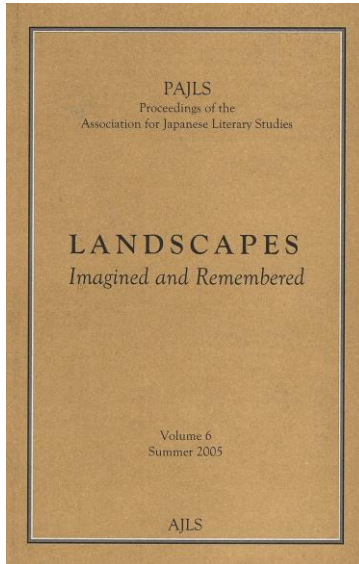


“‘Ideological Landscape’: Asianism (*kōa*) in 1880s Japan”

Atsuko Ueda 

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“Ideological Landscape”: Asianism (*kōa*) in 1880s Japan

Atsuko Ueda

Princeton University

This paper attempts to shed light on how Japan constructed the image of “Asia” (mainly China and Korea) in situating itself within the new world order specific to East Asia in the 1880s. In examining the early Meiji years, scholars often focus on de-Asianization (*datsu-a*), but this certainly did not mean that the call for Asianism (*kōa*) did not exist. In fact, it was everywhere. To grasp the forces that shaped Japan’s self-definition within East Asia, it is necessary to explore the foundation upon which both Asianism and de-Asianization were promoted. Ultimately, I believe that it is important for us to consider why “Asianism” did not and could not become a serious contender to de-Asianizing impulses prevalent at the time.

I will first map out the general paradigm that shaped a newly found geographical awareness, and then proceed with an analysis of how Asia was constructed in the 1880s by focusing on reports of the Imo Mutiny, which occurred in 1882, and the Sino-Franco War of 1883-1885. I will then extend my analysis to a fictional text that allegedly calls for Asianism, namely Komuro Shinsuke’s *Kōa kidan: Yume ren ren* (A Remarkable Story of Asianism: Dreams of Love, 1884), arguably the first work to thematize the ideal of “Asianism” in post-1868 Japan. As I will show, it is a text that embodies emerging colonial ambivalence, which is connected inextricably to Japan’s anxiety vis-à-vis its position in East Asia.

Although my discussion revolves around the new worldview that appeared in post-Meiji Restoration texts, it must be noted that the worldview began to shift long before the Restoration. As Yamamuro Shin’ichi points out, the worldview was one that the Japanese were familiar with through maps and travel writings of the seventeenth century, such as Matteo Ricci’s *Kon’yo bankoku zenzu* (The Comprehensive Map of All Countries of the World).¹ The new worldview brought with it a new way to categorize the world. In examining the new mode of categorization, it is important to note that the category of Asia (within which Japan found itself) was not a category created in the geographical topos of Asia, but one that was produced and introduced to Asia by Europe as its Other. In many ways, the mode of categorization was a means to produce “Europe” as a single collective. The many different steps “Europe” took to become a self-defined collective are rather complicated and

¹ Yamamuro Shin’ichi, *Shisō kadai to shite no Ajia: kijiku, rensa, tōki* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2001).

are beyond the scope of my project. What I want to emphasize here is that the gaze by which the world was configured had been formed elsewhere before it traveled to Asia, and that countries within Asia had to negotiate with this order to situate themselves within it.

The complexity of this world order is exemplified by the categories of *seiyō* and *tōyō* and the various processes of negotiations these terms went through to eventually signify “the West” (as Euro-America) and “the East” (as Asia). The sinified compounds *seiyō* and *tōyō* are originally Chinese and should be situated within the Sino-centric worldview and the way trade was conducted in China. At the end of the Ming period, *seiyō* signified the sea located to the west of the trade line that ran from Canton to Brunei, and then to Timor; *tōyō* signified east of the line. As time evolved, *tōyō* began to signify Japan, a small country in the Eastern Sea. Such usages began to shift with the encounter with Matteo Ricci’s map. Ricci’s efforts to use *seiyō* and *tōyō* and all their variations to translate the maps he brought to China are often understood as attempts to negotiate with the world order that the Chinese already had. He portrayed China at the center of the map and used *taiseiyō* for the Atlantic Ocean, referring to himself as a *taiseiyōjin* (a person from the Atlantic Ocean); *taiseiyō*, then, also signified “the further West,” relative to what the Chinese named the West of China (which he referred to as *shōseiyō*, denoting “the closer West”). In more ways than one, the new geography grew out of incessant negotiations with a paradigm of power that shaped the struggle between the European world order and Sino-centrism.

