Japan and transformation of national identities in the imperial era

Li Narangoa, The Australian National University
Robert Cribb, The Australian National University
IMPERIAL JAPAN
AND
NATIONAL IDENTITIES
IN ASIA, 1895–1945

Edited by
Li Narangoa and Robert Cribb
INTRODUCTION

Japan and the Transformation of National Identities in Asia in the Imperial Era

LI NARANGOA AND ROBERT CRIBB

When Tokugawa Japan opened its doors to the West after 1854, Asia was a world of empires in flux. The ailing Chinese empire still dominated East Asia but was already feeling the intrusion of Western powers, while Western colonial empires were taking shape in South and Southeast Asia. During the century which followed the opening, Japan not only transformed itself into a modern industrial power but also attempted to create an empire of its own in Asia and the Pacific. Beginning with the conquests of Hokkaido and Ryukyu, proceeding to the acquisition of Taiwan and the annexation of Korea, and eventually embarking on an ill-fated invasion of China, Southeast Asia and the Western Pacific, Japan subjugated neighbouring territories and sought to construct a new imperial order in its region.

Japan created its empire by force of arms, but like most imperial powers it aimed to give its dominion a more enduring basis than mere military might. The Japanese sought to convince their new subjects that they really belonged in the new order they had created. In part, they tried to have people believe that Japanese rule was materially better than any of the alternatives. They also sought, however, to ingruit their subjects' sense of identity to the imperial cause. They did this by creating a variety of discourses about the nature of their empire. At times the empire was to be a constellation of different nations under Japanese leadership; at others, its eventual goal was to be the imparting of
Japanese culture to subject peoples, perhaps even to the point of complete assimilation, as was sought in Hokkaido and Okinawa; at still other times the empire was presented as an expression of a common Asian culture, of which Japanese culture was the highest, but not the only, form. In this discourse, the Japanese prized some aspects of other Asian cultures while marking other aspects for improvement or elimination. These discourses changed and intertwined, varying in accordance with the scope of Japan’s imperial ambitions and the visions of individual Japanese authorities and institutions. Sometimes these discourses operated together, sometimes they appeared to be in conflict. They were driven both ideologically and by practical considerations: for some purposes, such as general administration, it suited the Japanese to have subjects who were very much like them; for other purposes, such as labour management, it was more convenient to keep a clear distance from their subjects. For these reasons, Japan’s policies affecting the national identities of other peoples often seemed to be contradictory: sometimes selflessly encouraging them (at least on the surface), sometimes transparently recruiting them in the Japanese interest, sometimes seeking to transform them, sometimes blocking them. This was a challenging strategy, because it involved combining an anti-imperialist rhetoric—directed against the Chinese and Western empires—with an imperialist one in support of Japan’s own ambitions.

Japan’s influence on national identities in Asia both fell far short of its intentions and was much more far-reaching. Its influence fell short of its intentions partly because Japan’s rule was relatively brief and partly because much of what might be called Japanese identity propaganda was poorly conceived. Most of all, however, it fell short of Japanese intentions because the peoples whom the Japanese sought to influence were not merely the passive recipients of Japanese manipulation. In every society which the Japanese encountered, people made use of Japanese models, actions and ideas for their own purposes. In some cases, Japan’s achievements inspired admiration: Japan’s early success in industrializing and its spectacular victory in the Russo–Japanese War of 1904–1905 inspired many Asians. In other cases, especially among peoples who had been ruled by other powers, Chinese or Western, Japan’s presence offered an opportunity to change the balance of power in favour of the subject people, and these people sought to manœuvre or persuade the Japanese into granting them support. In still other cases, however, the brutality of Japanese authorities in the occupied
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fundamentally hostile to Japan's war aims.3

This volume examines the relationship between Japan and changing national
identities in the rest of Asia during the era of Japan's territorial expansion in Asia,
approximately 1895 to 1945. There are three important features in this relation-
ship. First, Japan's achievements in industrializing and resisting Western encroach-
ment added extra dimensions to the way in which other Asian societies considered
the possibilities for their own futures. The rise of the West in East Asia in the
nineteenth century had presented societies there with a complex set of dilemmas.
Especially those societies with a Confucian heritage had a long tradition of
regarding themselves as unquestionably superior to outside societies, yet some
Western societies had clearly overtaken Asia, at least in areas of technology and
military organization. In the era of European expansion, Asian societies began
to address a complex set of questions: was Westernization the only path to
restoring their former power and prosperity? Or was the problem that Asia had
strayed too far from its own traditional values, so that a rejection of the West
was the surest path to success? Or was there some means of blending the best
from each civilization so that Asia might not simply catch up to the West but
eventually overtake it?

