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Korea's First Encounters with Pan-Asianism Ideology in the Early 1880s*

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The paper deals with the process of dissemination of Japanese Pan-Asianism in Korea mainly in 1880-1884. It is based mainly on the publications of Japan's earliest large-scale Pan-Asianist group, *Kōakai*, as well as Korean materials. The paper begins with an outline of Pan-Asianism research in South Korea, Japan, and Western academia, and then gives a short summary of the genesis and growth of Pan-Asianism in Japan before 1880. Its main part deals with the establishment and early activities (especially Korea-related) of *Kōakai*, the aim of the research being to delineate *Kōakai*'s social and political character, as well as the process of defining its ideology. Attention is also paid to the character of the reception of *Kōakai* ideology in Korea, and the role of Pan-Asianism in formation of Korea's early "progressive" thought. *Kōakai*'s Pan-Asianism is examined as simultaneously culturalist, racist, and regionalist ideology, and the influence of *Kōakai*'s racist taxonomies ("struggle between the Whites and Yellows"), its culturalist construction of Asia as the center of human civilization, and its regionalist idea of the "East Asian alliance" on the formation of Korea's modernity discourses is scrutinized.

Keywords: Pan-Asianism, Nationalism, Meiji, *Kōakai*, appropriation

1. Foreword

To a student of Korean history, Pan-Asianism looks as one of the persistent, recurrent topics of Korean modernity. When the first Korean

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emissary to be sent to Japan after the country's forcible "opening" in 1876, famed calligrapher and man of letters Kim Ki-su (1832-?), met Moriyama Shigeru (1842-1913), one of the Japanese diplomats instrumental in the process of the "opening," the theory of "East Asian unity" was to open their conversation. According to Kim Ki-su's travelogue, Moriyama — supposedly "ashamed of the barbarian cloth" (i.e. European suit) he had to wear — told the Korean envoy that "Why should we, Your esteemed state, and China, stick to the present course? Is not Europe frightening enough for us all? Various people are speaking about banding together in order to resist the European designs...." (*Sushinsa kirok* 1971:5). A staunch Neo-Confucian hardly able to consider Japan an equal or possible ally to either China or Korea, Kim did not show any serious interest in the ambitious proposal, but his successors in the field of the Korean-Japanese diplomacy from the reformers' camp tended to react quite differently. First introduced to the Korean intellectual circles in the early 1880s, Pan-Asianism quickly became a popular mode of thought with the representatives of quite different reformist groups. Although to a different degree, American-influenced — and partly Christian — leaders of the Independence Club (*Tongnip hyōphoe*) and publishers of the *Tongnip Shinmun* (The Independent) of 1896-1899, reformist Confucians, and Japan-educated Japanophiles of the 1900s were all influenced by the idea of a Pan-East Asian/Pan-Asian alliance against the real and perceived threats from outside the region. In later periods, the understanding of what "Asian" actually should mean was visibly tinged with racialist thinking. Even Yu In-sōk (1842-1915), a stubbornly traditionalist leader of the Confucian "Righteous Army" (*ūibyōng*) movement, was fond in the 1900s and 1910s of talks about future "great battles between White and Yellow races" and the eventual necessity of a "Great East Asian alliance" between China, Korea, and Japan (the latter was urged to "repent of its sins" against the first two as a prerequisite for such an alliance), and for his more modernist contemporaries such a way of perceiving the world was more or less commonplace (Kim To-hyōng 1979:141-142). Enshrined in the ideological construction of the Japanese annexation of Korea in 1910 (often legitimized by both the colonizers and their local allies as "necessary for preventing Russian/White Imperialist encroachment") and in the idea of "The Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere" of the

later 1930s - 1940s, the idea of pan-regional/Pan-Asian unity in response to the challenges of imperialistic modernity did not die with Japan's defeat and loss of its Korean colony in 1945.

That Park Chung Hee, the architect of the South Korean authoritarian developmental state and himself a Japanese officer in the past, was deeply fascinated by the success of Meiji reforms and viewed the ties with Japan as key to Korea's stronger position in the world is well known fact; but the belief in the pivotal role of East Asian (especially Korean-Japanese) cooperation in all spheres for "coping with the hard realities of capitalist civilization" is shared by much broader circles, including the opposite side of the political spectrum. For example, Ch'oe Won-shik (b. 1949), a literary critic well known for his opposition to South Korea's past authoritarian rulers, stated in one of his last "program" articles that only *bona fide* Asian solidarity — distinctively different from the Japanese Imperial Pan-Asianism born out of "symmetric" reaction to Western "Orientalism" — may deliver a divided Korea from its present intolerable status within the West-dominated international system (Ch'oe Won-shik 2000). As we can see, Pan-Asianism — in different forms, underpinned by different, often mutually incompatible ideologies and policies, and yet well recognizable in all its ceaseless mutations — seems to accompany the development of Korea from its first "modern shocks" in the late 19th C. up to its painful post-colonial experience of being integrated into the modern world-system in the form of a Cold War frontier. And, from the late 19th C. beginnings till today's musings on overcoming the "distorted" Cold War "pseudo-modernity" on the Korean Peninsula through "*bona fide* Asian solidarity," Japan, an embodiment of both dangers and perspectives of "Asian modernity," seems to represent "Asia" in this continuing, unending discourse. The question the present author intends to debate in this paper is: can we suffice with the assumption that this identification of "Asia as the object of Pan-Asiatic discourse" with Japan was plainly a product of Koreans' own "spontaneous" fascination with the Meiji project and its post-war successors? Should not we consider intentional transmission from the Japanese side — represented not only by the diplomats like Moriyama Shigeru (whose seminal comment to Kim Ki-su was just mentioned above) or political heavyweights like former Japanese Prime Minister (1960-64) Ikeda Hayato

(who used to describe Japanese “developmental assistance” to Asian states as “mutual aid among Asian brethren” while trying to build a relationship with the Park Chung Hee regime; Shipaev 1981: 30-31), but also countless journalists, scholars, travelers, etc. — also an important factor in speedy, yet forceful and vigorous, development of Korea’s own Pan-Asianist consciousness? The following paper is an attempt to shed some new light on the first stage of development of Korean contacts and alliances by early Japanese Pan-Asianists of the 1880s. Special attention is to be paid to the ideological modes used by the Japanese activists in the process of developing an “Asian awareness” in their Korean counterparts. The author will attempt to show how the imported construction of “civilization” and “progress” was effectively appropriated¹ and turned against its Western creators: how Japanese Pan-Asianist activists developed an “indigenized version” of the “civilization/progress” paradigm, centered on the newly-invented notion of “Asian tradition” or “Asian unity,” and also on the newly reinforced distinction between imagined “Asian We” and “European Other.” The attention to the Pan-Asianist stratum in the Japanese intellectual and political life of the early 1880s should problematize the notion of the “civilization/progress” paradigm domination in that period showing how nuanced the “civilization/progress” discourse could be: in some variants, the newly invented “Asia” appropriated the dominant position normally given to “Europe” in the “modernization” narratives.

2. Current State of Research on Pan-Asianism

Being one of the central topics in Korea’s “modernity” discourse, Pan-Asianism did not succeed, however, in attracting appropriate scholarly attention in post-war South Korean academia. One reason to this surprising disinterest may have been apprehensions that emphasis on Korea’s modern intellectuals’ sharp interest to the topics of “Asian solidarity” — first and foremost, with Japan — might undermine the master narrative of “relentless national struggle” against the Japanese

1. Notion of “appropriation” used here is based mostly on Bakhtin’s theoretical approach to the term (Bakhtin 1975: 282-293).