Japan also had to negotiate with such a power struggle. Eventually, through renaming and renegotiating at various levels, *seiyō* began to signify “the West” in Japan as one unified entity that sent missionaries to secluded Japan. Once this was established, it was very easy for the category *tōyō* to take on the meaning of Asia, “the East.” Inoue Tetsujirō claims that it was with Fukuzawa’s *Seiyō jijō* (The Condition of the West, 1866) that the term *seiyō* stabilized as an equivalent of “Euro-America” in Japan. Moreover, in so doing, *seiyō* not only signified the geographical region but also its civilization and culture; as it did so, the awareness that countries within *tōyō* constituted a common collective began to take form. Many claims of *dōbun* (common language) and *dōkyō* (common teachings/religion) were made as a result.

The shifting worldview that manifests itself in the terms *seiyō* and *tōyō* is much more complicated than I am able to discuss here; different maps named seas and regions differently, and political struggles led to further negotiations with newly imported maps and writings. But as a result of all these negotiations, *seiyō* and *tōyō* ultimately entered a co-figurative relationship (to borrow Naoki Sakai’s term). Co-figuration is a mechanism of semantic correlation by which a collective represents itself vis-à-vis the other.² In effect,

² Naoki Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity: On ‘Japan’ and Cultural Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 15-16.

seiyō (as the West) and *tōyō* (as the East) entered a relationship of equivalence: what is attributed to each collective should and must correspond with the other.

This relationship of equivalence is complicated by the Social Darwinian formula that proliferated in writings from the end of the Edo period through the Meiji period. Social Darwinism was a discourse of hierarchy that designated the West as *the* telos of evolution; hence, the most civilized forms of society, culture, and so on were associated with the West. For example, Fukuzawa Yukichi's *Sekai kunizukushi* (The Countries of the World, 1869) and Uchida Masao's *Yochi shiryaku* (An Abridged Account of the World, 1870), the two texts used as school textbooks to disseminate world geography, relied heavily on Darwinian rhetoric, designating Europe as the most "civilized" geographical region, while portraying Africa and Asian countries, such as India, as barbaric. In effect, learning geography through these texts meant internalizing the Social Darwinian hierarchy by setting the West as the model to follow.

Inscribed in the new geographical awareness is the new model of desire that inevitably results from the intersection between the relationship of equivalence and the Social Darwinian hierarchy. Equivalence cannot sustain itself and invariably produces "lack" and/or "excess." The standard of the "West-as-civilized" is used to "explain" this "lack" or "excess." In other words, the West-as-civilized becomes the dominant regulative idea by which to measure deviation.³ In this paradigm, the "lack" (or "excess") is inevitably attributed to the non-West, making the non-West strive harder to "Westernize." Yet the West is inherently inaccessible and thus the urge to become the West can only be frustrated. One way to relieve the frustration that arises from the new model of desire is to seek a more "barbaric" Other over which to claim superiority. If the Western is always inaccessible, the only way to access "the West" is to *act* like the West by discovering a more "barbaric" Other. Historically, the most obvious targets were the countries of East Asia. Japan, therefore, sought status as the leader of East Asia and as the most civilized nation in East Asia.

Of course, this does not mean that Japanese intellectuals were conscious of this model of desire, nor that they all began to discover "East Asia" as their more barbaric Other. At the conscious level, Japan's relationship with other East Asian countries, especially China, was ambivalent at best. For many, China, Japan's long-term mentor, was still very much an object of respect and

³ Sakai argues, "It is important to note that, through the representation of translation, the two unities are represented as two equivalents resembling one another. Precisely because they are represented in equivalence and resemblance, however, it is possible to determine them as conceptually different. . . . Just as in the co-figuration of 'the West and the Rest' in which the West represents itself, thereby constituting itself co-figuratively by representing the exemplary figure of the Rest, conceptual difference allows for the evaluative determination of the one term as superior over another." *Ibid.*, 16.

valorization. Yet the disintegration of Sino-centrism, a gradual process that began in part with the fall of the Ming and more decisively with the Opium War, had a strong effect on the Japanese view of China. In the early Meiji years, it was not unusual for a Japanese individual to harbor both respect and contempt for China.