These questions had arisen well before Japan's emergence as an industrial
or military power. Japan's apparent success in modernizing without discarding
its distinctive national identity, however, encouraged Asian thinkers to reflect
on what they could learn from it for their own countries. Japan played an
important role, consciously and unconsciously, as a model for people in other
Asian nations who wished to make their countries or regions—whether colonized
or not—strong and free. The electrifying effect on other Asians of Japan's victory
in the Russo–Japanese War of 1904–1905 is well known.4 Japan now drew close
attention from Asians seeking the key to Japan's success against a western power
and its growing prominence in East Asian affairs. Of course they took the
general lesson that Japan's success showed it was possible for Asian societies to
modernize, but they also wondered what features of Japanese culture and social
organization might account for Japan's success and might be adapted to their
own societies. In other words, they sought ways of shaping their own national
identities to resemble more closely those features of the Japanese identity that
seemed to have produced such success.
As Japan began to implement its imperial ambitions, however, it ceased to be simply an admirable model for the rest of Asia and became also part of the problem. Japanese rule was everywhere accompanied by a programme of Japanization. In some cases, most notably Korea (as earlier in Okinawa and Hokkaido), this programme involved the deliberate imposition of Japanese culture and suppression of indigenous cultures. In other cases, such as Manchukuo, it entailed the selective use of Japanese-style institutions to increase the cultural compatibility of the rulers and the ruled, within a hierarchical order placing Japan at the summit, while leaving other institutions from the pre-colonial order intact. In still other cases, such as Indonesia, the Japanese largely retained existing institutions, adapting them to the difficult conditions of the war and adding no more than a flavour of Japanese style. As people in different parts of Asia gained closer experience of Japanese policies and institutions, they began to reject Japanese models, in some cases precisely because of their association with the harshness of Japanese rule, in others because those models seemed to work less well when examined closely. Japan's expansion into Asia thus shaped the national identities of its neighbours both positively, providing a model to be followed, and negatively, presenting an example to be avoided.

Second, there was no real consensus in this era on which identities should be considered to constitute a nation. Although the assumption had begun to take root that nation-states were the natural unit into which peoples should be distributed, it was difficult to say how many nation-states there should be and where their appropriate boundaries might run. Most political units incorporated many different ethnic groups, and several large ethnic groups like the Mongols and the Malays sprawled across the political boundaries created by the imperial powers. The presence of a large Chinese diaspora in Southeast Asia further complicated the problem. Nor was it easy to say just which groups properly constituted a potential nation. Some ethnic groups were generally considered to be too small or too 'primitive' to form the basis for a state; few people imagined, for instance, that any of the small ethnic groups in eastern Indonesia could ever form a state in its own right. Even large ethnic groups such as the Mongols, the Tibetans, the Javanese and the Vietnamese could be the victims of such denigrating attitudes on the part of Russian, Chinese, Dutch and French imperialists. And the Japanese came to have much the same attitude towards China, believing that Chinese backwardness disqualified China from proper nation-statehood. Another issue was the relative importance of broad ethnic identities over narrow ones. The Chao Phraya river valley was the centre of Siam,
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which identities should be had begun to be the victimes of those of Burma, Cambodia, Laos and Malaya, and ended the political unity of the Netherlands Indies by establishing separate administrations over Sumatra, Java and eastern Indonesia. They did all these things moreover in the context of challenging and defeating the Western colonial powers and creating a broad Asian empire under Japanese hegemony. This willingness and power to redraw boundaries forced the Japanese to consider just what the basis for nation-building might be in the various parts of Asia they dominated and opened to the people of those regions new opportunities to imagine different kinds of national futures.

Finally, discussing national identities allows us to set them against Japan’s attempts – for the most part unsuccessful – to create a pan-Asian imperial identity. It was one thing for Japan to propose itself as a developmental model for other parts of Asia or for Japan to intervene ostensibly in support of un-
fulfilled national aspirations of Tibetans, Mongols or Southeast Asians. Neither of these proposals, however, created a clear justification for imperial rule in the eyes of their new subjects. On the other hand, the persistently heard argument – even if it was unevenly promoted and often inconsistent – that Japan’s Asian identity gave it a special role in the region put forward a different kind of identity which was both trans-national and quasi-national.
While the late twentieth century interest in Japan was as an economic model, in the period from 1895 Asians at first saw Japan primarily as a political, social and technological model. Asian observers were struck most of all by the fact that Japan appeared to have taken the technological strengths of Western civilization and yet had preserved the best of its own culture. By contrast, Indian observers of Japan, as Van Blijert shows in his chapter for this volume, believed that their own society had absorbed the worst of Westernization while remaining mired in obscurantist tradition. The aspiration to blend the best of East and West was a widespread phenomenon across Asia in this period. Koreans talked of ‘Eastern ways, Western machines’ (Dong-do Seo-ki) and the Chinese of ‘Chinese learning, Western technology’ (Zhongti Xiyong), both echoing Japan’s own ‘Japanese spirit, Western talent’ (Wakon Yōsai). Even in The Philippines, whose people were uncomfortably aware that they had absorbed much Western civilization during the long period of Spanish and American rule, there was a strong feeling that the most appropriate path was to draw from both traditional values and Western achievement.

