Center and Periphery in East Asia in Three Epochs

Mark Selden, Cornell University

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This paper examines the relationship between center and periphery in the structuring of East Asian regional relations and regional-global relations in three epochs. The brief framing of core-periphery relations structuring East Asia in the first two epochs, a China-centered tributary trade order, and a subsequent Japan-centered colonial order, sets off the analysis of core-periphery in the structuring of the emerging regional formations in contemporary East Asia. Particular attention is paid to relations among China, Japan and Korea as regional powers on the one hand, and the position of the United States as a declining hegemonic power on the other. In all three periods, the analysis considers the interplay of geopolitical, political economy and cultural factors in structuring defining hierarchies of wealth, power and position. What insights toward the emergence of a peaceful, prosperous and environmentally viable East Asia can this history offer?

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I. East Asian Regional Formations, 16th-19th Centuries

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the dominant view in both East and West privileged and essentialized a dynamic Western world order and a weak, inward-looking and conservative East Asia that collapsed in the face of Western capitalism and military predominance to create a world of center and periphery defined predominantly in terms of imperialism on a world scale. That nineteenth- and twentieth-century view presumed that Western superiority was an historical constant, once and forever immutable.

A new revisionist vision has emerged in recent years, one that views China as the dominant economic and geopolitical center of an East Asian regional order from the 16th century to the arrival of the Western powers in full force in the mid-19th century. Both China's second coming in recent decades, and, above all, the resurgence of East Asia as the most expansive center of the capitalist world economy in the final decades of the twentieth century, lend credibility to this analysis, leading some to

anticipate that China will lead the way in creating a new Asian regional order, or even an Asia-led world system in the new millennium. While sympathetic to approaches emphasizing contemporary East Asian dynamism, I propose to rethink both the Eurocentric and the Chinacentric perspective on East Asia as a world center prior to its destruction by the Europeans in the nineteenth century, and to consider subsequent regional restructuring and the contemporary implications of this alternative perspective with particular reference to China-Japan-Korea relations.

Following the lead of Hamashita Takeshi, and Andre Gunder Frank, I argue that the heart of the Asian economic and geopolitical zone historically, and the key to its linkage with the world economy as early as the sixteenth century, was silver exchange. While European and American scholarship on East Asia long focused on commodity trade (tea, silk, ceramics and opium), silver flows initially characterized the Asian trading world, and subsequently appear as a key to understanding global flows including Europe and the Americas in deep interaction with East Asia. Indeed, the large-scale flow of silver from the Americas to China beginning in the sixteenth century linked the major world regions. This approach highlights not only the critical role that silver played in linking Asian and Euro-American economies, but also in transforming intra-Asian trade and China's domestic economy. In short, the silver-lined story that Hamashita tells begins not with the multiple disasters associated with the drainage of silver to pay for opium or with the debacle in the Opium War that led to China's and then East Asia's forced opening on terms dictated by the Western powers, and the associated loss of Chinese sovereignty associated with the Treaty Ports and extraterritoriality. It began rather with the long preceding epoch of Chinese trading predominance that resulted in massive silver flows into China from other parts of Asia, Europe and the Americas in exchange for silk, tea, porcelain and other manufactures. Silver provides a thread that ties China, Asia and the world economy over five centuries, in fresh ways that include the following:

- Maritime perspectives on China, Asia and the world economy. In contrast to the long dominant statecentric, landcentered and inward-looking China scholarship, this approach prioritizes the importance of commerce and finance with silver as the medium of trade and finance from the sixteenth century forward.
- The structure of intra-Asian trade networks. Beyond the tributary system and the centrality of silver is a spatial vision centered less on national economies and state policies, and more on open ports and their hinterlands, one that draws attention to maritime intercourse and the periphery, and that calls into question the statecentric parameters that have long dominated scholarship.It is an approach that requires new spatial understanding of the relationship between land and sea, and between coastal and inland regions and their interconnections. Consider, for example, the fact that, between 1644-1911, Japan sent no tributary mission to China but substantial trade was conducted not only at Nagasaki but also by those that the Qing state repeatedly denounced as "pirates"… that is, traders who were beyond official control. Such an approach also anticipates current scholarship by Saskia Sassen and others highlighting global city networks largely autonomous from statist imperatives that have emerged in the course of the long twentieth century and have emerged with particular vigor in China since the 1980s.
- As the primary medium in both official and private trade including rice, silk, marine products, porcelain, tea and spices, silver governed Chinese state finance and the tributary-trade system of the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, as well as local marketing.
- Silver likewise became an important medium for internal trade in Korea, Japan and Vietnam, if somewhat later than in China.
- Banking and finance, driven by silver, emerged as vehicles for migration and remittances above all for Chinese migrants throughout Asia and the world economy during the second half of the nineteenth century. The large scale sustained migration of Chinese to Southeast