invaders enshrined in state-directed history education. That seems to be one of the reasons why articles dealing with the Pan-Asianist issues in depth almost never appeared in South Korean academic publications until general political liberalization of the later 1980s removed many hidden restrictions in the historical field. The best known of Korean works on the topic is Yi Kwang-nin's article entitled "Korean Views on 'Asian Solidarity' in the [Early Modern] Reforms' Period" (*Kaehwagiüi han'guginüi Ashia yöndaeron*) which was published in one of Korean historians' most prestigious journals, *Han'guksa yön'gu*, in 1988 (Vol. 61-62).² The article gives an inclusive and content-rich overview of the development of Pan-Asianist tendencies in Korean political and cultural discourse from the first encounters with Japanese Pan-Asianist ideology in the 1880s until Korea's annexation in 1910. Yi Kwang-nin shows a remarkably open attitude towards these nuances of Korean intellectuals' infatuation with Pan-Asianism that likely made many of his colleagues in South Korean academia feel uneasy about the topic. Yi mentions, for example, that even one of Korea's nationalist icons, An Chung-kün (1879-1910), known for his assassination of Itō Hirobumi (1841-1909) in 1909, sincerely believed in the need to defend the "Oriental races" from "white domination," and would have been content with a Korean-Japanese alliance for this sake, given that Japan would mend its openly selfish and aggressive policies. Yet, Yi's interpretation of transmission of the Japanese Pan-Asianist paradigm to Korea in the early 1880s reduces that complex process to the beguiling of "naive" Korean intellectuals into "accepting Pan-Asianist phraseology — cover for Japan's expansionist designs — at its face value". In a word, Yi's understanding of the common fascination with Pan-Asianism on the part of many East Asian intellectuals of the time, Japanese as well as Korean and Chinese, is strictly teleological. That some of Japan's future victims flirted with Japanese Pan-Asianist ideas appears to him to be simply a grave misperception on their side that made it easier for Japanese to ideologically disarm its prospective continental opponents. In this sort of teleological view of the history of the modern Korean-Japanese relationship, all kinds of Japanese ideological

2. Reprinted in Yi Kwang-nin (1989: 138-155).

exports to its peninsular neighbor are lumped together into the “preparations to/justification of aggression,” Pan-Asianist ideas being no exception. Korean research works in the 1990s mostly continue to classify the Pan-Asianist trend of early 1880s Japan as a variation of general “expansionist strategy,” using also the conclusions of a similar kind reached by some of left-wing Japanese post-war historians to support their positions.³ While not disagreeing with this approach totally — the nationalist agenda of the Japanese Pan-Asianist activities was quite visible from the very beginning — the present author still will insist that ideological frameworks as wide-ranging and broad as the Pan-Asianist program of Asia’s “indigenized modernity” are not reducible to matters of political expediency as easily as both Japanese and Korean researchers sometime suggest. Political propaganda was apparently one, but certainly not the only function of the Pan-Asianist ideological products; nor was the broad revision of the Euro-centric “civilization/progress” project undertaken (and propagated on the international level) by the Pan-Asianism activists brought to scene only by the designs of Japan’s military planners. In a nutshell, while acknowledging a certain relationship between Japanese Pan-Asianist and expansionist projects, the present author objects to “explaining away” the former as just a part and parcel of the latter.

Much more nuanced was the approach used by Kim Keong-il, a sociologist, and Kang Ch’ang-il, a historian of Korean-Japanese relations, in a lengthy co-authored paper they recently published in (Kim Keong-il and Kang Ch’ang-il 2000: 269-333). Assuming that Pan-Asianism could grow from very diverse ideological positions and was rather an “ideological tool” for advancing different sets of ideas than an independent ideology *per se*, they focus, first and foremost, on the differing meanings of Pan-Asianism before and after the 1880s, the period of the decisive strengthening of Japan’s modern state and military machine. In the 1860s and 1870s, Pan-Asianist rhetoric tinged variants of response to the Western-triggered crises in Asia, many of these responses being also heavily loaded with anti-establishmentarian emotion. It also served as a valuable epistemological instrument of bridging

3. See, for example, Pak Yŏng-jae (1996: 28-36).

the gap between Japan and the rest of the continent, building up a common identity based on constructing an imaginary Western "Other." But after the 1880s, and especially after the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95, the assertion of Japan's own newly-obtained hegemonic position in the region, its own "mission" to "lead" its neighbors began to dominate the Japanese Pan-Asianist discourse, also increasingly influenced by purely racist movements. So far as Pan-Asianism's early history is concerned, Kim and Kang are the first South Korean scholars to try and distinguish the genuine quest for solidarity against the perceived European aggression in the origins of the movement. Methodologically, another important point made by the researchers is the "structurally dependent" character of Pan-Asianist discourse, built in the aftermath of the European-generated shocks on the idea of immanent differences with, and the "common struggle" against, the "Western enemy," and maintained in tight connection with imperialist rivalries that put Japan against various Western countries. The paper by Kim and Kang signifies the incipience of a new tendency in the South Korean scholarship on Pan-Asianist topics, with unconditional nationalistic negation of this phenomenon being superseded by detached scholarly analysis.

Western scholarship has given several important accounts of Japan's Pan-Asianist vogue of the 1880s. Paul A. Cohen — the author of groundbreaking research work on Wang T'ao (1828-1897), one of the first Chinese reformers to be strongly influenced by the Pan-Asianist project — makes fine distinction between the general sympathy felt by his hero towards the idea of a Sino-Japanese anti-Russian alliance and "Asian revival," and understandable frustrations about more concrete aspects of Japan's early expansion (Cohen 1974: 99-109). Marius B. Jansen — who wrote extensively on the connections between Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925) and the later Pan-Asianist movement in Japan (Jansen 1970) — also noticed that the East Asia of the 1880s sense of "national borders" was not as strong in feeling of belonging to a common cultural tradition. Jansen also notices that, together with undeniable interest in the possible territorial and political gains, enthusiasm and a sense of mission strengthened by the feeling of threat and insecurity in the world of rampant "White" imperialism, were also important socio-psychological underpinnings of the Pan-Asianist project (Jansen 1967:163-190). In another essay, Jansen also emphasized the ability of later 19th

C. Chinese reformers to accept Meiji Japan as a model and a usable — at times — political partner, while remaining at the same time highly critical of Japanese encroachments against their country (Jansen 1975:129-138). Akira Iriye's apt comparison between European missionary undertakings in the non-European world and "private" efforts of Japanese Pan-Asianist activists in China and Korea (Iriye 1989: 756-757) seem to have major heuristic value. Just as the enterprises of the former, their motives as diverse as they were, cannot be simply reduced to the designs of Western imperialism, the latter should be placed in broader contexts than simply the military and political expediency of Japan's expansionist state. At the same time, Yumiko Iida, a Britain-based scholar, looked into Pan-Asianism from a different angle in her recent publication, arguing that the Asianist ideology in the forms it took in Japan was, first and foremost, a kind of representational violence towards all the diverse Asian cultures lumped together as the West's victims and its potential contenders by their self-appointed leader, modernized Japan. She argues further that, by appropriating Western classification categories, such as "Orient" and "Occident," Japanese intellectuals sought to monopolize the whole discursive field, "channeling" attempts at self-representation by various Asian thinkers into the Japan-dominated Pan-Asianist paradigm (Iida 1997: 409-430). While her thesis is certainly tenable so far as later Pan-Asianism (especially in the period after 1894-95) is concerned, the "attempt to dominate the discursive field" is hardly a coherent description of Pan-Asianism of the early 1880s, strongly tinged by sincere, indignant fear of Western domination.

Japanese scholarship on early Pan-Asianism — probably most detailed and meticulous among all available academic work on the phenomenon — was extensively used by the present author in the process of writing this paper. The pioneering post-war Japanese monograph dealing with Pan-Asianism, Takeuchi Yoshimi's volume of commented sources for the topic with a lengthy introduction and thorough comments (Takeuchi 1963), still remains both a useful primer and a handy collection of primary materials for any student of the movement. Takeuchi's scrupulous explanations on the connections between the expansionist projects of some 1850-60s loyalist activists and the further development of "practical" intelligence-gathering work by early Pan-

Asianist enthusiasts, as well as his attempts to grasp the complex fabric of relationship between nationalistic and solidarist aspects of the Pan-Asianist mindset, laid a good foundation for further study of the subject. The early period of the development of Pan-Asianism was elucidated in details by Kuroki Morifumi in a series of academic papers (Kuroki 1983a: 175-216; 1983b: 73-110; 1984: 29-48; 1992: 1-24). Kuroki devoted lots of energy to reconstructing the background, process of ideological "maturation," and political contacts of Sone Toshitora (1847-1910), the key person in the formation of the earliest Pan-Asianist organizations. He emphasizes the distance between romantic enthusiasm and Confucian ethical indignation about Western predations of Sone's kindred spirits among the early Pan-Asianist activists, and the diplomatic and intelligence gathering interests of Sone's powerful governmental backers. Namiki Yori-hisa took a look at Pan-Asianist issues from another angle, accentuating both the sensitivity of the pan-Asianism-influenced Chinese intellectuals of the 1880s to Japan's expansionist policies, and Sone Toshitora's criticism of the failures of Meiji government in building genuine confidence between Japan and China (Namiki 1993: 11-24). An interesting addition to the research by Japanese scholars was a Japanese book by Chinese scholar Zhao Jun (currently residing in Japan), which provided many important insights on the genesis of Japanese terms for "Pan-Asianism," as well as the connections between Pan-Asianist activism and the People's Rights movement (Zhao Jun 1996). But, while the influence of Japanese Pan-Asianism on the contemporary Chinese intellectuals has already been traced in detail in Japanese scholarly literature, Korean connections to the movement have attracted very little attention so far. Up to the present day, the account on Korean-Japanese Pan-Asianist connections provided by Yi Kwang-nin, may be considered the most extensive.