Many Asians also admired what they saw as a sense of discipline among the Japanese. They felt that their own societies were disordered and divided, and that disorder and division had allowed the West to dominate them. The discipline of Japanese society seemed to arise both from inner values and from means of organization. Indian observers drew hope from what they saw as connections between Japanese Bushido – literally the way of the warrior, which they saw as the essence of Japanese self-sacrificing discipline and devotion – and the Vedanta, a set of ancient Indian precepts and insights which provided much of the underlying philosophy of Hinduism. In Thailand, General Phibun developed a national code, the Fourteen Wiratham, which he seems to have based partly on interpretations of Japanese-style discipline as it could be applied to Thai society.7

In those Asian societies which felt the immediate effects of Japanese expansionism – China after 1895, Korea after 1910 and Southeast Asia after 1941 – this rather spiritual admiration of Japan quickly gave way to a much more utilitarian, calculating and limited view of Japan’s possible usefulness, even to a determination not to use Japan as a model. Japan became as much a threat as a model.8 Some Chinese intellectuals were unwilling to regard Japan as anything but a convenient means by which they might get access to Western technology and training. Even though Japan was one of the main channels by which China
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learnt of the West and even though it was often difficult for Chinese to tell what was 'authentically' Western and what was Japanese, these intellectuals were not prepared to concede that China might improve its position by learning from the Japanese model. However, this reluctance to learn from Japan was not simply a matter of refusal to consider ideas from a supposedly derivative culture but also a consequence of the very different social and economic conditions in the two countries that made Japanese 'lessons' very difficult to adapt to Chinese circumstances. In societies which were actually ruled by the Japanese, this resistance to the Japanese model became still stronger. Jose’s chapter in this volume describes a multitude of ways in which Filipinos resisted Japan’s attempts to strengthen its cultural authority in the archipelago. Caprio’s chapter shows how strong, shrewd and varied was Korean resistance to the Japanese policy of assimilation.

Even in regions where there was no especial aversion to learning from Japan, the Japanese model was often seen as offering specific technical example rather than broader cultural lessons. As Hyer’s chapter demonstrates, whereas the Japanese were interested in Tibet because of a perception of common Buddhist culture, the Tibetans were mainly interested in the technical aspects of Japan’s modernity, such as military training. Much the same applied to the Mongols, Indonesians and Burmese, who learnt Japanese techniques in areas as diverse as military discipline, hygiene, agriculture and animal husbandry, without imagining that they thereby acquired Japanese culture. At most, the Japanese sponsorship of modern education among the Mongols may have strengthened the value attached to such education after the Japanese departed, while the closure of schools and colleges in Indonesia may have weakened the intelligentsia, but it is hard to see these changes as part of any adoption of Japanese views of the world. Sato’s chapter indicates that Japan’s brief period of rule in Java was barely enough even to transmit a few Japanese technical skills, let alone deep-seated elements of Japanese culture. It is true that after the Second World War, the sudden strength of Southeast Asian nationalist movements led some observers to believe that the Japanese had somehow inculcated militaristic values into Southeast Asian societies. For the most part, however, what the Southeast Asians, like the Tibetans and Mongols, learned were technical skills not worldviews, though for the Mongols educational opportunities expanded greatly under Japanese influence.

The Japanese themselves at first had no idea that other parts of Asia might see them as a model. In the late nineteenth century the Japanese thinker Fukuzawa...
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Yukichi still saw Japan as a semi-civilized country, inferior to Europe in most respects.10 As they looked beyond the shores of Japan, however, the Japanese could hardly help but notice the far greater chaos and decay in neighbouring China and they began to imagine that they could ‘escape’ from Asia by modernizing. Still, the idea that Japan might lead other countries along the same path had not yet emerged. Especially after their victory in the war with Russia in 1904–1905, however, the Japanese increasingly became aware of the admiration which their achievements aroused in the region. As Japan began its process of territorial expansion in the twentieth century, it began to regard itself not just as a model for the rest of Asia but also as the destined leader of Asia. It began to make considerable use of the argument that it was bringing to the rest of Asia the social and political values that had delivered it such success. Japan’s march into Taiwan and Korea was accompanied by a rhetoric reminiscent of the contemporaneous ‘White Man’s Burden’.11 Japan claimed to have come to these regions to raise them from poverty and ignorance and to reshape them as modern societies in the Japanese image. Japan’s developmentalist order in Taiwan, as Huang’s chapter shows, left many Taiwanese with at least a grudging appreciation of the order and prosperity of the Japanese period.

The idea of Japan as a model for modernity was especially important in Japan’s construction of a platform for establishing Manchukuo after 1931 and in creating a new political order elsewhere in northern China thereafter. Manchukuo, created to detach Manchuria from China and bring it under Japanese domination, had the superficial form of a successor state to the Manchu dynasty expelled from China in 1911. With Chinese constituting a large majority of the population, however, it was difficult to justify Manchukuo’s existence on ethnic grounds alone. Instead, the Japanese constructed Manchukuo as an explicitly multi-ethnic state in which the two indigenous ethnic groups, Manchus and Mongols, were to be in partnership with the immigrant Chinese, Japanese and Koreans in a state nominally dedicated to delivering modernity and prosperity to all and peace and harmony among the ethnic groups.12 Mitter’s chapter describes how the Japanese and various Chinese groups constructed competing paradigms of modernity in the Manchurian arena. Similarly, Dryburgh shows how Japan sponsored local autonomy movements in North China not by promoting cultural Japanization but by presenting what was meant to be a paradigm of modernity and peace which they were sure would be attractive in the war-torn and poverty-stricken region.13
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The Japanese model, however, was not always as successful in reality as it seemed to promise in theory. Practices which were effective in the Japanese social environment could not always be transferred to other societies with different customs and cultural or social forms. Many Muslims in Indonesia, for instance, objected to being required to bow in the direction of Tokyo because this action seemed to be one of paying religious respect to a human being. Mongols objected to Japanese medical practices which did not have the approval of the Buddhist lamas. Language difficulties alone were often a major obstacle to the transmission of information and techniques. The hygienic practices, too, which worked well enough in Northeast Asia were totally inadequate when Japanese troops arrived in Southeast Asia. Thousands of Japanese troops and tens of thousands of Southeast Asians in their charge died as a result of inadequate sanitation and hygienic precautions in the tropics.\(^\text{14}\) Even when the technology available was appropriate, the Japanese empire soon became so large that Japan had insufficient technical experts available to cover every region properly. Technical instruction in the colonies was therefore often in the hands of people with less than adequate knowledge and experience.

