obscured by the powerful, yet rigidly internalist and arguably myopic, narratives of national history. Similar to Kang, Hamashita sees the formation of Japanese identity as a persistent process of differentiation from superficially-imagined Others—first the Chinese, and later the West. Hamashita argues that the overwhelming emphasis on the nation-state from the beginning of modernization in Japan served to obliterate consciousness of the Japanese archipelago as part of a regional system. Instead, region was continuously reframed as, or, as Hamashita puts it, ‘condensed’ into national identity.80 Although Japanese civilization was itself a hybrid construction of imported regional and domestic processes, Hamashita says that the Japanese ‘detached’ and decoupled the aspects of their civilization borrowed from peripheral regions, not attempting to understand them from within the ‘negotiations and exchanges’ with adjoining cultures of the seas of Okhotsk, Japan, East China, and South China. Such regional


78 Wada, Shin Chikishugi Sengen, p. 38; Kang, Tōhoku Ajia, p. 39.
79 Kang, Tōhoku Ajia, p. 40.
aspects of Japanese civilization were disassociated from the region and inserted into the ‘centre’ so that they appeared to be distinctively ‘Japanese’. The negative result, of course, was the disappearance of the region from Japanese consciousness and identity, leaving only the nation which served as a poor substitute for the country’s historically regional embeddedness. Lacking a consciousness of region, Hamashita now believes it will be extremely difficult for the Japanese to ‘relativize’ their nation which has so long served as a cozy surrogate for the country’s East Asian origins.

Nevertheless, Hamashita’s project, especially from the 1990s, has been to ‘try and position Japan within an Asian context’ and to examine how Japan has constructed its identity through its historical engagements with Asia. He has attempted to detach the study of Asia in Japan from its strongly Euro and Japan-centric biases, understanding and imagining the region and Japan’s place therein from ‘within’. He stresses the historical existence of several maritime regions including Northeast, East, and Southeast Asia. ‘Within this vast area, countries, regions, and trading centers and subcenters interacted with one another’. This region, Hamashita argues, was ‘not one large expanse of water like the Indian and Pacific Oceans’, but was ‘constituted by a series of seas connected by straits’. In this maritime conceptualization of East Asia, Japan emerges not as an isolated archipelago on the fringes of continental Asia but as an integral part of an organically-intertwined system of regional networks. Japan is unequivocally positioned within Asia.

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81 Ibid.

82 Ibid., p. 7.


Hamashita’s colleague in this regional project, the intellectual historian Hiraishi Naoaki has pursued a similar ‘regionalization’ of Japan in the ideational realm through a provocative reconsideration of prewar Pan-Asianist thought in the country. Hiraishi attempts to detach prewar Asianism from the history of colonialism and imperialism by resituating the Japanese discourse within the broader Pan-Asianist movement for liberation. Hiraishi unambiguously distances his project from Takeuchi Yoshimi who he says approached Asia primarily from the perspective of Japan’s wartime responsibility. Takeuchi’s Asianism, he says, was a method for understanding why a movement for ‘solidarity’ resulted in ‘aggression’ and, in this sense, it conformed to the progressive postwar project to identify and root out the pathology of modern Japanese history—a fundamentally national perspective.86

But, according to Hiraishi, in order to properly understand war responsibility and the Japan-Asia connection, it is also necessary to examine how the various strains of Asianism were moulded by external intellectual and ideological elements, and external political incidents and economic developments.87 Hiraishi points to a number of prewar Japanese Asianists who he says must be understood within a regional intellectual history. For example, the Meiji political activist Tarui Tōkichi (1850–1922) in his 1893 publication Treatise on a Greater East Asian Union called for a confederation of Asian states based on ‘independence’ and ‘equality’.88 Similarly, in an influential 1898 essay ‘A Same-Race Alliance and On the Necessity of Studying the Chinese Question’ translated into Chinese, the politician Konoe Atsumaro (1863–1904) advocated ‘eastern solidarity’ and proposed the implementation of an ‘Asian Monroe Doctrine’ which caught the attention of the Chinese political thinker and reformer Kang Youwei (1858–1927).89 For Hiraishi, Konoe’s call for an Asian Monroe Doctrine is a significant early expression of ‘the East for the East’ and the reach of Konoe’s ideas beyond Japan proves to Hiraishi the regional interconnectedness and wider influence of Japanese Asianist