3. Western Threats and Eastern Response: the Beginnings of Japanese Pan-Asianism

The "Western threat" was an important topic in Japanese thought even before Perry's incursion and subsequent humiliations of "unequal" treaty relationships with overseas bullies made it a concrete,

palpable challenge. The works of a representative of Mito school, Aizawa Seishisai (1781-1863), described Russia's eastward advance as the biggest menace, not only to Japan, but also to the Chinese Empire and to the rest of the world. Interestingly enough, Aizawa resembled later Pan-Asianists in his belief that only successful learning of the "barbarian" skills might lead to effective expulsion of the menacing aliens (Wakabayashi 1986). The first Opium War imbued the Japanese contemporaries with a sense of imminence of "barbarian danger," the visible inability of Chinese to resist it only adding to the intellectual climate of insecurity and anxiety (Wakabayashi 1986: 139-140). Whenever the relationship between China's calamities and Japan's own precarious position was mentioned, the traditional metaphor of "lips and teeth" ("when the lips go, the teeth are cold," as the saying goes) was often used: humiliation of China ("lips") meant that Japan ("teeth") was next to be affected. At the same time, a wider awareness of the general Asian situation (largely generated by translations of Dutch books) helped to link China's disgrace in the broader Asian context. Such famous scholars of "Western learning" as Watanabe Kazan (1793-1841) tried their hard to warn the government of the scale of the danger, pointing out that the world was already ruled by the "Western barbarians," with most Asian countries, except Japan, having been previously overrun by the unusually effective, rich, and powerful predators. The idea of "Asia" as a geographical and historical unity figures prominently in Watanabe Kazan's writings. Not unlike later Asianists, he emphasizes both past efflorescence of Asian lands, the cradle of all world religions, and the present decay of Asian states unable to put any coherent defense in the way of the alien aggressors (Abiko 1989: 199-219).

After the "Five Ansei Treaties" forcibly included Japan in the West-centered worldwide system of unequal trade (1858), and Japanese missions, governmental and private, started to venture overseas, encounters with the arrogance and feeling of unquestioned superiority demonstrated by the Westerners towards the "natives" of Chinese and South East Asian ports, informed *bakumatsu* travelers with shock and indignation. Subjects of the country which just recently prided itself on being a "new Middle Kingdom", found now that they were classified by the Western intruders as simply an "Asian barbarian state," to be

forced into an unequal treaty system on the same terms as Persia, Siam, or Turkey, and to be treated with the same disdain as their continental Chinese neighbors. Patriotic rage, which followed the discovery of the realities of Japan's new unenviable place in the West-centered world system, could be channeled both into a modernizing fervor and a socio-psychological complex of solidarity in distress with similarly mistreated Asian brethren. The ideology of the first stage of the People's Rights Movement (1874-1878) seems to be a peculiar mixture of both elements: a willingness to achieve equal status with the West through radical political reform was combined with romantic notions of the solidarity of oppressed Asians on the basis of burgeoning early nationalistic sentiment. The prevailing understanding of solidarity was undeniably highly questionable by modern standards of respect to other peoples' sovereignty. The Korean government of the 1870s, as one example, was considered rather as a target of a punitive expedition than as a partner in any common "solidarity" project, "humiliation" early Meiji envoys to Korea suffered at the hands of the isolationist Taewon'gun regime being the main argument. The logic of the self-styled Popular Rights advocates put Japan's territorial enlargement at Korea's expense as a precondition for "firmly establishing Japan's state rights" and, subsequently, offering resolute resistance to European predators. That newly "civilized" Japan, rather than an "obstinate" China, was to lead this Asian resistance effort, went without saying. In a nutshell, Pan-Asianist rhetoric was, in that initial stage, firmly "married" to the state-centered nationalist discourse. The difference lay in the radicals' cherished image of the Japanese state, more democratic inside and bolder, resisting Western bullies, outside than the existing oligarchy-ruled Meiji polity. Another important point was the distinction made between "obstinate" and "feudal" continental governments, on the one hand, and the Asian brethren as potential associates in the common Asian project, on the other. This distinction was especially evident on the "left" side of the movement. "Barbaric" continental governments were seen in these circles as essentially equivalent to the pre-Meiji *ancient regime* in Japan itself: the difference between Asia's self-appointed leader and "the led" lay in the timing of "awakening" only.⁴ With enthusiastic publishing activities of the radical groups, the settings for emergence of the first Pan-Asianist groups were being quickly pre-

pared.

What was the attitude towards China, Asia, and the European threat in the more mainstream “enlightenment” thought of the 1870s? Fukuzawa Yukichi’s seminal 1875 account, *An Outline of a Theory of Civilization*, groups “Oriental” countries — especially Japan and China — together in a sort of negative community defined by what it lacks and by the “diseases” it suffers from. Both Japan and China had their evolutionary development checked by “despotic absolutism,” both lacked “truly independent religion” (Confucianism and Buddhism being made into simple “tools of tyranny”), and both filled their historical books with “absurd fantasies.” They, together with India (and, by implication, most other major Asian countries), were grouped together as “semi-civilized” — of course, as opposed to the fully civilized powers of the West. Japan was seen as having certain comparative advantages (the absence of an “absolute theocracy” of the Chinese imperial kind), but still totally unable to compete with major European nations on an equal footing. What follows is a communality of danger — once the Meiji project of “civilization and enlightenment” fails, Japanese will be either subject to the same tyrannical colonial rule as the natives of British India, or even gradually exterminated by the victorious Europeans, not unlike the Indians of North America. The same fate — to become a “garden for Europeans” — may befall China as well. That Europeans will not hesitate “to devour a weak,” country was without doubt for Fukuzawa. The solution Fukuzawa proposed — patriotic efforts for the sake of “civilizing” Japan before it was too late — was seriously different from the “Asian” project of the radicals, but the sense of a European danger hanging over all Asians that the book conveyed could certainly find a sympathetic response among the Asianist public too (Fukuzawa 1875a: 14-15, 24-25, 50-51, 171-199).

Fukuzawa’s assumption of negative commonality between China and Japan was not shared by another important mainstream liberal

4. On the radicals’ views of Korea and China, see Hatada (1983: 21-26). Interesting reflections on the Asian themes in the activity of Ōi Kentarō (1843-1922), one of the movement’s most prominent young leaders and the organizer of the abortive expedition against “reactionary” Korean government in 1885 (“Osaka incident”), can be found in Jansen (1952: 305-316). One of the earliest researches on the radicals’ calls for a punitive expedition against Korea is Tōyama (1950: 18-34).

thinker of the period, Nakamura Masanao (1832-1891), a Confucian scholar further educated in England and one of the first Protestant converts among Meiji intellectuals. Translator of the Western books that became important sources for Meiji People's Rights radicals, Smile's *Self-help*, and J. S. Mill's *On Liberty*, Nakamura persistently retained commitment to harmonizing his newly obtained Christian faith with traditional Confucian ideals, and to re-interpreting Confucian sagehood in ways suitable to the "civilization and enlightenment" drive. Together with Fukuzawa, Nakamura was a prominent member of *Meirokeisha*, one of Japan's earliest scholarly societies (founded in 1874), but his views on China, as expounded on the pages of society journal *Meiroke Zasshi* differed largely from that of the majority of his colleagues, who mostly perceived their continental neighbor as even more "despotic" and "uncivilized" than Japan itself. Nakamura's most noted piece on contemporary China, "China should not be despised" (*Meiroke Zasshi* 35, April 1875), was based on assumptions common to Fukuzawa's too. Under "barbaric" Manchurian rule, Nakamura argued, China was deprived of its "national polity" and heavily disadvantaged in relation to the "civilization and enlightenment." However, asserted Nakamura, China's prospects of "de-barbarizing" itself were not completely bleak. With its ancient and noble tradition of letters, and superb written language so useful for translating Western terminology, China certainly was at least as able as Japan to send students abroad and quickly advance its Western studies to a decent level. China's long tradition of political change and reform made it able even to put Japan to shame by convening a popularly elected assembly first. China's inventions put to use by Europeans and Japanese alike, a kind of respect to Chinese potential expressed by more enlightened Englishmen and Russians — all this proved to Nakamura that China's prospects in the context of "civilization and enlightenment" discourse may even successfully rival that of his own country. Nakamura's opinion — actually written in an attempt to correct the disparaging attitude towards China that was broadly adopted in Japan after the Chinese had to make serious concessions to Japanese demands in the settlement of the 1874 Formosa crisis — was not Pan-Asian according to the strict meaning of the word: no anti-European alliance between Asian neighbors was proposed. But the explicit parallel between the prospects of "civilization

and enlightenment” in the two countries suggested that they had something more in common than just a shared tradition (in whatever way, pejorative or affirmative it is looked upon). The ideas of Asia’s common strive for “civilization and enlightenment” became afterwards one of the key points of Pan-Asianist doctrine of the 1880s (*Meiroku Zasshi* 1976: 425-428).