JAPAN AND THE REDRAWING OF POLITICAL BOUNDARIES IN ASIA

Japan’s earliest imperial encounters with other ethnic groups took place in sparsely populated northern Honshu and Hokkaido, where it displaced, absorbed and assimilated the indigenous Ainu.\(^\text{15}\) The people of the Ryukyu Islands to the south of Japan, conquered in the 1870s, were also absorbed into the Japanese ethnic identity without any thought of giving them a distinct status. Sparsely populated Karafuto, ceded by Russia after the Russo–Japanese War, was treated much the same way as Hokkaido. The acquisition of Taiwan from China under the Treaty of Shimonoseki in 1895 and the annexation of Korea in 1910, however, presented Japan with new challenges because the populations of these territories were so much greater than those of Hokkaido or Ryukyu. In both territories, Japan adopted an official policy of assimilation, ostensibly seeking to turn Taiwanese and Koreans into Japanese by having them learn the Japanese language and adopt Japanese culture and, particularly in Korea, by suppressing the indigenous language and culture. This policy, however, was never consistently pursued. On the one hand, the Japanese could see clear advantages in
binding the Taiwanese and Koreans as closely as possible to the Japanese nation, both for the sake of security in the colonies and in order to use them as reliable officials and soldiers in their wider empire. On the other hand, the Japanese had constant doubts about whether millions of Taiwanese and Koreans could or should become fully Japanese.

The reasons for these doubts are complex and have never been fully explored. They seem to have included a racial feeling that the blood of Koreans and Taiwanese was different and could not – or should not – be absorbed into that of the Japanese (although the Ainu were ethnically even more remote from the Japanese). They also appear to have included the suspicion that Chinese and Korean cultures could never be fully erased from the souls of Chinese and Koreans whereas supposedly less advanced cultures – Ainu and Ryukyu – were less deeply engraven. Japanese attitudes to Chinese civilization were particularly ambivalent: they often regarded Chinese civilization as worn-out and hidebound, but they nonetheless had to acknowledge the achievements of Chinese civilization and Japan’s long cultural debt to Chinese models. Since Japanese respect for Korean culture was distinctly less than their respect for Chinese culture, the assimilation programme was correspondingly much stronger in Korea than in Taiwan. The Japanese were probably also aware of the enormous cost in time and energy involved in seriously attempting to assimilate large populations. The Taiwanese were always more reconciled to Japanese rule than were the Koreans – partly because dissatisfied Taiwanese could flee to the mainland – whereas colonial rule faced determined resistance from the Koreans, perhaps encouraging the conclusion that assimilation was the only strategy likely to guarantee Japanese rule in the long term. (Assimilation, of course, has been a common strategy of imperial powers seeking to deal with unruly minorities.) The Japanese may also have felt that leaving subject Koreans and Chinese with fewer civil rights than Japanese would facilitate the total mobilization of human and natural resources in the new territories, although Japanese subjects in Japan had few enough political and economic rights in this era. And they may have felt that if the full assimilation of the Taiwanese and Koreans could not be achieved, then it was better to make the distinction between them and the ‘true’ Japanese as clear as possible in order to avoid practical and administrative uncertainties.

During the first half of the twentieth century, both colonies were gradually integrated more closely into the Japanese political structure. In 1919, the governor-general of Korea became responsible to the government of the day,
Japanese nation, them as reliable he Japanese had orceans could or fully explored. ans and Taiwan-into that of the m the Japanese). Korean cultures ns whereas sup-tely engraved. mbivalent: they , but they non- tion and Japan’s. · Korean culture he assimilation in Taiwan. The ime and energy. The Taiwanese koreans – partly thereas colonial encouraging the rantee Japanese mon strategy of panese may also civil rights than atural resources ad few enough lt that if the full ved, then it was nese as clear as nties. were gradually z. In 1919, the ent of the day, rather than directly to the Emperor and in 1929 a new Minister of Colonial Affairs began to supervise colonial administration from within the cabinet. In 1942 the governors-general of Taiwan and Korea were brought under the direct authority of the Japanese home affairs minister, as well as under the authority of the ministers of finance, agriculture, education, commerce and industry, communications, and transport in their respective areas. In principle, the governors-general were thus reduced to the same level as a prefectural governor. Koreans and Taiwanese were Japanese subjects but they still remained less than Japanese, both in the colonies and in Japan itself. Corporal punishment, although abolished in Japan, was a standard part of the repertoire of punishment in Taiwan, and only for Taiwanese. Access to higher education for Koreans was limited, in Korea and Japan, and Koreans and Taiwanese were never permitted to rise to senior posts in the Japanese armed forces. The other hand, Koreans living in Japan could vote in Japanese elections and one Korean was even elected to the Imperial Diet. The contradictory processes of assimilation and exclusion in the Japanese empire formed a constant theme throughout the imperial era and were a major element in the dissatisfaction of colonized peoples with Japanese rule: to be pressured to abandon their own cultures for Japanese culture was traumatic enough, but to find that familiarity with Japanese culture still did not lead to equal rights or to social acceptance was every bit as destructive of confidence in colonialism as earlier Western racial discrimination had been.