86 Hiraishi, ‘Kindai Nihon no Ajiashugi’, p. 266.
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid., p. 275. For discussion and a translation of this essay see Kyu Hyun Kim, ‘Tarui Tokichi’s arguments on behalf of the union of the Great East, 1893’ in Saaler and Szpilman, Pan Asianism: A Documentary History 1, pp. 73–83; and Takeuchi, Ajiashugi, pp. 32–37. For the original essay see Takeuchi, Ajiashugi, pp. 106–129.
89 Hiraishi, op. cit., pp. 275–276, 278.
thought at the time. Hiraishi also identifies a similar pan-regional perspective in the thought of Okakura Tenshin (1862–1913) whose negative reaction to modern Western civilization as the ‘destroyer of Asian tradition’ and identification of spiritual and civilizational commonalities in China and India represented an ‘indication’ of ‘revitalized confidence’ amongst Asian intellectuals. Different to Konoe’s ‘Asian Monroe Doctrine’, Hiraishi says Okakura was less interested in a Pan-Asian political alliance against the West than he was in an Asian ‘self-renewal deeply rooted in tradition’ and focused on the ‘ethnic awakening of individual nations’. Hiraishi explains Okakura’s ‘positive’ and ‘offensive’ (kōseiteki, i.e. not ‘defensive’) Asianism as a product of Okakura’s experience with the Anti-British liberation movement in India in the early twentieth century, especially his interactions with Indian intellectuals like Rabindranath Tagore.

The calls of Japan in Asia advocates for a ‘common house’ in East Asia, their attempts to excavate a regional history of people and ideas, their calls for historical recognition and apology, and their challenge to national history, although diametrically opposed to the motives of those advocating Asia as Japan, emerge from a shared intellectual trajectory. Asia as Japan advocates have reacted to the influence of regionalization on Japan by positing fantastic stories of national sacrifice and hybridity-lost. The Japan in Asia trajectory is similarly stimulated by regionalizing forces on Japan but, rather than attempting to buttress national history through its reinvention, advocates here skillfully mobilize the energy of regionalization in the present to further destabilize already-vulnerable mythologies of modern, particularly postwar, Japan. Indeed, Kang, Wada, Hamashita,

90 Ibid., p. 278. But, as Hiraishi honestly admits, Konoe’s notion of an Asian Monroe Doctrine also had a utilitarian hue: Japan was a small, resource-poor nation but China promised to become its resource base. See Hiraishi, ‘Kindai Nihon no Ajiaishugi’, p. 279. See also Aydin, The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia, pp. 54–55; and U. M. Zachmann, ‘Konoe Atsumaro and the idea of an alliance of the yellow race, 1898’ in Saaler and Szpilman, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 85–92. For the original essay, see Takeuchi, Ajiaishugi, pp. 106–129.


Hiraishi and others advocate the region as the most credible solution to the protracted and thorny malaise of a ‘Japan after Japan’.  

*Asia for Japan*

Ideologically, advocates of *Asia for Japan* fall somewhere in between those in the other two trajectories of the New Asianism. On the one hand, they are committed to national sovereignty and the U.S.-Japan security alliance and, whereas they see enormous opportunities for Japan in China, they are concerned about that country’s increasing economic and strategic clout in the region which they want to contain. On the other hand, although they reject notions of shared identity and EU-style common values, they are committed—in an instrumental way—to the creation of a functional community in East Asia based on universal values and openness to the outside world. Most in this trajectory subscribe to a kind of East Asian realism: though there may be debate about the nature, shape, and operation of an East Asian community, the reality is that countries in the region are becoming more and more interconnected as they grow and, hence, some kind of formal regional framework is required. If Japan fails to be an active player in this regionalist upsurge it will be left behind as the fading giant of Asia.

The *Asia for Japan* trajectory emerged from the flying geese analogies of the 1970s and 1980s which imagined Japan as the leader of an East Asian miracle. As late as 1993, for example, Okazaki Hisahiko, Ministry of Foreign Affairs bureaucrat, later Thai Ambassador, outlined a ‘grand strategy for a new Asia’ in which Japanese-led economic development would strengthen the economic base of Asia-Pacific. Unlike assistance from the IMF or World Bank, Japanese investment, explained Okazaki, came ‘interest free’ and would produce an ‘overall improvement in economic and technological standards’. Investment in Asia would also help Japan solve the pressures of a declining labour force and limited land. More strategically, exporting the Japanese model to Asia would create