Asia, the Americas and elsewhere–followed by Japanese and Korean migrants–that coincided with the creation of Western colonial empires, was accompanied by the remittance of silver and new banking networks which linked the coastal communities of South China and migrant populations overseas. Remittances were critical not only to the families of migrants. They also provided foundations for the creation of Chinese banking networks in China and abroad. In short, we note the progression from the flow of goods to the flow of silver to the movements of people and the return flow of goods and silver through new banking networks that are products of their migration to Asia, the Americas and beyond. Migrants, banks, and silver created new intra-Asian and international linkages that continued into the era of imperialism in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century.

- Viewed in center-periphery perspective, at its height in the eighteenth century, it is not too much to suggest that Asia, with China at its center, experienced a long epoch of peace and prosperity that resulted from the successful working of a tributary-trade order that placed the region at the center of the world economy at a time when Europe was plagued by war and turmoil. While our discussion has centered on finance, silver and banking, tributary and private trade lubricated the regional order. So too did common elements of statecraft in the neo-Confucian orders in Japan, Korea, the Ryukyus, and Vietnam.

A distinctive feature of this regional order is the fact that China, the dominant regional power during the eighteenth century, subsidized peace and stability through the tributary trade order through a sustained transfer of resources both in direct subsidies and in access to lucrative trade to Korea, Vietnam, and the Ryukyus. By contrast, Japan remained outside the tributary order throughout the 17th-19th centuries, with the important exception of its behind-the-scenes manipulation of the Ryukyu tribute missions to China.

In these and other ways, viewed in longue durée perspective, a

distinctive regional economy emerged in East Asia and progressively linked Asia, Europe and North America in the world economy. This is particularly significant in light of the tendency in the reappraisals of imperialism beginning with S. B. Saul, J. Gallagher, R. Robinson, and D. C. M. Platt, to treat Asia in a negative or exclusively reactive fashion.

Our discussion has focused on tribute, trade, and other economic mechanisms that provided foundations for East Asian regionalism in the era of protracted peace of the long 18th century. We can here only briefly enumerate other distinctive features of the regional order.

- As Kenneth Pomeranz and Sugihara Kaoru demonstrate, income and consumption levels in core areas of China and Japan were comparable to or higher than those prevailing in Western Europe and North America in the 18th century.
- China may be viewed as the hegemonic power in East Asia during the long 18th century in the triple sense of being the most powerful state, the leading manufacturer and magnet for silver, and in radiating cultural-political influence as indicated by the predominance of Neo-Confucian thought and statecraft norms in Japan, Korea and Vietnam. At the same time, with important exceptions noted below, the Chinese state made a little attempt to assimilate or enforce language or cultural norms on the peoples on its peripheries. Nor were the vast differences in income and opportunity among states that would characterize the long 20th century in evidence either within East Asia or between East Asia and the West.
- This is not to suggest an absence of conflict and conquest in the East Asian order. Rather, it appears that the modes and goals of conflict and conquest in 18th-century East Asia differed in certain fundamental ways from those in the contemporary Western world. China's Manchu rulers in the 18th century expanded China's territorial reach through conquest in Inner Asia, binding for example, Mongols and Uyghurs to Qing rule. It made no significant effort, however, to significantly

transform the polities, economies, societies, languages or religious practices of peoples subsumed within the Qing. It is worth recalling that the dynasty that brought China to these heights of power and vastly expanded its territorial scope, like the Mongols earlier, was a dynasty of conquest by the small Manchu people sweeping down from the steppe.