The relative indigestibility of Korea and Taiwan, and defeat in Siberia, described by Stolberg in this volume, helped convince Japanese policy-makers that a more subtle political strategy would be needed if they were to create a larger sphere of influence in Asia. As Stegewerns points out, too, by the end of the 1910s the global environment had turned decisively against the creation of new colonial empires. Self-determination had become an accepted principle in international affairs. It might not yet have been strong enough to dismantle the Western colonial empires, but it became a significant obstacle to any Japanese ideas of simply annexing new territories as they had annexed Korea. Japan did expand its empire after the First World War by acquiring control of former German colonies in the northern Pacific but it ruled them under League of Nations mandates which required Japan to develop those territories for eventual independence. The irony of Japan committing itself to the eventual independence of small Pacific islands while refusing to contemplate independence for Korea was not lost on Korean nationalists.
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Japan’s expansion into Taiwan and Korea resembled the colonial expansion of the Western powers, but after the First World War Japan had to take a different approach to spreading its influence. As Japan extended its power into Manchuria and further afield in Asia, it was constrained by practical and diplomatic considerations from simply making further annexations. In place of straightforward colonialism, therefore, Japan sought to construct its larger Asian empire as a constellation of states, regions and peoples under a broad Japanese political and cultural hegemony. In some respects, this new order in East Asia simply involved a shift from the hierarchical European and Chinese colonial orders to a still hierarchical Japanese colonial order. As Stegwarne shows, however, Japanese hegemony was to be based partly on Japan’s claims to superior cultural capacity to deliver modernity, and partly on the idea that Japan shared cultural values with the rest of Asia which it did not share with the West. In this respect, Japan drew from the dominant discourses of both Western and Chinese imperialism.

After 1931, therefore, Japan worked to create a series of regional governments which were neither colonial territories nor truly independent. The ‘jewel in the crown’ of Japanese imperialism was the state of Manchukuo, founded in 1932. At its height in the early 1940s, however, the Japanese empire consisted of a complicated hierarchy of allied and subordinate states and governments. Thailand, which had been an independent state before the war, was formally an ally of Japan, though Japanese troops were present on Thai soil and the Japanese exercised considerable influence on Thai policy as far as it affected the war effort. Manchukuo, together with the Republics of Burma and the Philippines, both created in 1943, have generally been termed ‘puppet states’, implying that although they were nominally sovereign, independent states they were subject to Japanese military occupation and their policy in practice was subject to Japanese instruction. The isolated Andaman and Nicobar Islands were formally handed to the puppet of India (Azad Hind) under Subhas Chandra Bose, though there was evidently not even a symbolic change in the administration of the islands. In Indochina and Macao, the Japanese retained European colonial administrations effectively also as puppet governments under Japanese instruction. Between 1935 and 1945, the Japanese established dependent governments, administrations, territories and councils in various parts of China, some of them based on ethnicity (Mongol) but most of them regionally focused. These included the East Hopeh Anti-Communist Autonomous Council, founded in 1935, the
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Mongolian Military Government (1936), the South Chahar Autonomous Government (1937), the North Shansi Autonomous Council (1936), the Mongolian Allied Leagues’ Autonomous Government (1937) and the Mongolian Allied Autonomous Government (1939). Finally, the rest of Japan’s empire was under military rule, generally flanked with some kind of local consultative council.

The term ‘puppet state’ is contentious. It appears to have entered the English language initially as a description of the state of Manchukuo and is mostly used to refer to the nominally independent states created within the German and Japanese empires during the Second World War.\textsuperscript{21} The phenomenon, however, is both older and broader. At the end of the eighteenth century, Napoleon established a series of nominally independent republics in parts of Europe not annexed to France — the Batavian, Helvetic, Cisalpine, Ligurian, Roman and Parthenopaean Republics — though these states are not usually referred to as puppets. The states dominated by Soviet Russia and later the Soviet Union — Mongolia, Tannu Tuva and the short-lived Far Eastern Republic between the wars and the Warsaw Pact countries after the Second World War — were generally called satellites rather than puppets, while states similarly affiliated with the United States have generally been called neo-colonies or client states. This variety of terminology, of course, indicates that the category of puppet state can shade imperceptibly into other forms of domination and alliance. Although state sovereignty is a formal principle of international affairs, only superpowers are ever in a position to act with unfettered sovereignty. In all these cases, the terminology is pejorative and tends to obscure the complexity of the relationship between the hegemonic power and its local subjects. Puppets, satellites and clients did the bidding of the dominant power in some respects, but they generally existed because the dominant power could not simply exercise its authority directly, mainly because of the strength of local nationalism and international criticism. They can be interpreted as an attempt to conceal the reality of external hegemony but they could often also serve local interests distinct from, and even in conflict with, those of the hegemonic power. Manchukuo, the various Japanese-sponsored governments in North China and the ‘Reorganized National Government’ of China headed by Wang Ching-wei (Wang Jingwei) did the bidding of the Japanese in most respects but they also reflected and responded to the legitimate and long-standing interests of their subjects. Still more so, the Japanese-sponsored Republics of Burma and The Philippines, and later the Empire of Vietnam and the Kingdoms of Laos and Cambodia built on...
and reflected the interests of Southeast Asian nationalist and aristocratic elites. Guillemon's chapter makes clear that major differences of opinion and conflicts of interest could develop between the Japanese and local nationalists within a puppet state framework. Dismissing local leaders as puppets of the Japanese was also a convenient way of dismissing the emerging national identities which they represented.