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‘captive’ markets which would empower the Japanese economy to expand globally. In short, Japanese economic penetration of East Asia was ‘all good’ for both Japan and the region as a whole. Okazaki stipulated only one condition: Japan’s Asian reengagement had to unfold safely in the embrace of ‘Pax Americana’ with the U.S.-Japan security alliance as the linchpin. As much as he envisaged a Japan-East Asian fusion economically, Okazaki was pessimistic about the possibility of Japan going it alone if the U.S.-Japan Alliance were to end. To the extent that relations between America and Japan were healthy, he concluded, the countries of Asia would permit Japanese expansion in the region, but if relations deteriorated there was no guarantee these countries would stand on Japan’s side.

But, as Japan’s domestic recession continued through the 1990s, scenarios of a Japanese economic takeover of East Asia sanctioned by America gave way to more urgent appeals for Japan to engage with the region as a matter of national survival. Of course, from a historical perspective, this was hardly a novel turn. As the political scientist and Asia for Japan advocate Shiraishi Takashi has noted, East Asia has ‘repeatedly figured as a “solution” to crises in modern Japanese history. It appeared to offer a way out of the mess in which Japan found itself in China towards the end of the 1930s. It seemed to offer a solution for Japan’s economic recovery when China was closed in the 1950s and 1960s. And the region is again seen in Japan as a way out of the current predicament, the enormous appreciation of the yen since 1985, which has threatened Japan’s international competitiveness’. Political scientist and former journalist Walter Hatch similarly observes how many Japanese came to ‘engage Asia and... the region, again, in the 1990s as a solution to its economic crisis’. East Asia provided a ‘kind of cushion during hard times at home’, becoming for elites an ‘extension of Japan’. Hatch notes how Japanese producers enjoyed profit margins of four to five per cent in Asia—‘double or triple what their counterparts earned in North

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95 Ibid., pp. 77, 86.
96 Ibid., p. 105.
97 Ibid., pp. 90–91.
98 Takashi Shiraishi ‘Japan and Southeast Asia’ in Katzenstein and Shiraishi, Network Power, p. 171.
99 Hatch, Asia’s Flying Geese, p. 72.
100 Ibid., p. 101.
America and Europe, and significantly more than what they earned in Japan.\textsuperscript{101}

The Okuda Report of 1999 commissioned by the Obuchi Cabinet and headed by Okuda Hiroshi, then chairman of the Toyota Motor Corporation and the influential business group, the Japan Business Federation (Nihon Keizai Dantai Rengōkai or Keidanren), encapsulates this growing sense of ‘Asia as solution’ among many academics, business elites, and high-level diplomats in the late 1990s. Coming on the heels of the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis and ongoing Japanese stagnation, the report appealed to a ‘common destiny’ between Asian countries and famously proposed a ‘third opening’ (daisan kaikoku) of Japan after the first opening of the Meiji Restoration and the second opening of 1945.\textsuperscript{102} In what Edith Terry characterizes as a ‘blistering attack on the government’s Asia policy’, Okuda—through his shadow author, the diplomat and Asia specialist Kohara Masahiro—accused officials of intentionally restricting Asian imports and inflows of Asian workers.\textsuperscript{103} He called for free-trade agreements with Asian countries, and demanded that Japanese visa requirements be eased for Asian workers, especially those with skills in aged caregiving. The sense of Asia as the only solution to a national crisis is palpable throughout the report, for example, as in the following appeal to readers in the preface:

Japan stands at a major watershed. Ties of interdependency are deepening with Asia and with the world, and resource-poor Japan must further develop its external economic and social relations. Our population is aging, our birth rate is falling, and our population is declining. We must reform old systems, we must move forward rather than back, we must seek new growth and development, and we must be aware that efforts and sacrifices on our part will be required. If we are to continue to grow, we must relax and eliminate regulations and become a country more open to Asia and the world. It is imperative that we follow up on the ‘openings’ of the Meiji Restoration and the postwar period with a ‘third opening’ now. Opening Japan is urgent to the revitalization of our society and economy, to ensuring that we do not

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., p. 143.  
\textsuperscript{103} Noble, ‘Japanese and American perspectives’, p. 257.
miss the historical trend of globalization. Opening Japan will also enable us to be a true and trusted friend to Asia.¹⁰⁴