With this complex model of desire and ambivalence in mind, I wish briefly to discuss how “Asia” was constructed in different newspapers in 1880s Japan. By 1881 or so, there was a rhetorically agreed-upon notion that Japan was the most civilized nation in Asia, a sentiment that gained widespread acceptance domestically among the *minken* (people’s rights) newspapers.⁴ (I say “rhetorically” agreed upon because it had to be insisted over and over again for it to be believed.) And this rhetoric was a ruler by which varying types of de-Asianization and Asianism were narrativized.

The tension between Japan and China intensified drastically when the Imo Mutiny erupted in Korea in 1882; anti-Chinese sentiments grew among the *minken* newspapers. Reactions to the Imo Mutiny, however, varied. *Jiyū shinbun* called for Japan to exercise force against the Korean government.⁵ *Chōya shinbun* argued for a mixed use of military and diplomatic policies to bring about “enlightenment” in Korea, while *Tōkyō nichi nichi shinbun* criticized the aggressive military policies advocated by more extreme newspapers such as *Hōchi shinbun*.⁶ In short, despite the common colonialist trope that situated Korea as inferior to Japan, the most advanced nation in East Asia, the newspapers were divided in the action they promoted immediately following the Imo Mutiny.⁷

In sharp contrast to the newspapers’ varied stance, the *minken* activists were nearly united in their anti-Chinese, anti-Korean position in the aftermath of the Kōshin Incident in December 1884. Numerous newspapers called for a military confrontation, and most argued for the immediate dispatch of forces to Korea. *Jiyū shinbun* went so far as to claim, “this is a great opportunity to display the strength of Japan’s military power and surprise the conceited white race.”⁸ *Chōya shinbun*, in a less emotional tone, argued for military attack in order to expand national rights.⁹ *Hōchi shinbun*, too, called for a war with China in order for Japan to gain the status of *ashū no meishu* (leader of

⁴ Shibahara Takuji, “Taigaikan to nashonarizumu,” compiled in *Taigaikan, Nihon kindai shisō taikai*, vol. 12 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1988), 504.

⁵ Okunomiya Kenshi, “Seikanron,” *Jiyū shinbun* (2 and 4 August 1882). There is ambivalence, however, even among *Jiyū shinbun* writers: for example, a column titled “Chōsen no henpō,” which overlaps with Okunomiya’s “Seikanron” in serialization, argues that a victory against a small country like Korea would not bring any merit to Japan because Korea’s state corresponded roughly to Japan’s “Tokugawa era.” *Jiyū shinbun* (1-2 August 1882).

⁶ *Chōya shinbun* (10 May 1882) and *Tōkyō nichi nichi shinbun* (8 August 1882).

⁷ See, for example, “Chōsen shisetsu no raichaku,” *Jiyū shinbun* (14 October 1882), which describes Koreans as “uncivilized men” who ought to be “educated” by the Japanese.

⁸ “Nihonhei no buryoku o unai ni shimesu beshi,” *Jiyū shinbun* (27 December 1884).

⁹ “Waga hō no Shina ni taisuru seiryaku ikan,” *Chōya shinbun* (21 December 1884).

Asia).¹⁰ Such a range of responses prompts the question of why their reactions were so different from those following the Imo Mutiny only two years earlier. For one thing, this was the second time that Japan's rhetorical claim as the leader of Asia was being questioned. Perhaps the more significant factor, though, was the fact that the Sino-Franco War (1883-1885) erupted during the time between the Imo Mutiny and the Kapsin Incident as a result of competing claims to Annam (present-day Vietnam).