In constructing puppet states and puppet governments, the Japanese demonstrated the same ambivalence towards ethnic and national identity which they had shown in Taiwan and Korea. They had a strong inclination to regard national identity as highly malleable but equally saw the unfulfilled aspirations of national groups as a significant force which could be used to recruit people to their side. This ambivalence was strikingly expressed in Japan's policies towards the Mongols of Manchukuo. The Japanese valued the Mongols, the territory's second largest ethnic group after the Chinese, as a counterweight to that Chinese majority, enabling the Japanese to demonstrate that Manchukuo was a multi-ethnic state. At the same time, they realized that there was an opportunity to win the support of Mongols in the central and western parts of Inner Mongolia by promoting the idea of a larger independent Mongol state. They even had vain hopes, as Batbayar's chapter shows, of using Manchukuo to help detach Outer Mongolia from the Soviet orbit, even if, as Nakami indicates, there was never any coherent plan to bring Outer Mongolia under Japanese suzerainty. The Japanese encouraged the Mongols of western Inner Mongolia, led by Prince Demchugdondrub (generally called De Wang or Prince De), to establish the Mongolian Allied League's Autonomous Government under Japanese sponsorship in 1937. After 1937, however, the Japanese launched their full-scale war on China and political considerations relating to China began to overshadow those relating to the Mongols. Particularly after the creation of the government of Wang Ching-wei in Nanking in 1940, the Japanese realized the political importance to the Chinese of preventing further erosion of China's borders. Accordingly, they refused to allow the Mongols to proceed towards independence and created instead a so-called Mongolian Autonomous Dominion which remained formally a part of the Chinese Republic.

In Southeast Asia, the Japanese showed a similar mixture of calculated exploitation of and disregard for ethnic identity. They permitted Thailand to expand its borders to encompass territories which it had lost to the British and French in the early twentieth century, but these territories included both regions
which were Thai in the broad sense – parts of Laos and some of the Shan states in Burma – and regions whose people were ethnically very different from the Thai – the northern states of British Malaya and the eastern provinces of Cambodia. When the Japanese granted independence to Vietnam in March 1945, they retained control of the southernmost part of the country, the former French colony of Cochin China, despite clear messages that this decision was an affront to Vietnamese nationalism.

The new borders which Japan drew in Asia did not themselves create new identities. Manchukuo, in particular, was conspicuously unsuccessful in creating a sense of national identity among its diverse peoples, and Japan’s division of the Netherlands Indies into three separate administrative zones failed to fracture the broad sense of Indonesian national identity which had developed in the archipelago under Dutch rule. Rather, the Japanese actions created a wider sense of opportunity among peoples who felt that they had not yet achieved national fulfilment in a nation-state of their own. Koreans saw a chance to consolidate their de facto independence into internationally recognized sovereignty. Mongols imagined a larger Mongolian state free of great power domination. Local Chinese politicians imagined a China in which decentralization would mean efficiency and progress, rather than the corruption, brutality and disorder of the warlord era. Thais imagined a state restored to its former centrality in mainland Southeast Asia, and Indonesians toyed briefly with the idea of extending their boundaries to encompass closely related peoples in the Malay peninsula, northern Borneo and eastern Timor.

With military defeat in 1945, Japan’s attempts to reshape the borders of Asia came to nothing. The only borders that Japan ended up changing were its own. Japan’s influence on national identities, however, was much more significant and lasting, although largely unintended. Japan’s engagement with Siberia and Outer Mongolia (see the chapters of Stolberg and Batbayar) contributed to cementing those two regions into the Soviet world. Without Japan’s aggressive movement towards the Russian Far East in the 1920s and 1930s, it is doubtful whether the Soviet Union would have been interested in investing such energy in securing the formal independence of Outer Mongolia from China. Japan’s involvement with the Mongols in Manchukuo and western Inner Mongolia encouraged Mongol hopes for greater autonomy from China. In consequence, the Chinese Communist Party reversed the absorption of Mongol lands into Chinese provinces and in 1947 reconstituted Inner Mongolia as an autonomous
region. Similarly, the puppet independence which Japan granted to Burma in 1943, and to Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia in 1945 and which it had planned for Indonesia later in 1945, sharpened the hopes of nationalists in all those regions for a speedy end to colonialism. In both Indonesia and Inner Mongolia, however, the alliance of local nationalist aspirations with the broader strategic plans of the Japanese created grave difficulties for the local nationalists once the Japanese were defeated. Prince De fled to Outer Mongolia; he was later jailed by the new communist government in China and was made to confess that his actions during the war years had been traitorous to China. Indonesia's foremost nationalist leader, Sukarno, who had worked with the Japanese and who was chosen as president of the independent Republic of Indonesia declared after Japan's surrender, was anathematized by the Dutch and other Western powers and the Republic was contemptuously dismissed as 'made in Japan'.