4. *Kōakai* and its Activities

The most vital role in the forming of the 1880s’ foremost Pan-Asianist organization, *Kōakai* (“Raise Asia Society”), was played by charismatic and well educated naval lieutenant, Sone Toshitora (1847-1910). The man whose writings and activities largely embodied the essential features of early Pan-Asianist mindset, Sone, was born to a Yonezawa samurai family of solid Confucian background and received both Confucian and *rangaku* (“Dutch Learning”) education. He was acclaimed as a prodigy in his domain’s Confucian school. His first teacher of English is said to be Watanabe Kōki (1848-1901), then a youthful *rangaku* scholar (a disciple of Fukuzawa Yukichi), who went on afterwards to become Sone’s companion in Pan-Asianist endeavors, and successfully rose to become Tokyo Imperial University President. There are indications that, after the Meiji Restoration, Sone was strongly influenced by the teachings of fellow Yonezawa samurai, Kumoi Tatsuo (1844-70), who was executed in December 1870 for allegedly planning to overthrow Meiji Government. At the time of the incident Sone had been studying in the capital and avoided serious allegations. He was, however, briefly imprisoned a year after, on charges of complicity in the assassination of the Restoration’s prominent Chōshū leader, Hirozawa Saneomi (1833-1871); he allegedly plotted the assassination as a sort of revenge for Kumoi’s death. On having managed to clear the accusations, he entered the Naval Forces in 1871 as a protégé of the Restoration’s diplomatic leader, Soejima Taneomi (1828-1905). Sone’s responsibility was the gathering of China-related information, and his first trip to Shanghai in 1873 was seemingly dedicated to this duty. After participation in the 1874 Formosan Expedition, Sone was stationed in Shanghai for a longer time, practically as the person in charge

of Japanese intelligence activities there (Satō 1978: 429-451). Sone's first Asianist group, *Shinasha* ("Promote Asia Society") was already established in 1877, with the declared purpose of "nurturing Asia activists." Unlike the *Kōakai* to be established 3 years after, this group did not seem to enjoy serious official backing; nor did its activities result in any large-scale projects. To be sure, the only governmental backer of the undertaking was Ōkubo Toshimichi (1830-1878), and Ōkubo's assassination in 1878 meant that Sone's group was deprived of its most promising source of support.

At the same time, 1878 brought an important breakthrough for Sone's Pan-Asianist endeavors. Being by that time an acknowledged "China hand," Sone was (through Ōkubo's good services) given an imperial audience — thus, an opportunity to appeal to the Meiji Emperor for more activist and better advised Asian policies, primarily for strengthening the relations with China with a view to involve Chinese partners into common resistance against European predators in the future. The audience was highly successful, as Sone managed to secure governmental support for his Pan-Asianist future undertakings. The opportunity to realize his dreams of "raising the generation of Asia enthusiasts" presented itself quite soon. In March 1879, Japanese seizure of the disputed Ryūkyū (Liu-Ch'iu) Islands (to be renamed Okinawa and become a Japanese prefecture) greatly inflamed anti-Japanese passions among China's leading intellectuals, with Sone's close friend, Wang T'ao (1828-1897), being the author of some of the most stringent tirades (Cohen 1974:104-105). The Japanese Foreign Ministry was anxious to repair its shattered relationship with China, and the formation of *Kōakai* by the group of activists headed by Sone was eagerly permitted and supported. The *Kōakai* was officially formed on February 13, 1880, and at its inaugural meeting held in a Tokyo restaurant, its main stated purposes were the training of Asia activists (primarily in classical and spoken Chinese), the collection and publication of Asia-related information in a special bulletin, and the promotion of friendships with Chinese and Korean statesmen and literati. The fact that all these activities were supported by a generous Imperial grant of 1000 yen (Kuroki 1983b: 73-110) may support Yi Kwang-nin's definition of the Society as a "cat's paw" for Japanese governmental operation on the continent. In reality, however, the Society's political and ideological

profile looks more complicated.

As it has already been pointed out, Sone, a Yonezawa native, was mainly backed either by the representatives of “non-mainstream” clans in the government (Soejima Taneomi from Hizen), or by Satsuma men (Ōkubo Toshimichi), while his relationship with the mighty Chōshū faction in the government remained rather thorny, accusations of conspiracy against Chōshū’s Hirosawa Saneomi hardly being totally unfounded. It does not seem a simple coincidence that *Kōakai* attracted a large number of activists of “non-mainstream” clan backgrounds, many of them being strongly opposed to the “clan clique government.” Sone’s attitude towards many of governmental policies was sharply critical. For one example, in 1882 he and his younger followers attributed the Imo Soldiers Mutiny (*Imo kullan*) in Seoul, Korea — that resulted in murder of several Japanese diplomats and officers, the garrisoning of Chinese troops in Seoul, and subsequent serious losses for Japanese influence and prestige on the peninsula — to the Meiji Government’s disinterested and disdainful approach towards Japan’s continental neighbors. It was exactly the lack of Japanese “support in civilization and enlightenment” — concretely, in weapon procurement, railroad building, etc. — combined with a “distorted attitude of subservience toward the West and disrespect towards Asia” that, according to Sone, resulted in the growth of anti-Japanese feelings on the peninsula (Kuroki 1984: 29-48). His opinion differed sharply from the mainstream view in governmental circles that stressed Chinese animosity and the imminence of a decisive showdown with the continental neighbors over the Korean question. Afterwards, as an official observer of the Sino-French war in Vietnam from the Japanese side, Sone fulminated against Japan’s perceived indifference towards the fate of a fellow East Asian state while the latter was attacked and humiliated by a Western predator (Satō 1978: 443). His highly emotional account of the conflagration was published, with Wang T’ao’s long preface, in 1886, to strong discontent of the Foreign Ministry (Hazama 2001). In a nutshell, while certainly not negligent to the core value of Meiji activists, “state interest,” Sone understood it in his own peculiar way — as more activist continental policy, with a strong emphasis on building an anti-European partnership with Japan’s Asian neighbors. Sone was also deeply interested in Asia’s oppositional intellectuals,

typified by Sone's closest friend, Hong Kong journalist Wang T'ao. Admirer of the *T'ai ping* rebels, Sone was persistent in his attention to "other Chinas" — to the self-grown alternatives to the "antiquated" Manchurian dynasty. Sharp critique of the "de-Asianising" (*datsu-A*) mood so prevailing in governmental circles of the later 1880s, Sone was, in a way, a direct predecessor of later Japanese Asianist supporters of Sun Yat-sen — avowed opponents of both European depredations in Asia and their own government's unresponsiveness to the common Asian plight. Not surprisingly, Sone's conflict with the Chōshū clique inside the government and navy ended in his brief arrest and trial in 1888. Found not guilty, Sone had, however, to resign from the navy for good in 1890 (Sat? 1978: 442-443).

Many of Sone's collaborators from *Kōakai* could hardly be considered unquestioning supporters of the governmental line. Nakaoka Moriyoshi (1850-1906), the first chairman of *Kōakai* (February 13 - March 24, 1880), was a younger brother of Kumamoto *daimyo*, and, among the first Meiji students who went to the USA to study and held several important diplomatic posts afterwards. Proficient in a good few European languages, he went on to become Japan's first Minister to Belgium, and became known for his writings on Belgium and the Netherlands. As an official from a "non-mainstream" (*hishuryū*) domain, he was considerably critical of the manner governmental influence was monopolized by Satsuma and Chōshū "clan cliques." His sentiments were not alien to the Society's long-time vice-chairman, Watanabe Kōki (a native of the Echizen domain), a colleague of Nakaoka from the newly founded (1879) Tokyo Geographical Society. Neither were considered open People's Rights' supporters, but showed noticeable understanding of the radicals' attitudes.