Within the Asia for Japan trajectory, proponents of this ‘Japanese-crisis and Asian-solution’ thesis have spurred a virtual cottage industry of publications over the past decade or so. Most predict disaster for Japan if the country fails to engage with Asia and/or remains closed to Asian workers. The late-economist Morishima Michio was one of the most outspoken critics here, and the titles of his books from the mid-1990s reveal an intensifying sense of crisis: Choices for Japan: Toward the Building of a New Nation in 1995; Why Japan is Collapsing in 1999; and What Can Japan Do? Propose an East Asian Community in 2000.¹⁰⁵ His ideas read very much like the tracts on national survival written by patriotic samurai of the pre-Meiji Restoration era and, in fact, Morishima sees many parallels between Japan’s contemporary condition and the national crisis of the mid-nineteenth century. But, in stark contrast to the Meiji patriots, Morishima’s programme for survival revolves around Japan joining, not leaving Asia. ‘But Japanese people are not attracted to this kind of proposal’, he laments, because ‘even Japanese today think they are the best in Asia’.¹⁰⁶ Yet if the Japanese fail to embrace an East Asian community only ruin awaits in the form of ‘population fragmentation’, and ‘devastation’ ‘spiritually’, ‘financially’, ‘industrially’, and ‘educationally’.¹⁰⁷

Morishima’s is a dark vision indeed, but it is a perspective which informs the Asianism of many within the Asia for Japan trajectory. In a comprehensive 2010 report, the quasi-government think-tank the National Institute for Research Advancement (NIRA) suggests that the reinvigoration of the Japanese economy demands a ‘reinvestigation’ of ‘every institution within Japan’ with an eye to ‘opening up to East Asia’. It points out that, since the economic bubble burst in the early 1990s, Japanese society has become ‘extremely

¹⁰⁴ Okuda, Ajia Keizai Saigai Misshon, Preface.
¹⁰⁶ Morishima, Naze Nihon, p. viii.
¹⁰⁷ These characterizations of devastation correspond to chapters in Morishima’s 1999 book, Naze Nihon.
insular’ and government policy has focused primarily on domestic issues. In many spheres Japanese corporations are now lagging behind those of South Korea.\textsuperscript{108} China is also changing. The report notes that, unlike Japan, China’s rise is largely built on opening up to the world. Almost 60 per cent of Chinese exports, for example, are mediated by foreign companies. ‘Chinese youth are going to overseas universities in great numbers’ whilst Japanese youth stay at home.\textsuperscript{109} ASEAN countries are also removing barriers to trade, investment, and finance.\textsuperscript{110} Japan alone, the report laments, remains stagnant and inward-looking. Although things are changing with such great speed globally, Japan seems to have ‘turned its back’.\textsuperscript{111} As Itô Ken’ichi, former diplomat and leading member of the influential CEAC argues, the Japanese ‘have proved themselves unable to overcome the limitations of a peripheral people. Their stubborn adherence to narrowly Japanese values and behavior patterns has once again caused other Asians to view them with suspicion and distrust’.\textsuperscript{112} For Itô, the story of Japan from the 1980s is one of shameful insularity and demise, from ‘Japan bashing’ to ‘Japan passing’ and finally, ‘Japan [as] nothing’.\textsuperscript{113}

So how do Asia for Japan advocates imagine that this East Asian Community can resuscitate an ailing Japan? The ideas of the CEAC established in 2004 offer a valuable insight into recent elite imaginations of East Asian regional integration. As noted earlier, the CEAC is a quasi-governmental group chaired by former Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro, comprising former diplomats, academics, and business persons. Group members have been involved in both the APT think-tank, the NEAT, and the influential East Asia Vision Group (EAVG) established by former South Korean President Kim Dae-jung in 1998.\textsuperscript{114} In its influential 2005 report, the CEAC identified a number of key components of the East Asian Community concept. First, it would need to be a compatible community with ‘ideals’

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., p. 11.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., p. 10.
\textsuperscript{113} Itô and Tanaka, \textit{Higashi Ajia Kyôdôai}, p. 50.
and ‘principles’ corresponding to the ‘universal rules and values of international society’. Second, it would be an inclusive community, open to membership on a functional as opposed to geographical basis. Third, it would be a transparent community with basic principles and ideas clearly articulated in a charter or constitution. Fourth, it would pursue functional cooperation in clearly demarcated spheres (economics, environment, security, health, etc.) and in an incremental way. Since comprehensive integration will not be possible from the outset given the different political systems and levels of economic development in East Asia, members will determine their own level of involvement depending on their own requirements.