II. The Collapse of the East Asian Regional Order, Imperialism, and Japan's Greater East Asia Coprosperity Sphere

The onslaught of the Western imperialist powers in the 19th century brought to an end the regional order and the protracted peace that had extended across Northeast, East and Inner Asia to parts of Southeast Asia. With China in disintegration, and then carved up by the Western powers and Japan, with much of Southeast Asia colonized by the British, French and Americans, and with Korea, Taiwan and the Ryukyus incorporated within the Japanese empire, peace gave way to protracted conflict that culminated in the Asia Pacific War of 1931-1945. In the process the former center periphery relationships were fundamentally dismantled and transformed.

While the China-centered tributary trade system in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries accepted the participation of Western trading nations, to be sure under duress, Japan in its Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere from the late 1930s sought to drive the Western nations from Asia, notably in going to war simultaneously against the ABCD powers of America, Britain, China and the Dutch. The result is that East and Southeast Asia were continuously at war from 1931-1945.

Japan's approach to its colonies and dependencies in the years 1895-1945 diverged sharply from that of China in the earlier tributary-trade order. Like the Western colonial powers, Japan actively mined the colonies for natural resources and human resources–including coerced

Korean and Chinese labor–to spur Japan's industrialization. At the same time, in contrast both to the Chinese tributary-trade order and the Western colonial order, Japan actively spurred industrialization and comprehensive growth in such colonies and dependencies as Korea, Taiwan and Manchukuo. Equally important, Japan set out to directly assimilate colonized and conquered peoples, above all the Koreans, Taiwanese, the peoples of Manchuria (Chinese, Mongols, Hui Muslims, Manchus) and Ryukyuans who were educated in the language of the conqueror and subjected to diverse forms of assimilation even as they acquired Japanese (or Manchukuo) citizenship.In all these respects, Japan broke sharply with the dynamics of center-periphery relations associated with the tributary-trade order.

Perhaps most striking, in contrast to the protracted peace of eighteenth century East Asia under the earlier tributary order, Japan precipitated successive wars that kept the region in turmoil and ended in defeat for the brash, upstart empire within half a century. In both the lofty rhetoric of empire and the brutality of the colonial wars waged against Asian peoples, Japan shared much in common with the Western colonial powers. Yet, the extent of the killing and brutality were even greater than elsewhere despite the fact that, for the most part, Japan fought people who were racially indistinguishable and were immediate neighbors. While war crimes and atrocities associated with such high profile events as the Nanjing massacre and the military comfort women are most vividly remembered throughout Asia, atrocities were embedded in the very structure of Japanese counterinsurgency actions sanctioned at the highest level of the imperial order over a fifteen year period.

Whatever industrial and commercial gains were recorded under Japanese rule–in Japan, in Korea, in Taiwan, in Manchuria, in coastal Chinese cities–few were passed on either to subject peoples or Japanese citizens in an epoch in which war and the preparation for war took precedence. That order ended in 1945 through the joint action of anti-Japanese forces in China, Korea, Vietnam, the Philippines and elsewhere,

in conjunction with the US-led allied response to Japanese attack, in the destruction of much that had so painstakingly been constructed in the course of creating a Japanese imperium in Asia. The Asia Pacific War, that we date from Japan's Manchurian coup in 1931–but might also be dated to the colonization of the Ryukyu kingdom in 1872, of Taiwan in 1895 or Korea in 1910–took the lives of some 10-30 million Asians and cast a deep shadow over the postwar epoch.

III. The Resurgence of East Asia and the Possibilities of a New East Asian Community

I propose to examine contemporary Asian regional development in light of the interplay of three powerful forces:

- The resurgence and interpenetration of East Asian economies at the heart of the world's most dynamic economic zone over the last half century.
- The position of the United States, the dominant regional and global power since World War II, in East Asia and the Pacific.
- The continued salience in memory and consciousness of the legacy of Japanese colonialism and the Asia Pacific War.

Let me begin with a reflection on the contemporary situation in East Asia: the world's most dynamic and increasingly interconnected economic zone is simultaneously riven by deep conflicts rooted in clashing historical memories of the era of colonialism and war which are intensified by territorial conflicts exacerbated by the possible presence of oil: specifically the China-Japan clash over the Diaoyutai/Senkaku Islands and the Japan-Korea clash over Dokdo Islands. These tensions are complemented by another set of tensions associated with the US posture in Asia, the product of the empire of bases constructed over six

decades and an aggressive unilateralism rationalized in terms of the "war on terror."

I would like to discuss the geopolitics of East Asia in the post-1970 era in light of these intertwined contradictions and the prospects for a new regionalism.