Though less represented in the Society's top leadership, People's Rights activists themselves played an important role in *Kōakai*'s varied activities. Two journalists from the fiercely oppositional *Choya Simbun* (founded in 1874), Kusama Tokiyoshi (1854-1933, Kyoto native) and Suehiro Shigeyasu (1848-1896; became a Diet member and prolific writer on Philippines' revolutionary events in the 1890s), were of special significance, as they helped to publish the Society's mouthpiece, the monthly *Kōakai hōkoku* (Reports of the Raise Asia Society). Among other People's Rights advocates who joined *Kōakai*, we can find the

names Hayashi Masaki (editor of a popular radical magazine, *Kinji hyoron*, and a noted translator of English legal texts), and Yano Toshiō (afterwards, in 1883, gained some notice as a translator of Willard Glazier’s account of the American Civil War). It is noteworthy that, while non-Tosa radicals joined *Kōakai* in good number, the Tosa group in the movement, led by future Jiyūtō leader Itagaki Taisuke (1837-1919), remained rather critical of the idea of solidarity with their Asian brethren before Japan’s continental neighbors liberated themselves from the “despotic rule” of their present sovereigns. In a way, these “Asia-minded” People’s Rights advocates that grouped around *Kōakai*, belonged to the non-mainstream flow even inside the movement itself. Of course, close connections between the Society and the Meiji governmental institutions most keenly interested in Asian affairs — notably, Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Army and Navy — are undeniable. Some of the highest-ranking bureaucrats — for example, Date Munenari (1818-1892; former *Daimyo* of Uwajima) known for the Sino-Japanese treaty he signed in 1871 together with Li Hung-chang, — were among the Society leadership, and the Society’s Chinese Language School was expected to churn out translators for the Army and diplomatic service.⁵ Still, the school, were the main text of the People’s Rights movement, J. S. Mill’s *On Liberty* (in Nakamura Masanao’s translation) was studied along with Chinese classics and spoken Mandarin language, as well as the Society on the whole, the gathering where Asianist advocates of the People’s Rights could mingle with critically-minded lower- and middle-ranked bureaucrats and traditional Chinese scholars, hardly could be classified simply as tools of the Meiji elite’s foreign policy.

How was Asia imagined by the *Kōakai* activists — many of whom, not unlike Nakamura Masanao, combined Confucian tradition with liberal versions of the fashionable “civilization and progress” discourse? One of the earliest general discussions on Asia (entitled “General Discourse on Asia”) was submitted, to *Kōakai hōkoku* by Kaneko Yahei (1854-1924) — an Asianist *shishi* of distinction, who had received a “new-style” education under Fukuzawa Yukichi and was known for his rich experience in Chinese affairs, dating back to his first official trip to

5. *Kōakai hōkoku* 3, April 21, 1880 (*Kōakai hōkoku Aija kyōkai hōkoku* 1993), 15-20.

Beijing in 1875 in the entourage of Mori Arinori. Kaneko's construction of Asia was notably marked by the consistent attempt to turn the dominant Euro-centric vision of historical and political time and space upside down. The first part of the text was devoted to a brief description of Asia's past efflorescence, obviously influenced both by standard mid-19th C. European world history accounts and the Confucian understanding of antiquity:

At the time of primordial chaos, Asia was best among the five continents in the development of human knowledge. Generally, four thousand years ago, human knowledge was already born there, and states were established.... In all these states, mankind first began to grow and prosper three thousand years ago, when both knowledge and material life effloresced, castles and palaces were built, and all rituals and customs concerning the cloth and implements were established. The products of agriculture and sericulture were profitably exchanged in markets, and the teaching of etiquette, righteousness, and human morals flourished. Two thousand years ago, there were gradual increases in human wisdom, and the biggest number of innovations appeared ranging from systems and decrees to science and industry. It was said to be flourishing!

The past glory of the whole of Asia — from China in East to Asia Minor in the West — is contrasted with Europe's much less glorious historical pedigree:

At that time, in the continent of Europe, with the exception of its South-East (Italy, Greece, and European Turkey), the people still lived in the caves, did not know how to cook food with fire, and were primitively ignorant.... 2600 years ago, the Roman state was established in Italy, and its fortunes gradually improved throughout its existence. In the east, it destroyed Greece (Greek states were established more than 2700 years ago, being the earliest in Europe, while Rome was the nest. With the exception of those two, Europe has no ancient states) and also various lands of ancient Turkey, and in the west, it annexed the lands of such

barbarians as the British and Germans — the whole of Europe's hinterland. It brought a flourish of intellectual and material life.

But the “flourish” of Greek or Roman culture, along with the “rise” of contemporary Europe, is wholly ascribed by Kaneko to the civilizing influence of Asia:

The origins of Roman culture lay in Greece, while Greek culture enriched itself by borrowings from the various lands of Asian Turkey.... Then, afterwards, millions [of Europeans] threw themselves into the Crusades. As they personally witnessed the efflorescence of the intellectual and material culture of Asia, they began to admire it. On having returned from the war, they studied and recorded it, and also emulated and re-created it, both in scholarship and crafts. The more they studied it, the more exquisite their knowledge became. Gradually, their superstitious and evil customs were overcome, and they began to progress rapidly in culture. Thus, it is said that European culture is, in fact, a gift from Asia. Asian culture, intellectual and material, predates that of Europe by more than two thousand years. The [start] of the flowering of European culture is separated from us only by 500-600 years. [I] lament also that it is not discussed [wider in Japan] today.

In effect, Kaneko states that less than 500-600 years ago “civilization and progress” were usually brought westward from Asia, the cultural benefactor of both ancient and mediaeval Europeans. On having established Asia as traditionally central to human evolution, and Europe as a perennial periphery, Kaneko shifts the topic to the reversal of roles in more recent times:

But today, as I will describe in this article, the overall strength of Asia does not reach the European [level]. Let us try to discuss it. If we are to describe the progress of European states in wealth and military strength, we may say that human intelligence progresses there daily, and the culture advances monthly. [They] explore the laws of Heaven and Earth, while scrutinizing also

the nature of the myriads of things.... Inside [these countries] the political rule and education are in order, while outside they profit from trade. Both superiors and inferiors assumed their proper positions, and [mutual treatment with] humanness follows.

Asia is the opposite. The land is desolate, and the people are scattered. [They] blindly advocate the old, being besotted with antiquity. [They] ignominiously seek for immediate peace, their vigor having declined and their minds being ignorant.... The superiors and inferiors resent each other, officials and commoners disdain each other.... If one day an incident breaks out, and [they] wish to guard against internal problems and fend off external enemies, rare are those who do not suffer defeat or do not have their hands tied.

The “Raise Asia” project is described, in this way, as a restoration of sorts — recent, unprecedented change on the world map of “civilization and progress” is to be checked and reversed, so that Asia would restore its time-honored centrality. But what could be the reasons for the recent decline of the age-long center of human culture? In search of plausible explanations Kaneko resorts to the theories of “Oriental” and “Occidental” characters that enjoyed popularity in the contemporary West:

Why are the past and present Asian intellectual and material cultures so unlike? And why are the differences between the [periods] of its efflorescence and decline so sharp?

The knowledgeable people whom I once heard say that, by their nature, Asians like stillness while Europeans, by custom, prefer motion. Stillness means “stop” while motion means “continuous movement”. That is why, as they say, [the development of] intellectual and material culture in Asia stopped in the Middle Ages and did not move continuously further. They add that Asians are credulous and gullible, while Europeans are skeptical. Credulous means, “shallow” while skepticism means that deeper [reasons] are searched for. That is, they say, the reason for the difference in the fortunes of Asian and European cultures today.

It is clear but we are indeed as manly as they are, and the rise

and downfall of culture, as well as the fortunes of state, depend only on human action or inaction.