The CEAC supports development of a ‘soft regional identity’ which recognizes that the ‘common characteristic of various cultures in East Asia is the hybrid composition of local, traditional, and modern cultures with the increasing common influence of common urban culture in East Asia’. It rejects any identity ‘focused primarily on differences with other regions’. As the diplomat Kohara Masahiro puts it, ‘East Asia is not a concept supported by a shared cultural, religious, or political base... it is instead merely a geographical concept demarcating the eastern region of Asia’. Although Kohara and some other Asia for Japan advocates feel that there are ‘certain characteristics which are written deeply into the DNA of the East Asian Model’ such as ‘relations of trust based on familistic management styles’, high rates of saving, diligence, emphasis on education, and respect for government and authority, most subscribe to an open regionalism which balances the regional with the universal. Different to earlier Asianism, they suggest that the new Asianism is not about ‘resisting the West’ but about ‘sharing Asian values and culture’. Indeed, only when Asian values and culture are able to present a universalism to the West will an East Asian Community coexisting with the globalizing world become possible.

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115 Kohara, *Higashi Ajia Kyōdōtai*, p. 293.
116 Ibid., p. 294.
120 Ibid., pp. 253–254. Although they are by no means mainstream, it is also worth noting some of the more fantastic proposals for East Asian Community. Morishima Michio, for example, proposes the creation of a United States of East Asia (USEA).
Political scientist Shiraishi Takashi presents the most eloquent and convincing case for the *Japan in Asia* trajectory, aimed in particular at those who propose an exclusivist community based on shared culture and identity. It would be an ‘act of madness’ to abandon the West for Asianism he argues. ‘The aims’ should be to ‘harmonize internationalism and Asianism’, and to create ‘a stable Asian regional order’, along with ‘expanding and deepening exchange’ through ‘economic cooperation, cultural cooperation, intellectual cooperation, [and] technological cooperation’.\(^{121}\) Taking aim at *Asia as Japan* ideologues, he asserts that ‘Japan is not the light of Asia’, ‘and however much Japanese chauvinists such as Shintarō Ishihara would love to see it become such, that is a role that Japan cannot pull off. To make this point two ghosts must be put to rest: the wartime Co-Prosperity Sphere and the postwar developmental state’.\(^{122}\)

Shiraishi is particularly committed to severing any linkages between East Asian community building and earlier phases of Pan-Asianism. Linking the two, he suggests, is tantamount to ‘polluting’ contemporary processes by ‘exhuming the ghost of Japanism which swelled into Asianism’, just like a ‘zombie in some B-grade movie’.\(^{123}\) As he explains in a coauthored 2009 article ‘Beyond the Spell of Asianism’, two aspects of the earlier Asianism categorically distinguish it from recent East Asian regionalism. First, wartime Asianism ‘took modern Western Europe as a single, coherent civilization

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\(^{122}\) Shiraishi, ‘Japan and Southeast Asia’, p. 170.

and criticized the ‘double standard’ represented by the claim of universality, and second, ‘it aimed for solidarity among the people of Asia based on race, culture, civilization, tradition, resistance, experience of oppression, and other commonalities—and it further aimed to create an “Asia-centric” order to rival the Eurocentric one’. But ‘today’s Asia is not the same as the Asia of the past’, says Shiraishi. No longer is the region associated with ‘humiliation, poverty, and despotism’ but, on the contrary, with affluence, democratization, and development. Furthermore, Shiraishi asserts that ‘equating the Eurocentric order with the U.S.-centered order as manifestations of the same “West–centered” order is a form of intellectual laziness that makes no attempt to understand the historical transformation of the world order’. Indeed, ‘the U.S.-centered order that emerged to replace [Europe] during the Cold War . . . was built on the Wilsonian ideals that arose as a criticism of the Eurocentric order’. In short, ‘the Eurocentric order that the Asianism of the past criticized is long gone’ and Asianism ‘is of no use in explaining the project to construct an East Asian Community’.