To discuss the importance of the Sino-Franco conflict, I wish to focus on *Jiyū shinbun*'s reports on the conflict. This is partly due to the overwhelming amount of material, but also because *Yume ren ren*, to which I will turn after my discussion of the Sino-Franco War, was serialized in *Jiyū shinbun* from 6 April to 18 June 1884 as the newspaper was, incidentally, filled with reports of the Sino-Franco War. Serialization, then, paralleled the intensity with which *Jiyū shinbun* covered the Sino-Franco conflict. As the serialization progresses, so do the anti-Chinese sentiments and the aggressive stance against Qing China in favor of France, creating, at least on the surface, a strange juxtaposition between reports that propagate anti-Chinese sentiments and a work of fiction that calls for Asian consolidation.

Despite Japan's claim that it was the most civilized country in East Asia, China was a serious contender for this status. As the column "Annan no senpō" (War Reports of Annam, 13 June 1883) shows, in fighting against the French, Chinese forces at first appeared much more capable than expected. Accordingly, in 1883 the threat of Chinese expansion of military power in East Asia was more palpable than ever.¹¹ As if to alleviate growing anxiety about Japan's self-professed status, *Jiyū shinbun* began to side with France by mid-1883. Its reasoning was simply that "France is a republic," as opposed to the "barbaric" autocratic government of China.¹² It is clear, however, that the threat of China aroused strong resentment toward China and produced in Japan an unfounded sense of superiority and a strong sense of identification with France. When China suffered an interim loss in May 1884 as it was forced to sign the Tientsin Treaty, *Jiyū shinbun* found a prime opportunity to devalue China. In "Shinfutsu no wa" (Sino-Franco Alliance), a column introducing the Tientsin Treaty to the readership, *Jiyū shinbun* described Chinese incompetence in a strongly derogatory manner.¹³ Thus, we find an increasing contempt for China coupled with an increasing trend to side with France, which marks an effort to rhetorically produce a sentiment of Japan's equivalence with France.

¹⁰ Ozaki Gakudō, "Shina to tatakau no rigai o renzu," compiled in *Ozaki Gakudō zenshū*, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Kōronsha, 1956), 161.

¹¹ See, for example, "Shinkoku heisei," *Jiyū shinbun* (16-25 October 1883) and "Nisshin no kankei," *Jiyū shinbun* (3 November 1883).

¹² "Rō narukana sensei seifu no ken," *Jiyū shinbun* (26 June 1883).

¹³ *Jiyū shinbun* (17 May 1884).

Komuro Shinsuke's *Yume ren ren* was serialized in *Jiyū shinbun* precisely when the anti-Chinese, pro-French sentiments grew in intensity. Let us now look at the story closely and see how such sentiments are inscribed in the story. The narrative, set in China, begins around 1830 with the birth of the hero, Raishun. He is born when lightning strikes the tomb of a Japanese woman, Raishun's mother, who drifted ashore on the eastern coast of China after a shipwreck and died during the last days of her pregnancy. Raishun ultimately grows up to be a man whose natural grandeur is recognized by everyone – even by his adversaries. His training in the Chinese classics is recognized as he begins correspondence with Lin Zexu (Rin Sokujo in the Japanese rendering), who is extremely impressed with Raishun's knowledge and intelligence. In the meantime, Raishun also learns “Western learning” from an American missionary who is appropriately impressed with his intelligence as well. The main plot features a kind of adventure story that revolves around his trip as he sets out to visit Lin Zexu in Beijing.

As Lin Zexu is introduced, the story features the binary between Qing China and Britain: Lin Zexu is portrayed favorably as the “righteous” man who fought against the “wrongs” of the British during the Opium War. The binary, therefore, is between the good Lin Zexu (who stood up for the country) and the evil British. This binary shifts as the Taiping Rebellion and Hong Xiuquan (Kō Shūzen) enter the story. The British are no longer evil – they are replaced by Hong Xiuquan – and the emergence of this new evil is accompanied by the rhetoric of government corruption (*kan no fuhai*) and a representation of the people of China as having “the tendency to be lowly and slave-like” (*hikutsu dorei no fūshū*). Accordingly, the underlying logic of the narrative is that the “evil” of Hong Xiuquan and the movement cannot be put down because of government corruption and the lowliness of its people. As Raishun discusses the need for reform, his comrades come up with the perfect solution: Raishun will become the leader of their cause to suppress the Taiping Rebellion.