The last sentence shows that, while accepting to some degree contemporary Orientalist (in Saidian sense of the word) images of a credulous, passive Asiatic, Kaneko still believed that, inasmuch as Asia used to be central in the past, the negative trend could be consciously reversed again. And Meiji Japan, energetically striving to catch up with the Western rivals, could provide both an example and valuable source of partner assistance to its continental neighbors. Kaneko did not fail to point out that Asianist *shishi* were, in that connection, of particular significance:

Today, if [we] wish to revive Asia ... and compete with Europeans in wealth and power, who will be the people [able to lead the revival]? Even if there are such people, is it possible for human strength to achieve [the revival] at once when the situation is so [bad] as it is now? [Many] say "No," but they are wrong. We need not worry about the absence of such people today, as the people already exist, and the situation is ripe. In past years, the culture of our country followed that of the whole [Asian] continent, mutually acknowledging each other and influencing each other's development. And in recent years [in Japan] lots of noble-minded patriots (*shishi*) emerged, and the wisdom and broad-mindedness also rose concomitantly.... Human knowledge advances daily, and the worldly fortunes [of the country] are steadily progressing. In this time, rightly called that of manly action, the rise of the whole Asian continent can be expected.... All the things our countrymen are doing, will not be limited to our country, but will further progress into similar action on a pan-continental scale....

Today's moment should not be lost, for success or failure of the affair depends on whether the moment is utilized. Before, the wealth, power and civilization of Britain were superior to that of other European countries. Although it lies on a remote sea island, it gained hegemony over the great continent, and, throughout several centuries, all countries looked up to it as to

the Great Mountain and Big Dipper. Its might and authority has not declined up to the present. How can we not to use the opportunity [now] in order to achieve [the same]?... Let us make efforts, for our responsibility is not light! And all countries of the whole continent also will take up our initiative, renew their spirit, wipe out absurd customs, design new ways, and, in mutual cooperation, make great achievements! That is my cherished hope.⁶

Nationalistic hegemonic ambitions (“to become the Britain of the East”) and a sense of cultural unity with the rest of Asia, inclusion into a common historical and cultural context, are intertwined in a very complex way in Kaneko’s passionate appeal (written in classical Chinese — the language that was to unite Japan with its direct continental neighbors). But all in all, the Asianist appropriation of the dominant “civilization and progress” paradigm seems to be the central element in the construction of this text. Asian revival is described as essentially synonymous with “enlightenment”: desired success in the new rivalry with the West for wealth and strength simply restores Asia to its glorious past self. The Meiji Restoration is contextualized in an “Asian” way: as a beginning of an Asian revival, an opportunity to set world history onto its traditional, Asia-centered course once again. Evident patriotic zeal of the author notwithstanding, the optimistic conclusions that could be derived from this Asia-centered view of the world — the cradle of the “civilization,” Asia possessed all the necessary prerequisites to restore its glory - could certainly appeal to a wider East Asian intellectual readership, interested in a more global explanatory framework for understanding the contemporary struggle to catch up with Western wealth and power.

Less global and even more emotional explanations of the trend of “advancement of the Western forces to the East” were offered by Sone to Ho Ju-chang (1838-1891) — Chinese Minister for Tokyo whose approval of the Society’s plans could be crucial for gaining success among a reform-minded Ch’ing bureaucracy. After Ho — still indig-

6. *Kōakai hōkoku* 2, April 1, 1880 (*Kōakai hōkoku Ajia kyōkai hōkoku* 1993), 10-11.

nant about Japan's seizure of the Ryūkyū Islands and suspecting ties between the newly established society and the Foreign Ministry — sent his translator to the Society's inaugural meeting instead of his personal participation and politely refused the honor of making a congratulatory speech (while accepting *Kōakai* membership), Sone visited him personally, to explain the Society's aims in no uncertain terms. "Raise Asia," he explained to the Ch'ing diplomat, meant, "to reverse the general trend of Asian decline, to unite the hearts and strength of all Asian lands" against "Whites" (*hakujin*) that treated the "Yellow Race" (*ōjin*) in the "most heinous" fashion. "Everything in Asia has already been captured by the blue-eyed people," Sone fulminated, giving familiar examples of British-conquered India and the French advance to Annam in order to explain that "Whites" did not amount to more than "avaricious pigs and snakes." Sone's artful Asianist appropriation of Western racist rhetoric (one of the first instances of the use of racialist taxonomies in Sino-Japanese contacts) produced certain results: Ho gave written approval of the Society's purposes, stressing "common Asian decay" and the necessity for a Sino-Japanese alliance, "to defend ourselves against the humiliation by outsiders."⁷ The racialist anti-colonial rhetoric so successfully employed for persuading Ho, proved afterwards also quite effective with Korean early reformers as well.

5. *Kōakai*'s Korean Connections

The first Korean to accept *Kōakai*'s version of "Asian consciousness" and join the Society was Yi Tong-in — an enigmatic Buddhist monk with strong connections in the fledgling reformist group, who secretly went to Japan in June 1879 with the help of Japanese Buddhist missionaries sent to Korea by the Amidaist Shin sect. After learning the basics of Japanese, Yi Tong-in (soon re-ordained as a Shin novice: April 5, 1880) began to widen his circle of contacts in Japan, meeting, among others, Fukuzawa Yukichi and senior oligarch Iwakura Tomomi (1825-1883). After being introduced to *Kōakai*, Yi Tong-in sent a piece

7. *Kōakai hōkoku* 2, April 1, 1880 (*Kōakai hōkoku Ajia kyōkai hōkoku* 1993), 9-10.

of his classic Chinese writing for the Society's monthly. This document — recently re-discovered for Korean academia by Yi Kwang-nin — shows how strong was the Asianist influence on the basic patterns of Yi Tong-in's thought. Beginning with the general assumption (that was echoed by Kang Yu-wei a decade after) that both sage kings of ancient China and Confucius were indeed reformers able to adopt themselves timely to the incessant process of change in the “all under the Heaven” (ch'önha), Yi goes on to attribute Europe's recent projection of its “rights and power” overseas to the ability of the Europeans to learn each other's advantages and thus to adapt themselves quickly; Asian decline was ascribed to a lack of these qualities. On a more concrete note, Yi highly approves of Lin Tse-hsu's (1785-1850) anti-opium policy (which was “dictated by the love of people and care about other Asian states”) and bitterly criticizes the British for both “slaying tens of thousands of innocent Chinese” in the First Opium War and the “lawless seizure of various Indian states” — in a word, for “committing the crime of despising the weak from a position of strength.” As to the way “to chastise European crimes.” Yi proposes to follow the example of G. Washington's “chastisement of British tyranny,” expressing the hope that the more than 700 million-strong population of Asia will eventually produce “gentlemen of equally noble intentions,” and ends declaring his own personal willingness to exhaust himself for the great undertaking of making Asia again into the “chief continent of the world” (*chongju*) as it used to be in the times of Yellow Emperor.⁸ As we can see, the explanatory framework provided by *Kōakai*'s Asianist appropriation of “civilization and progress” paradigm — believe that Asian decay was caused by Asian “passivity” in international relations and that unified “civilizing” efforts by all Asians might help to restore the continent's glorious past — was effectively used by the reform-minded monk. With the help of this paradigm, he could well harmonize Korea's deeply seated anxiety with the unprecedented growth of Western power (the country experienced French and American incursions in 1866 and 1871 respectively, in addition to the constant concern about Russian colonization of the neighboring Maritime Province from 1860

8. *Kōakai hōkoku* 4, May 14, 1880 (*Kōakai hōkoku Ajia kyōkai hōkoku* 1993), 22. See also Yi Kwang-nin (1986: 3-14).

onward) with the reformist narrative of “civilization and progress.” Yi’s conservative opponents in Korea equaled “civilization and progress” with “barbarization” and selling out to foreigners, but in *Kōakai*’s ideology, “enlightenment” turned out to be exactly what Yi would have liked it to be: a return to an authentic “reformist sagehood,” a continent-wide attempt to restore the past glory of tradition. In this “Easter-nized” form, the discourse of “civilization and progress” looked much more persuasive for the Korean court elite Yi hoped to convert to reform ideology. Yi’s acceptance of *Kōakai*’s basic explanatory framework hardly made him a Japanese “cat’s pawn” in the *Realpolitik* of the time: secretly from his Japanese hosts, he befriended Ernest. M. Satow (1843-1929), the Second Secretary at the British Legation in Tokyo (first meeting between the two men occurred on May 12, 1880), and — his declarations for his Japanese patrons about brotherly ties between Korea and Japan and consequent need to expel Western goods in favor of Japanese wares notwithstanding — showed keen interest in contacting British trading firms in Japan.⁹ Using the Pan-Asianist paradigm for reconciling the attachment to the cultural tradition with reformist beliefs certainly did not mean to blindly follow Japan’s line.