On one level, Shiraishi’s fervent endeavours to dissociate—indeed fumigate—the legacy of Pan-Asianism from East Asian regionalism actually reveal the long shadow the former still casts over the latter in Japan. But they also attest to the historic import Shiraishi and other New Asianists attribute to the emergence of East Asia. As Itō Ken’ichi observed in 1995,

we are today witnessing the rise of a tremendous dynamism, the birth of a new order, and the gathering of an energy capable of spearheading a new era in world history. It is a dynamism, an order, and an energy reminiscent of what was seen in Europe at the beginning of the modern age . . . . We can be confident, however, that if the formation of this order proceeds in an appropriate direction, then just as Europe led the world into the modern age, East Asia will lead the way into a new era of world history’.

Itō’s optimistic outlook is a good place to end analysis of the Asia for Japan trajectory, but before doing so, one more subgroup here warrants attention: namely, those who see Japan becoming an ‘honest broker’ between Asia and the West, ‘taking advantage of

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125 Ibid., p. 35.
126 Ibid., p. 35; and Shiraishi, ‘Higashi Ajia Chiiki Shisutemu’, p. 88.
Japan’s Asian cultural tradition on the one hand and its modern experiences of Westernization on the other’. In 1995 for instance, Takenaka Heizō, economist and later a minister in the cabinet (2001–2006) of Koizumi Junichirō, called on Japan to become a ‘kind of glue’ binding together ‘the European Union, the North American Free Trade Agreement, and APEC’, and helping to foster ‘creative tension’ as opposed to ‘rigid blocs’. Japan, Takenaka argued, ‘having achieved an income level equivalent to America’s by means of an Asian-type growth mechanism’, had ‘an extremely weighty role to play as an adhesive holding together the APEC membership, whose widely divergent stages of economic development and historical and social backgrounds create a complex and tangled web of interests’. The journalist Funabashi Yōichi voiced a similar mantra throughout the 1990s with his ideas about an Asia-Pacific ‘fusion’. As he asserted in an influential 1993 essay in Foreign Affairs, Asia had ‘at long last started to define itself’ and ‘Asian consciousness and identity’ were ‘coming vigorously to life’. Rejecting appeals to traditional identity, culture, or tradition, Funabashi suggested that the ‘spirit of the times’ was ‘predominantly affirmative and forward-thinking, not reactionary and nostalgic’. He identified an Asian consciousness ‘animated by workday pragmatism’, the rise of ‘a flourishing middle class’ and the ‘moxie of technocrats’, all tied together by the ‘power of electronic communications technology’. Since regionalization was ‘paradoxically the result of the globalization of [the region’s] economy and media’, Funabashi could only conclude that the ‘Asianization of Asia’ hinged on a fusion of Chinese, Indo-Chinese, Japanese, and American civilizations which would ultimately combine into a new ‘cross-fertilized’, ‘Asia-Pacific civilization’.

At first glance, Funabashi’s fusionism appears, if anything, to be a movement away from the New Asianist agenda (regardless of the trajectory) but, as Tessa Morris-Suzuki notes, Funabashi’s Pan-Pacific perspective actually implied a Japanese movement away from the United States by placing a greater distance between the two nations and, more generally ‘restoring the balance’ between Asia and the

128 Yamakage, op. cit., p. 301.
130 Ibid., p. 22.
132 Ibid., 77.
133 Ibid., pp. 75, 78.
134 Ibid., pp. 84–85.
As Funabashi put it, ‘the days when the United States sneezed and Asia caught a cold are over’, hence the need for Japan to recalibrate its relations with countries on both sides of the Pacific. As Shiraishi Takashi noted, ‘many see in the current Asian economic dynamism a possibility for the first time in modern times for Japan to be Asianist and internationalist simultaneously, to expand Japan’s postwar politics of productivity beyond Japan’s borders, to play an important role in the creation of an open regionalism in the Asia-Pacific, and yet to harmonize the future Japanese economic expansion with the maintenance of the Japan-U.S. Pacific alliance’. American observers of Japan have concurred. In 1997 the political scientist and specialist on Asian regionalism, T. J. Pempel, concluded that ‘the most fitting image of Japan’s proper role is the torii, the large wooden gate that stands at key points outside a Shinto shrine and which consists of two large columns joined by an equally strong lintel. For many Japanese, their country is the ideal lintel—the top beam or crossbar uniting the otherwise isolated columns, which represent Asia and the West. Japan is ideally positioned economically and culturally to be the “bridge between East and West”’. Whether or not they envision such a role for Japan, as noted above, most advocates in the Asia for Japan trajectory subscribe to a form of East Asian realism based on open regionalism and the continuity of the U.S.-Japan security alliance. This stance certainly lacks the romance of the Asia as Japan and Japan in Asia trajectories, but reflects the concerns many committed Asianists have about the political stability of the region, particularly with the rise of China.