What is extremely important is that Raishun, the natural leader, the man with grandeur that everyone recognizes, is Japanese: he is the one designated to correct the wrongs of the government and direct the people out of their slave-like existence. During Raishun's youth, the monk who raises him sees him grow up to be a courageous fighter and thinks, “I heard that Japan had long been a land that respects martial arts and upholds justice and courage [*giyū*]. If a child of an unknown woman is this brave and heroic, a man born into a respected warrior family would be more so; it is no wonder that Japan produces courageous and intelligent men.” Raishun's natural grandeur is thus attributed to his “Japanese heritage,” and this makes him the most appropriate person to direct the Chinese to fight against the corrupt authorities of the Qing government.

Interestingly, the representation of the British as the original colonizing agent disappears rather quickly within the story. Government corruption and Hong Xiuquan quickly become Japan's enemies in the text. In fact, as the narrative progresses, we begin to get a rather favorable view of the British. In one of his many adventures, Raishun meets a pirate named Sai Shiryō. Impressed by Raishun's grandeur, Sai decides to show him his treasures: military weapons that he stole from a British ship a few days before he met Raishun. Raishun describes Sai's thieving success as "one great feat of justice" (*ichidai gikyo*). Later, when Raishun is captured by the British, even his captors recognize his natural brilliance (they are more impressed when they discover that Raishun can speak English). More importantly, Raishun is impressed with both British machinery and the way that he is treated by the British, and begins to regret that he evaluated Sai's act as "one great feat of justice." The British captain treats Raishun fairly and strictly adheres to the laws that bind him, eventually handing Raishun over to the Qing government. Raishun thus concludes that not only are the British more advanced in science, but they are superior in their emotions (*jō*) as well. The shock is even greater after he is turned over to the Qing authorities, who imprison him without much investigation. Raishun says, "I see the clear discrepancy of the political and legal systems between the West and the East. I grieve over how flawed our political system is and am angered by how deficient is our military capacity." Coincidentally, this section was serialized three days before "Shinfutsu no wa," the article that introduces the Tientsin Treaty and expresses a great measure of disdain for the Chinese.

The story goes on a little longer, but it is incomplete. It ends as Raishun finds a woman destined to be his wife and his partner in the quest to reform China. The narrator tells us that this woman is in fact a Chinese woman who was taken away on foreign ships as a slave at a young age. She was saved by a French philanthropist and was educated in France. Ultimately, Raishun and his Chinese wife "achieve a great feat by bringing success to Asia and warding off Europe."

Despite *Yume ren ren's* call for Asianism, the hierarchical structure developed for representations of Japan and China remains constant and becomes the yardstick by which Asianism is promoted. In this text, Raishun, a Japanese, embodies the potential for reform. Rather conveniently, Raishun never meets Lin Zexu, a meeting that was the initial objective of his trip to Beijing. If such a rendezvous had taken place, it would inevitably have led to a debate over Raishun's goals and methodology. Moreover, Raishun himself never questions his Japanese origins (the narrative voice within the text reminds us repeatedly that he is Japanese, but it is not a topic that is discussed by the characters themselves); this is a topic that would have extended discussions of the relationship between Qing China and Japan, and Japan's position in the power politics of mid-nineteenth century East Asia. Instead, the

text silently aligns Raishun's Japanese origin with the natural grandeur and righteousness he embodies. On top of all this, the text unites China and Japan in the form of a love marriage that appears to signify Asian consolidation. Not only is there a feminization of China in this union, but the basic structure of this masculinized/feminized form is never questioned, because it is, figuratively, a marriage.

It may be argued that the Japanese anxiety that arose with the Sino-Franco War finds solace in rhetorical fulfillment: given the inability of anyone to substantiate the claim that Japan is the leader of East Asia, *Yume ren ren* seeks relief in fictionally configuring an ideal in which Japan unconditionally (and "naturally") posits itself as a leader. Works such as this, often grouped as *kokken shōsetsu* (translated as *shōsetsu* of "national rights"), continued to be produced. Fujita Mokichi's *Saimin igyōroku* (A Great Feat of a Savior), for example, features a very similar hero: the savior here, though born and raised in China, is in fact of Japanese descent. Asianism promoted by works such as *Yume ren ren* could not contend seriously against the forces of de-Asianization. In fact, these two theories supplemented one another in the manifestation of colonial ambivalence.