1970 was the critical moment that opened the way to new regional possibilities: the US-China opening of that year may, in retrospect be viewed as the end of the Cold War bifurcation that had characterized postwar Asia riven between two blocs. The end of China's isolation opened the way to reknitting of economic and other bonds across Asia, overcoming former divisions, leading to the explosion of trade and investment throughout the region, and its deepening global connections. Among the critical developments of the following decades were China's full engagements in the world economy, the opening and/or deepening of Japan-China economic relations, the US defeat in Indochina making possible the reunification of Vietnam and its subsequent integration in the world economy.

Perhaps the most striking change, however, is the China-ROK relationship: from anti-Communist Mecca, a South Korea that fought China not only in the Korean War, but also in Vietnam, emerged as a major trade and investment partner of China in the 1980s; over the coming decades, China-Korea, Korea-Japan and Japan-China would become one another's leading trade and investment partners. To this we must add the deepening of trade, investment and technological partnership that has firmly tied the Taiwan economy to China's economy despite the continuing political gulf between the two claimants to the Chinese mantle.

Thus, while world attention has been riveted on Chinese economic growth, trade expansion and magnet for investment, the larger story is the emergence of the East Asia region and, particularly the interpenetration of its economies, together with deepening cultural interchange in such areas as manga, anime, film, the Korea Wave etc. A

number of comparisons that may be made to Japan's Co-Prosperity sphere of the years 1930-1945 are particularly instructive. The first is the multidirectional flow of trade and investment involving China, Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan in contrast with the bilateral relationships that characterized the earlier period. Second is the substantial, if unequal income gains both cross-national and within nations in the recent period. Third, where the Japanese zone was isolated from substantial parts of the world economy, particularly in the years 1941-45, the contemporary East Asian economy is fully imbricated in global trade, financial and investment networks.

Against this background, I would like to draw attention to certain geopolitical changes that have been transforming East Asia, particularly those that suggest the possible emergence of an East Asian community, its prospective character, and the challenges it faces both in terms of intra-regional tensions and the challenge of American power.

Against a two century-long pattern characterized by the primacy of strikingly unequal bilateral relationships, a number of recent multilateral initiatives merit attention. For the first time since the eighteenth century, China has taken the lead in an important regional and even global geopolitical initiative: as host, and arguably the leading force in the six-party talks that produced a breakthrough not only on the question of North Korean denuclearization but, just possibly, opening the way toward ending the half century Korean War between North Korea and the United States and paving the way toward a possible (gradual) reunification of the long divided Korean peninsula. To be sure, the recent agreements could collapse tomorrow, much as earlier agreements. What can be said, however, is that the Bush and Kim administrations have taken important steps, including nuclear dismantlement and ending North Korea's outlaw state (by US edict) thus enabling that regime to expand trade, to regain eligibility for international aid, and to move toward diplomatic relations and a Korean War Treaty with the United States. The intertwined issue of the Korean War and the division of Korea is the

single greatest unresolved legacy of World War II, and a key to regional accommodation.

In numerous ways, China has also taken the lead in the search for regional solutions: these include efforts to bring about an ASEAN + 3 arrangement involving China, Japan and Korea; agreement on an ASEAN-China Free Trade Area to take effect by 2010; in resolving, or, more often setting aside for future resolution such contentious territorial issues involving China and other nations as border disputes: with India, Russia, Vietnam among others, and extending to disputes with potentially oil rich islands, the Spratleys and Paracels involving many Southeast Asian nations.

By contrast, Japanese territorial issues with both China (Diaoyutai/Senkakus and Okinotorishima) and South Korea (Dokdo) remain intractable. Japan, long the dominant economic force in the region, has been notably lagging in formulating approaches to regional accommodation. The primary reasons are two: most critical is that for six decades Japanese leaders have honed their regional and global policy on the basis of subordination within and dependence on the US-Japan relationship, what Gavan McCormack calls the Client State bond: this includes the primacy of the US-Japan economic and security relationships, the US nuclear umbrella, the stationing of US forces on the Japanese mainland and Okinawa, and support for successive US wars. In certain ways, the rise of China as an economic and geopolitical power reinforces this tendency to look to the US rather than to Asia for solutions, despite the fact that Japan's economy is now deeply intertwined with other Asian economies, most notably those of China and South Korea.