The next success of the Society on its “Korean front” came when reformist-minded Korean envoy, Kim Hong-chip (1842-1896) visited Tokyo in August-September 1880. Kim — by the way, soon to be befriended by Yi Tong-in whose adventures in the name of “enlightenment” he greatly admired — found Ho Ju-chang and his well-educated secretary, famous poet Huang Tsun-hsien (1848-1905), to be the most inspiring sources of knowledge about “civilization and progress,” and spent several days in written conversation with the Chinese duo, in an attempt to figure out the best possible course for Korea’s policy toward both Japan and the West. As both Yi Tong-in and Ho Ju-chang recommended him to make the acquaintance of Pan-Asianist activists, he sent an exquisite classic Chinese reply to the Date Munenari’s flowery invitation and allowed three of the mission attendants to visit the

9. The excerpts from the papers of E. Satow related to Yi Tong-in (mostly letters to W.G. Aston, then British Consul in Kobe) were published in Korea (“Yi Tong-ine kwanhan Satowūi munsō” 1980: 121-135). Originals are kept in the PRO (London), ser. 30-33 (the letters to W. G. Aston: P.R.O.30/33/11/2, 3).

Society's regular meeting¹⁰. The trio — Yi Cho-yŏn (1843-1884; killed by the masterminds of the abortive coup of 1884 as a “pro-Chinese conservative”), Yun Ung-nyŏl (1840-1911; soon to head the new detachment of the Korean army reformed along Japanese lines), and Kang Wi (1820-1884; famous poet and reform-minded Confucian scholar) — were more than satisfied with the treatment: Kim himself mentioned the *Kōakai* and its efforts “to unite the three states” of East Asia against Europeans in very favorable way in his report to King Kojong (1863-1907) (*Sushinsa kirok* 1971: 151). To strengthen the budding Asianist sympathies of the Korean guests, they were sent an additional lengthy letter with the detailed explanation of *Kōakai*'s beliefs and intentions. The letter — written in classical Chinese by Hirobe Kuwasi (1854-1909), one of the foremost contemporary Sinologists of the country — shows well the way Asianism was presented to the Korean audience:

... Your servant has long observed that, among the five continents, Asia is the vastest and most populated. In antiquity, Asia was the cradle of ethics and culture, but now its fortunes are in decline, and Europeans humiliate it. Europe is the smallest continent, which had been a land of barbarism in antiquity. But today, its resplendence is growing daily, intelligence and skills match each other, technique and arts compete in excellence, and there is no place inside the five continents where its boats, vehicles and electrical devices have not reached. But it does not just ‘reach’ this or that land. First, it reaps profits, then continues with exploiting the people, and in the end ruins the country in question. That is what had been done with the Indian states in the southeast [of Asia], and all other cases are like that. The past has already seen the terror of smaller and bigger Asian states being annexed, ruined or destroyed, and today these who did not experience it yet are being annihilated. By luck, only several states of the Eastern part of Asia remain independent.

What are the reasons for this? Is it the fault of the Asian people? Or is it the fault of Asian lands? Or should we blame Asian

10. *Kōakai hōkoku* 10, September 20, 1880 (*Kōakai hōkoku Ajia kyōkai hōkoku* 1993), 63-64.

Heaven? No, it is not the work of Heaven, and the land is not to be blamed. Asian people have brought the calamity upon themselves. It has become the custom in Asia that the states do not rely on each other, and the peoples do not assist each other, just cultivating themselves in self-satisfying ways. [Asians of today] closely resemble hermits, just sitting all the day long and waiting for a hungry death to arrive. Alas! As the saying goes, 'it is difficult to prop up a big house with a wooden plank.' ... If we wish to reverse the decline in fortunes, and defend ourselves from the other side's insults, what should we do?

Recently, gentlemen of lofty intentions in our country came together to establish an organization under the new 'Raise Asia Society.' This society intends to bring together as many superior gentlemen from all Asian lands as possible in order to retrieve our declining fortunes, and then together enjoy the Great Peace. It has already acquired altogether more than three hundreds members, among them scholars, peasants, artisans, and traders being represented. It includes both governmental officials and scholars, and also officials and subjects of Ch'ing. I am also one of its members. If you, gentlemen, are interested in it, I would like you to join the Society too, and help it. In this regard, I respectfully present you a book of the Society's regulations, and a list of its members, as well as my *Research on Asian Languages* in nine volumes. I would be very happy if you would deign to read it, in spite of your busy lives....¹¹

To the arguments already deployed by Kaneko Yahei, Hirobe added an urgent sense of imminent catastrophe (East Asian states are mentioned as "the last independent states of Asia") and the emphasis on the favorable reception of Pan-Asianism by some Chinese intellectuals. The response, just as in the case of Yi Tong-in, was enthusiastic and affirmative. When in March 1881, King Kojong commissioned Kang Wi to write a detailed refutation to the conservative Confucian claims that the court's course towards establishing diplomatic relationships with

11. *Kōakai hōkoku* 11, October 9, 1880 (*Kōakai hōkoku Ajia kyōkai hōkoku* 1993), 74.

Western powers and deepening exchanges with Japan was politically detrimental and morally wrong, Kang Wi duly cited the “Russian threat” as a reason why “the three states” (Korea, China, and Japan) should unite their forces together. The same sentiments are strongly expressed in the classic Chinese poems Kang exchanged with his friend from the Japanese Foreign Ministry, Miyamoto Koichi (Chu Sung-t’ae 1991:152-168).

The Korean Courtiers Observation Mission (*chosa shich’aldan*; also known as *shinsa yuramdan*) that was sent to Japan in 1881 largely as a result of Yi Tong-in’s efforts (Yi himself went missing before the Mission departed, presumably assassinated by Confucian conservatives or court rivals), was the next major target of *Kōakai*’s attention. The meeting between the Mission’s members and *Kōakai* activists seems to have been arranged through a certain Kim Chōng-mo — a rather enigmatic reformer’s supporter who was invited to teach Korean in the *Kōakai* Chinese language school — showed up at several *Kōakai* meetings and was once met by E. Satow in connection with Yi Tong-in’s disappearance (*Kōakai hōkoku Ajia kyōkai hōkoku* 1993: 72; Yi Kwang-nin 1994: 76-77). The Mission members expressed their fascination with the ideas of Asia’s ancient glory, cultural unity, and the common struggle to fend off the Western invaders: Kim Yong-won (1842-?) contributed to the Society’s monthly a florid piece of prose on the “antiquity of Asia, the cradle of humanness and etiquette,” the Asian decline of today, and the necessity to “unite Asian hearts in the strife for wealth and power,”¹² while Hong Yōng-shik (1855-1884), Ō Yun-chung (1848-1896), and Yi Pong-shik (1828-?) exchanged Chinese poems with the Society’s activists. The fruits of their literary labor were filled with the declarations of “unity of the clothes (i.e. rituals and etiquette) in the three brotherly [East Asian] states,” thanks to *Kōakai* members for their efforts in “guarding off barbarians,” and the rhetoric questions about “the ways to fend off insults from outside.”¹³ In the florid language of ritualized poetizing, some elements of genuine interest in the Asianist doctrines on the part of the Korean quests are hardly distinguishable

12. *Kōakai hōkoku* 19, August 31, 1881 (*Kōakai hōkoku Ajia kyōkai hōkoku* 1993),146.

13. *Kōakai hōkoku* 18, August 10, 1881 (*Kōakai hōkoku Ajia kyōkai hōkoku* 1993),135.

from the polite compliments to the hospitable hosts. Even if the “Asia versus West” paradigm was accepted with some degree of interest and attention, it did not prevent some Mission members from apprising Japan’s policies in a sober and realistic way. For example, Hong Yǒngshik reported to King Kojong on his return that the chances of Japanese incursion against Korea depended simply on the state of Korea’s preparedness, “Asian unity” being just a vague strategic direction (Hǒ Tong-hyǒn 2000: 252). Budding sympathy with the Asianist doctrine did not necessarily translate into blind subservience to Japanese plans.