**Conclusion**

Stimulated by the regionalization of the Japanese economy after the 1985 Plaza Accord, Japanese diplomats, politicians, academics, public intellectuals, and business elites began to discuss East Asia

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137 Shiraishi, ‘Japan and Southeast Asia’, p. 192.
138 T. J. Pempel, ‘Transpacific torii: Japan and the emerging Asian regionalism’, in Katzenstein and Shiraishi, *Network Power*, p. 51. Not all agreed. As Yamakage Susumu argued in the same volume, ‘There is a vital shortcoming in this proposal. If relationships deteriorate, few governments, if any, in Asia will trust or want Japan to mediate between the United States and themselves. They believe that they can deal with Americans as well as, and probably better than, the Japanese’. Yamakage, Japan’s National Security, p. 301.
WHAT IS ASIA FOR US—CAN WE BE ASIANS?

and regional integration with an intensity unseen since wartime discussions of the East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere. The participants in this New Asianism did not speak with one voice, of course, although as suggested here, they can be meaningfully grouped into three broad normative positions or trajectories: Asia as Japan, Japan in Asia, and Asia for Japan. Although Asia as Japan advocates have attracted most attention—and apprehension—with their visions of Japanese flying-geese leadership and Asian values, over time their voices have been challenged by others calling for a regional reawakening and a renewed appreciation for Japan as part of Asia, not as the source of Asian values or the lead goose but as a country and civilization deeply shaped by the historical interactions and cultural borrowings of regional maritime networks. Other New Asianists of a more instrumental disposition highlight the historic transformations underway in contemporary East Asia, and posit regional integration as the only solution for Japan’s domestic woes. Some even see the rise of East Asia and Japan’s Asianization as an opportunity for the country to recalibrate its relationship with the United States: buttressed by an affluent and confident Asia, Japan could become a transpacific torii, mediating between the West and the East as an honest broker for the first time in history.

The lack of agreement—even between advocates in the same trajectories—suggests that formulating a regional vision in Japan will not be easy. Nor will it be easy for genuine regionalists in the country to convince their neighbours that the New Asianism represents a break from earlier Pan-Asianist projects in Japan. The persistence of troublingly nationalistic versions of Asianism constantly serves to undermine such claims. Nevertheless, my argument is that the New Asianism—even in its most chauvinistic renditions—evidences the way globalization and regionalization can help to destabilize apparently rock-solid national mythologies and simultaneously disrupt the exclusivist claims of the nation on both individual and collective identity and value. Nowhere is this more pronounced than in the ways Asia as Japan advocates have been forced to adapt their depiction of Japan’s role in Asia. Of course, it is not suggested that such ideational

139 One group not discussed in this paper consists of those who reject processes of East Asian community-building and regional integration outright. See Noble, Japanese and American perspectives, pp. 253–255 for an excellent analysis of these antagonistic positions. A recent example is Toshio Watanabe. (2008). Shin Datsu A Ron, Bungei Shunju, Tokyo.
transformations evidence the germination of a movement in Japan to relinquish elements of sovereignty for a formalized regional structure similar to the European Union—at least, not in the foreseeable future. With the single exception of Morishima Michio, even the most ardent advocates of East Asian community in Japan accept the ongoing centrality, primacy, and inviolableness of the nation-state. But, at the very least, like Shiraishi Takashi, the New Asianism represents a positive break with earlier imaginations of Asia in Japan which were not really concerned with Asia but with the West and Japan and, in one way or another, conceptualized the region through the lens of backwardness and stagnation. The New Asianists encounter a remarkably different Asia and they do so from the perspective of a nation burdened by the maladies of socio-economic stagnation and the fading vestiges of earlier preeminence in the region. Such vulnerability certainly has the potential to shift attention inwards, encouraging insularity and chauvinism. But it also represents an opportunity for the Japanese to comprehensively and genuinely recalibrate their relationships in East Asia, taking the New Asianism beyond the realms of discourse.