Accenting the positive, it may be said that in recent years East Asia has taken preliminary steps toward interregional cooperation in numerous areas including economic security, nuclear nonproliferation, resource management, counterterrorism, drug, smuggling, piracy, human trafficking and organized crime control, disaster relief, environmental

degradation and container security. These achievements have been possible in the relative peace of the post Vietnam War era. They contrast with the more far-reaching institutionalization of the European Union with its common currency and parliament, or of NATO with its regional security relations and US bond. Nevertheless, they are indicative of solid region-construction that began from very low levels just two decades earlier and is currently embedded within solid growth of a regional economy and cultural interplay.

Intra-Asian conflicts, including intense historical memory issues centered around a Japan whose government and neo-nationalist elements in society continue to prevent it from laying to rest the divisive memories associated with the Asia Pacific War, could undermine these promising regional beginnings. However, the most important challenge surely centers on the United States and its potential role in East Asian or in Asia Pacific geopolitical outcomes.

It is important to recognize the character of technological and structural preponderance, as David Shambaugh puts it, of the "US-led security architecture across Asia. This system includes five bilateral alliances in EA; non-allied security partnerships in SEA, SA, and Oceania; a buildup of US forces in the Pacific; new US-India and US-Pakistan military relations; and the US military presence and defense arrangements in SW and CA." That formulation fails to mention the extraordinary, and unique, structure of US military bases throughout the region and the world, the US militarization of space where again it has a virtual monopoly, the fact that as of 2006 65% of US sea-launched ballistic missiles were deployed in the Pacific maritime region, and that the US recently completed a redeployment that situated its power I Corp, responsible for the Asia Pacific in Japan while reorganizing its forces in the area. We should add that, in contrast to NATO's regional alliance anchored by US power, in Asia the US has long constructed a series of bilateral alliances and bilateral economic relationships that kept power in its own hands and sought to preserve a divided Asia.

Even as the US loses international credibility with its failed aggressive warfare in Iraq and throughout the Middle East, its unwelcome geopolitical pressures on and bullying of other nations, no nation or group of nations has the military power to directly challenge US might. The question is whether emerging regional formations including ASEAN + 3 and the Shanghai Group (China, Russia and four Central Asian states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, with India, Iran, Pakistan, and Mongolia as observers) can provide a measure of security at a time of US reverses and indecision.

IV. Conclusion

I have attempted to highlight the emerging significance of East Asia as a major world region, overcoming the fragmentation associated with several centuries of colonial rule and the postwar US-Soviet division, but also continued challenges and divisions. The combination of deepening intraregional economic bonds and the emergence of autonomous organizations at the sub regional level offer approaches distinctively different from what remains the dominant regional force: the US multi-pronged security arrangements with the US-J relationship at its heart.

The growing economic strength of Asia is a foundation for recent steps toward autonomy. If the US continues to hold important cards, it too needs Asia, for example in the case of $2 trillion in foreign reserves now held in dollars (what if some part is shifted to euros, yen, or a bundle of currencies?) as well as the dominant position of China, Japan and Korea with respect to US debt.

At the same time, the conflicts are palpable not only in response to US demands and unilateral actions in an agenda of permanent insecurity (wars and the war on terror campaign), but also in the myriad conflicts pitting Japan and her neighbors in a continued reenactment of the era of colonialism and war that refuses to go away.

We have briefly considered three models for organizing East Asia: a

Pax Sinica (16th to 19th century), a Pax Japonica (1914-1945) and Pax Americana (1945-present). Of the three, only the Pax Sinica offers a model of regional harmony in a period of protracted peace. It was, of course, like the other two, a hegemonic model in the sense of seeking to forge a China-centered order and prioritizing the bonds of Asian states with China, though it also offered an approach for defining the international relations of other states such as the tributary-trade bonds that linked Vietnam and Laos. Both the US- and Japan-centered models were created in periods of perpetual war, and both all the more prioritized bilateral relations with the dominant power. Never before, however, has there been so wide-ranging and deep mutual economic penetration in East Asia and beyond to Southeast Asia and the Asia Pacific. Moreover, this takes place at a time when the prospect for resolving the problems of a nuclear North Korea, a divided Korea, and the Korean War is brighter than it has been at any time in the last half century. Can such outcomes pave the way toward an era of peace and mutuality that is not imposed by, or organized to serve the needs of a single great power?