Another Korean official with Japanese experience, whom the *Kōakai* wished to win over, was Kim Ki-su — who, as we mentioned above, was actually the first Korean intellectual to ever encounter Japanese Pan-Asianist rhetoric. In the beginning of the 1880s Kim, as Tōgwon Country Magistrate (*pusa*), was in charge of the negotiations concerning the opening of Wonsan to the Japanese and the administration of Wonsan as a treaty port. Thus, *Kōakai* activists may have considered his attitude towards Japan and its “civilization and progress” to be rather important for the Japanese-Korean relationship. A letter of invitation to join *Kōakai*, sent to Kim by a certain Oku Gisei (a Japanese consular official in Wonsan and *Kōakai* member), explained the necessity of the Asia-wide “civilization and progress” movement in following terms:

The situation in your country today is beyond all comparison. You, my lord, exhaust yourself with royal service, agonizing over the lofty issues of mornings and evenings. Should not you set up the plans, which will produce real fruit? It is impossible to call ‘trouble-making barbarians’ these Americans and Europeans that come from faraway places seeking treaties and trade. It is only natural that the globe is opening up and human intelligence is gradually progressing. ‘Barbarians’ and ‘Chinese’ — did not these two words come from the same idea? The Creator of Things originally did not distinguish between ‘barbarians’ and ‘Chinese’. Earlier, in our country we pointed out that the Westerners ‘straighten up their coats in the wrong way’ and did not wish to consider them as equals. But on having heard their words, reading their books, and investigating the fruits [of

their activities], we realized that they are good in ethics and maintain strict etiquette. Moreover, in their countries food and cloth are abundant, technical and artistic skills are exquisite, states are rich, and armies are strong. We in the East are still far from this. How can we consider them 'barbarians'? We suddenly realized yesterday's mistakes, and fixed today's course.

Today, we cannot say that Asia brims over with good spirits. Situations in various countries, such as India and Persia, are all different. The only independent, self-ruling countries — moreover, having the same letters, customs, and understanding each other well — are your country, Ch'ing, and us. Indeed, our three states should rely on each other and be mutually helpful! If they will assist each other in their efforts, advance the underdeveloped industry, expand their slowly-growing wealth and strength, make both gentry and commoners rouse themselves and not stick to the ignoble peace, thus the fertile plains of our Eastern lands, these granaries of the world, will become the best in the whole universe. How can we not think about wealth and strength? If we do such, how could we fail in speedily recovering the declining fortunes of the Asian continent? It might even be expected that we could surpass Europe and America. By today's calculation, it would be foolish to say that our Eastern continent can be in mutual peace with Europe and America, but cannot become their match."¹⁴

Kim Ki-su, a devout Confucian, was offered the optimistic prospect of Asian revival on a scale surpassing even the European and American "wealth and power" if "barbarian" skills would be no more despised. Kim's reaction is not known, but it is well known that, for many of his juniors in Korea's Confucian bureaucracy, the ideas of repelling "barbarians" through learning their skills — imported from both China and Japan — looked very attractive. This notion — in many cases tinged with Asianist rhetoric — became the main staple of the moderate reformist movement of the 1880s.

14 *Kōakai hōkoku* 14, January 6, 1881 (*Kōakai hōkoku Ajia kyōkai hōkoku* 1993), 94.

6. Conclusion

All in all, Asianism of the *Kōakai* brand became an important element in Korean reformist ideology of the early 1880s. Kim Ok-kyun (1851-1894), the leader of radical reformers, is known to have submitted to King Kojong “A Proposal on Raising Asia” (Hŭngach’aek) in 1882, on return from his Japanese trip which brought him into contact with both Japanese and Japan-residing Chinese *Kōakai* members.¹⁵ The concrete content of the “Proposal” is not known, but it seems to have contained the main points of the Pan-Asianist doctrine in the form it took in contemporary Japan. Various memoirists remembered Kim Ok-kyun telling that, once Japan became Asia’s Britain, Korea was to “play either France or Italy” (Min T’ae-won 1947: 84-85). In a way, Kim seemingly viewed Korea and Japan as two parts of one geopolitical entity. *Hansŏng Sunbo*, Korea’s first modern newspaper (founded on October 1, 1883), often featured articles on European depredations in various regions of the world, focusing, of course, on the situation in Asian countries: India, Vietnam, etc. In its 26th issue (1884 June), an article by a Japanese *Kōakai* member (a certain Minamoto) on the necessity of cooperation against European invaders made its appearance too. Multi-faceted as it was (the theory of “benevolent colonialism” helping the “barbarians” to develop, was also introduced to the Korean readership), *Hansŏng Sunbo*’s understanding of modern trends did include Asianist notions (Han’guk kŭndae kaehwa sasanggwa kaehwa undong 1998:140-148). Another radical reformist leader, Pak Yŏng-hyo (1861-1939), also included detailed explanations on the “duplicity” of European powers — that supposedly covered their real intentions to invade and enslave weaker Asian countries with flowery tirades about international law - into his lengthy memorial submitted to King Kojong in 1888 from his exile in Japan (*Han’guksa charyo sŏnjip* 1982:56). For the radicals of the early 1880s led by Kim and Pak, Pan-Asianist notions legitimized their line on drastic reforms at home modeled on and assisted by the Meiji regime. For the less radical reformers of the 1880s-1890s — typically, Yu Gil-jun (1856-1914) and Kim Yun-

15. Kim was introduced to the *Kōakai* by his attendant Kang Wi, who had maintained *Kōakai* contacts for two years previously (Yi Kwang-nin 1973: 186-190).

shik (1835-1922) — Pan-Asianist emphasis on “Russian threat” (which, I tried to show above, had deep roots in late Tokugawa thought) and the necessity of regional cooperation (in Kim Yun-shik’s case, primarily with China, not Japan) for the sake of prevention of “Russian movement southward” was of tremendous importance. This group stressed the traditional reliance on China and an amiable relationship with Japan as crucial for Korea’s survival in the age of “rampant Russian expansion.”¹⁶ Ironically enough, the Pan-Asianist paradigm introduced by the Japanese activists was partly used by the Korean moderate reformist group from 1884 to 1894 to legitimize its policy of closer reliance on China in foreign affairs. As to the later development of Asianism in Korea, it is undeniable that the pro-Japanese (mostly Japanese-educated) “enlightenment” activists in the 1900s actively used it in order to justify their support of Japanese military efforts in the Russo-Japanese War, as well as Japan’s measures aimed at gradually strengthening its grip on Korean affairs. At the same time, it should not be forgotten that the influence of Pan-Asianist notions transcended the borders between political camps and was certainly not limited to utterly pro-Japanese groups. Pan-Asianism can be recognized, for example, even in some articles of the *Tongnip Shinmun* (1896-1899) — the first private (albeit government-subsidized) vernacular newspaper, published by American-educated and partly Christian reformers (Chŏn Pok-hŭi. 1996: 124). Moderate reformist Confucians in the 1890s-1900s also emphasized the cultural and racial unity between the “three eastern states” based on their common Confucian background and common urgent need for reforms in order to fend off the “White threat”. In a word, the ideas first transmitted through *Kōakai* channels in the beginning of the 1880s became an important integral part of Korea’s own early modern discourse on “civilization and enlightenment.”

The success of *Kōakai*’s efforts can be ascribed to several factors. First, being a conglomerate of People’s Rights activists, traditional Chinese scholars, oppositional journalists and lower and middle ranked bureaucrats, the Society did not represent the Japanese government

16. See Yu Gil-jun’s treatise on the possibility and desirability of proclaiming Korea’s eternal neutrality under Chinese protection (Hŏ Tong-hyŏn 1987:13-21).

and certainly was not viewed as a simple tool of Japanese foreign policy. Thus, however complex Kim Ok-kyun's — or Wang T'ao's — attitudes toward, and relations with, Japanese policies could be, the contacts with friends from *Kōakai* — viewed as “Asia-concerned gentlemen of lofty and independent intentions” — could still be safely maintained. To some degree, we can say that Kim Ok-kyun or Wang T'ao could recognize their own profiles — that of oppositional reformers deprived of understanding and support from mainstream opinion — in their *Kōakai* counterparts. Second, as has been mentioned above, *Kōakai*'s “Orientalized” version of the “civilization and progress” narrative could strongly appeal to the traditional cultural background of Korean reformers, in the same way as emphasis on the “European/White threat” resonated so well with Korea's own concerns about European — and especially Russian — expansion in the region. Third, the “Asian idea” was as open to a variety of interpretations as the paradigm of “civilization and enlightenment” it had appropriated. It could mean various practical things for various factions (say, reliance on China for the protection of “neutral” Korea for moderate reformers of the 1880s, and closer trade connections with Japan for the radicals of the 1890s), emphasis on the “we”-centered, “localized” development of the “civilization and progress” being the common denominator. The fact that an extreme Japanophilic version of Pan-Asianism was used for justifying Japan's colonialist violence on Korean Peninsula understandably gave a very bad name to the trend as a whole. Still, without taking into consideration the diversity of the motives and backgrounds of Japanese Asia activists, as well as multiplicity of the variants of the trend developed on Korean soil, an objective evaluation of the influence and significance of Asianist ideas in Korea's early modern history is impossible.

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