THE FAILURE OF A PAN-ASIAN IDENTITY

Japan's imperial venture shows intriguing parallels to the empire-building of Napoleonic France in Europe in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Both societies were initially successful in sweeping away an old international order because they combined both technical military skills and the ability to mobilize their own people for a sustained war effort. Both stimulated the rise of nationalism beyond their original national borders and presented themselves as liberators from older oppressive orders: Habsburg in Europe, Chinese and European in Asia. Then, when imperial expansion had brought them control of some of those regions, they used a 'puppet state' format to accommodate the nationalisms there. The Batavian Republic in the Netherlands, for instance, was not merely a Napoleonic puppet, but a reflection of anti-oligarchic political forces in Dutch society. Both empires floundered partly because they were overextended; they encountered determined resistance on a variety of fronts, both from well-established older powers and from conquered peoples. Each of them, moreover, placed the political unification of a continent on the agenda. Just as Napoleon cloaked French imperialism in a vision of a united Europe, so Japan cloaked its expansion in a pan-Asian vision.

The Chinese tribute system had long offered a vision of (East) Asian unity, based on China's position at the core of East Asian culture. Japan's empire-building was the first major sign of the emergence of a broad new ideology of...
ranted to Burma in which it had planned to in all those regions and Inner Mongolia, the broader strategic nationalists once the was later jailed by to confess that his 25 Indonesia’s fore Japanese and who Indonesia declared and other Western ‘made in Japan’.26

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‘Asianism’. The concept of Asianism included the idea that Asian societies might have something fundamental in common and that the depth of Asian civilization might provide a basis for modern achievement. As Van Bijlert’s chapter shows, by the early twentieth century, Indian thinkers were beginning to lay the basis for an ideology of common Asian values in which Japan had an important, though not dominant, role. By the time of its annexation of Korea, Japan had begun to employ a sentiment summed up by the wartime slogan ‘Asia for the Asians’. The argument that Japan was liberating Asia from the twin menaces of Western imperialism and malign communism became increasingly prominent in Japanese imperial discourse. Whereas the discourses describing Japan as a model and as a benefactor of nationalism placed Japan and Asia on opposite sides of an exchange, this formulation gave Japan and Asia identical interests. Both wanted to exclude the West and exclude communism; Japan claimed leadership on the grounds that it was the most developed of Asian countries at the time, not because it was somewhat different from the rest.28 In the case of Manchukuo, the Japanese used neo-traditionalist concepts such as ‘the kingly way’ (ōdō) and ‘harmony of the five ethnic groups’ (gozoku kyōwa) to portray Manchukuo as a Pan-Asian polity guided by classical Confucian political principles, but Confucian principles were not especially useful in seeking to include the countries of Southeast Asia which, apart from Vietnam and the Chinese diaspora, were well outside the Chinese cultural world. The discourse of Asianism culminated in the concept of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, launched in 1940 on the eve of the invasion of Southeast Asia. The Co-Prosperity Sphere implied that Japan and its Asian empire had complementary interests and that bringing them together in a single framework would be beneficial to all.

In reality, however, most of this discourse remained no more than discourse. The idea of liberation from the West was enormously popular in Indonesia, where Dutch rule had seemed deeply entrenched.29 The Japanese were much less welcome in the Philippines, however, where the Americans had promised to grant independence in 1946 in any case, or in Vietnam, where the Japanese allowed the Vichy French colonial administration to retain power. Policy-making in the Japanese empire, moreover, was always diffuse. Local authorities often pursued policies which had little direct connection with the intentions of the government in Tokyo. The confused and often contradictory actions of different authorities made it virtually impossible to develop any sense of overall imperial purpose apart from winning the war. Under pressure of war, Japan lacked the
opportunity to develop institutions which might have opened up the imperial administration to capable people from all across the empire. As such, while local elites in the Japanese empire sometimes found that their interests coincided with those of the Japanese, they never developed durable interests in the imperial enterprise as a whole. The economic dimension of the empire, the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, proved particularly unrewarding. In Manchukuo and North China, Japan created what has been described as a modern enclave economy which was highly integrated with the domestic Japanese economy but which brought fewer benefits to local communities.\footnote{Japan’s rule left a significant legacy in Korea, Taiwan and Manchukuo in the form of infrastructure and expanded agricultural and industrial production, but while the empire was in place the benefits of these developments were less clear. Japan’s modern economy, moreover, was still much too small to absorb the agricultural and artisanal production of the vast hinterland which Japan had acquired, especially with its Southeast Asian conquests. Establishing close connections between the Japanese economy and the economies of other regions was made still more difficult by wartime disruption, particularly American submarine activity in the South China Sea. As a result, vast plantation areas in Southeast Asia went to ruin because there was no market for their crops.\footnote{But even if the Sphere had worked more as it was intended, the result would hardly have been favourable for the durability of the empire, because Japan had in mind no more co-prosperity than would be created by centralizing industrial production in the north (that is Japan, Taiwan and Korea, with Manchukuo and North China) and leaving the outer colonies as producers of raw materials.}} Japan’s rule left a significant legacy in Korea, Taiwan and Manchukuo in the form of infrastructure and expanded agricultural and industrial production, but while the empire was in place the benefits of these developments were less clear. Japan’s modern economy, moreover, was still much too small to absorb the agricultural and artisanal production of the vast hinterland which Japan had acquired, especially with its Southeast Asian conquests. Establishing close connections between the Japanese economy and the economies of other regions was made still more difficult by wartime disruption, particularly American submarine activity in the South China Sea. As a result, vast plantation areas in Southeast Asia went to ruin because there was no market for their crops.\footnote{But even if the Sphere had worked more as it was intended, the result would hardly have been favourable for the durability of the empire, because Japan had in mind no more co-prosperity than would be created by centralizing industrial production in the north (that is Japan, Taiwan and Korea, with Manchukuo and North China) and leaving the outer colonies as producers of raw materials.}