Of course, hurdles remain. Public opinion in Japan on Asia or on specific countries within the region is, at best, mixed and seems to be highly sensitive to the vagaries of daily politics. Moreover, although many elites are convinced about the necessity of an East Asian Community and Japan’s active participation therein, the reception and appeal of their message amongst the Japanese public is unclear. As Edith Terry observes in her majestic study of the postwar Asian miracle, the Japanese were ‘woefully ill-prepared for the implications of a closer relationship with the rest of Asia, particularly when it came to accepting other Asians into their neighborhoods, companies, and schools’. Governing elites never asked the Japanese people whether they wanted to re-engage with Asia, and, according to Terry, ‘the Asianization campaign in many respects floated over the heads

140 Nevertheless, some Japanese advocates of East Asian community have begun to think about creating a legal infrastructure, going so far as to draft an ‘East Asian Community Constitution’ (Higashi Ajia Kyōdōtai Keshō). See Tamio Nakamura, Yoichirō Usui, and Yoshiaki Satō, Takao Suami. (2008). Higashi Ajia Kyōdōtai Keshōan, Shōwadō, Kyoto.
of the people’. Correct or not, Terry’s criticisms point to one of the key blind spots in the New Asianism. Whilst advocates articulate highly sophisticated plans for East Asian integration, very few consider the challenging task of ‘Asianizing’ the Japanese themselves. Kang Sang-jung and others have called on Japan to open its doors to foreign workers and products but such proposals are never fully developed. As Kang notes, one of the greatest obstacles to an Asian consciousness in Japan has been the relegation of the country’s Asian minorities to the status of lesser ‘Others’. Changing such attitudes will require fundamental transformations in domestic political, social, and economic institutions; simply telling people Asia is important will not be enough. A tight focus on the regional as opposed to the domestic aspects of East Asian community, however, seems to have blinded many of the New Asianists to the truism—clichéd though it may be—that change must begin at home.

Furthermore, the ‘virtual torrent’ of New Asianist writings in Japan also obscures another intellectual gap in contemporary thinking about Asia in Japan. Many conservatives criticize the idea of East Asian integration from the perspective of the national interest, so we find very few critical treatments of the East Asian community idea from the left. Indeed, as this paper has shown, progressives—usually within the Japan in Asia trajectory—almost universally support the notion of integration as a healthy step away from the destructive nationalisms of old. This perspective makes good historical sense and represents a positive way forward. But it is also worth recognizing the critical perspective foregone through an unconditional commitment to the East Asian community idea. The New Asianism is as much an ideational commodity produced as a regional effect of global capitalism as it is a conceptual innovation. As Leo Ching argues, precisely because of this commodification ‘Asianism no longer represents the kind of transcendent otherness required to produce a practical identity and tension between the East and the West’. “Asia” has become a market and “Asianness” has become a commodity circulating globally through late capitalism’. More concretely, a critical leftist perspective on the New Asianism is a reminder of its instrumental underpinnings. As Lily Zubaidah Rahim puts it,

143 Ibid., p. 16.
Japan’s more recent expressions of a “return to Asia” resonate with the same self-interested economic motives as its Second World War “return to Asia” campaign. In response to the growing protectionism in Europe and North America, as manifested in trading blocs such as the EU and NAFTA, Japan has systematically sought to foster greater economic integration with her Asian neighbours.¹⁴⁶

Ching and Rahim’s observations are a useful reminder about the need to treat critically new communal imaginaries which promise to transcend and overcome the contaminated communities of the past. Ultimately, as Uemura Kunihiko argues, the Japanese must scrutinize their consciousness in order to uncover and extirpate deeply ingrained desires to ‘leave Asia’ for ‘civilization and enlightenment’. But, as they do so, they must avoid a crude substitution of the Western fantasy for an imagined ‘Asian-ness’ that satiates cultural nationalism as the ‘photographic negative’ of ‘Eurocentrism’.¹⁴⁷ In an age when the objective basis for claims about Japanese leadership in Asia has faded, the Japanese must begin to reconstruct a ‘realistic relationship’ with other East Asians.¹⁴⁸ There is no necessity for the Asia they imagine to be ‘one’ and neither must the geographical space that has historically and politically been demarcated as Asia necessarily be Asian.¹⁴⁹ But as the discourse on the New Asianism implicitly confirms, the idea of Asia is here to stay and, hence, it forces contemporary Japanese to address—once again—two complicated questions which have endured throughout their modern history: What is Asia for us and can we be Asians?

¹⁴⁶ Rahim, ‘In search of the “Asian way”’, pp. 60–61.
¹⁴⁷ Uemura, Ajia wa ‘Ajiateki’ Ka, pp. 269–70.
¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 266.
¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 269.