NOTES

1. We would like to thank Mark Selden and an anonymous reviewer for their valuable comments on earlier drafts of this Introduction.

2. By the term ‘identity’ we refer to a sense of distinctiveness from others. All people operate, of course, with multiple identities, public and private, but our concern here is with those identities associated with ethnicity, territory and culture. We refer to this cluster of identifications as ‘national identities’, and we use this term, rather than ‘nationalism’, because it allows us to deal with more than one level of identity and with overlapping identities, whereas nationalism is generally understood to be exclusive and to operate only in relation to a (sometimes imagined)
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nation-state. In many definitions, too, nationalism implies a political programme, whereas national identity may or may not be linked to direct political aspirations. In some contexts, as in some chapters in this book, the two terms can be used almost interchangeably.

The role of Japanese actions in intensifying nationalism in the territories they occupied or how they may have changed the balance of power between various potential bearers of the nationalist banner is a complicated and controversial. In the case of China, there is a substantial literature arguing for and against the proposition that Japanese intervention was decisive in helping the Chinese communists to claim leadership of Chinese nationalist aspirations. This literature is ably summarized in the Epilogue of Mark Selden, China in Revolution: The Yanan Way Revisited (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1995), pp. 222–258.

Similar issues have been raised for Vietnam, where it has been suggested that Ho Chi Minh’s ability to cast himself as anti-French and anti-Japanese during the war years enabled him to become the main exponent of Vietnamese nationalism. Sukarno’s position in the Indonesian nationalist movement, on the other hand, is said to have been strengthened by the public prominence he achieved as a leading collaborator with the occupation authorities. In the case of Indonesia there has also been considerable discussion of the role of Japanese military training in shaping the political attitudes of the later Indonesian armed forces. On Vietnam, see David Marr, Vietnam 1945: The Quest for Power (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); on Indonesia, see J.D. Legge, Sukarno: A Political Biography (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972).

The defeat of the British, Americans and Dutch in Southeast Asia in 1941–1942, and the Japanese coup de force against the French in Indochina on 9 March 1945 had a similarly electrifying effect in those regions as demonstrations of the limits of Western power. The circumstances of war, however, gave Southeast Asians less opportunity to reflect on the nature of Japan’s power.


And when a separatist Republic of the South Moluccas was declared in 1950 it was widely assumed to be a puppet of the Dutch. Similar attitudes dismissed the viability of an independent East Timor after 1974.


9 See, for example, Mas Slamet, Japanese Souls in Indonesian Bodies (Batavia: s.n., 1946). For a more scholarly presentation of this argument, see Benedict R. O’G. Anderson, Some Aspects of Indonesian Politics under the Japanese Occupation, 1944–1945 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Department of Far Eastern Studies, 1961).


11 ‘The White Man’s Burden’ was the title of a poem written by the British arch-imperialist Rudyard Kipling to encourage the United States to establish colonial rule in the Philippines after the Spanish-American War of 1898. For the full text of the poem, see McClure’s Magazine 12 (Feb. 1899).


20. The same was formally the case in Portuguese Timor, but because of fighting on the island the Portuguese administration was largely confined to the capital, Dili.

21. Slovakia, Croatia and Vichy France were the archetypal puppet states of Nazi-occupied Europe, with the status of existing states which were forced into alliance with the Nazis (Denmark, Hungary and Bulgaria) considered to be more ambiguous.

22. Reliable population figures for the number of Mongols in Manchukuo are not available, but it appears that they may have numbered around one million out of a population of about 30 million in 1932. The other minorities numbered only a few tens of thousands. During the next decade, large numbers of Japanese and Koreans migrated to Manchukuo, and it has been estimated that their numbers had reached 1.5 million by 1945.


27. It is sometimes suggested that the Chinese tribute system also covered large parts of Southeast Asia, but this perception was more in the eye of the Chinese court than in the minds of the Southeast Asians.
There was also a Japanese discourse at that time which focused on Japan's alleged spiritual and cultural uniqueness and its qualities as a god-protected land, but this discourse was limited in its appeal to anyone who was not Japanese.

