Showa Japan and the Concept of “Toa”

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I. Toa

The reason that I used “Toa” instead of “East Asia” in this article is not to lose the former’s historical implications. In Japan, a book with a somewhat interesting title was recently published—The Idea of Toa. On the term Toa, the author does not approve its historical implications, but uses it as “a geographical term equal to East Asia comprising north-east Asia and south-east Asia.” Setting aside its historical implication, he perceives the concept “Toa” as interchangeable with “East Asia.” All this points to the ambiguities inherent in present Japan’s approach to “Toa” and “East Asia” from the geographical perspective. Is “Toa” a geographical term interchangeable with “East Asia”?

As Chinese characters have strong symbolic meanings, changes of meaning could be made simply by replacing a character or two, and in this sense historical implications could be easily lost. For example, the replacement of Sina with Chugoku after the war produced an illusion that Japan’s attitude towards China has been changed. Yet in such expressions as ‘Sina’, ‘Sina-jin’ and ‘Sina-gaku’ inscribed modern Japan’s perception of China. Even if they are replaced

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by ‘Chugoku’, ‘Chugoku-jin’, and ‘Chugoku-gaku’, historical implications imbedded in the previous terms should not be lost. The same explanation can be made about the term “Toa.” “Toa” is a concept closely related to the history of Imperial Japan until 1945. Not only “Toa” but also “Ajia” and “Toyo” have the same implications. With these terms, Japanese people in the first half of the twentieth century established their view of East Asia or Asia, and provided motives for their foreign affairs. “Toa” and other terms like “Toyo” are historical concepts: not just geographical ones.

The subject in question, along with the concept of “Toa,” is Japan’s view of Asia. By questioning this, I would like to show whether the replacement of “Toa” by “East Asia” which occurred from 1945, in fact, signified a change in Japan’s view of Asia; what has changed and what has not; what was lost and what was not; what were left behind and what were the new concerns, etc. By doing this, I would like to explain Japan’s current position towards East Asia at the time of historical turning-point.

Considering that I am discussing this subject in Seoul, I would like to stress that my discussion of the term “Toa” should be made on the basis of the historical experience of the Japanese people. The question of Asia could and should not be discussed apart from Japan’s historical experience in the twentieth century. My report was thus prepared by relating historical reflections on the concept of “Toa” in Japan to the debates on East Asian studies.

II. “Toa” in the Context of Cultural History

Since 1930s the term “Toa” took more of political nuances. Yet previous implications related to cultural history or the history of civilization still remained as was seen in Okakura Tensin’s definition of “Toyo” as a type of civilization. Such cultural concepts of “Toa” were

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2. Okakura Tensin’s *Toyo no riso* (The Ideas of East with Special Reference to the Art of Japan, London, 1903), which became famous for the statement “Asia is one,” defined “Toyo” as comprising Indian-Chinese civilization. It does not mean, however, “Toyo” or “Toa” is a cultural term irrelevant to the imperialist Japan. These are essentially geopolitical terms closely related to the vision of
produced in the academic discourses on the history of Toa arts, the history of Toa civilization, and the Toa archeology in Showa Japan. For example Hamada kosaku (seiryo) 햄다 코스aku (세리요), president of Kyoto Imperial University and archaeologist, entitled his book outlining Toa archaeology with The Dawn of Toa Civilization. In the introduction, he explains his interests in “the history of Toa civilization” as follows:

With China at the center, the Korean peninsula and the Japanese Islands are both located to the east of China, and thus have formed a closely related cultural unit since the ancient times. There remain questions to be solved, however, such as: how did this Toa civilization occur; how was it transmitted to the whole region; or when did it happen. I would like to explain from an archaeological perspective the roots of Korea/Japan, that is, Toa civilization with China at the center.

In this book written from the perspective of cultural history or the history of civilization, “Toa” is geographically defined. It covers from China as the source of this civilization, to Korea and Japan which share the same civilization with China. This area might be called Chinese civilization. Hamada, however, calls it “Toa civilization” instead of “China civilization.” “History of Toa civilization” therefore shows various academic perspectives produced in the countries surrounding China: the perspectives of history, archaeology, culture, history of art, etc. In the beginning of the twentieth century, it was Japan who developed these modern academic perspectives, and therefore Japan first devised the conception of “Toa” in the context of cultural history and the history of civilization. Hamada, who devised the term “Toa archaeology,” thus was the first person who founded modern archaeology at Kyoto University.

The notion of “Toa” in the context of the history of civilization raises

imperialist Japan.

3. Hamada Seiryo, Kokogakujo yori mitaru Toabunmei no reimei (The Beginning of East Asian civilization from the standpoint of archeology), Sogensha, 1939. This book was based on the special lecture series given at Kyoto Imperial University in November 1928.

4. Ibid., Introduction, Articles 2-3.
some important questions. First of all, “Toa civilization” is a term to replace “Chinese civilization.” The term of course was devised by “Japanese Orientalism” pursuing to go beyond Asia. At the same time, however, “Toa” was a term to refute Sinocentrism, and therefore it, as a cultural term, supports pluralistic cultural development in the region. “The History of Toa Buddhism,” for example, deals with the diffusion of Buddhism from the India-South Sea Empire, to Indochina, and from Xizang·Xi·Yü through China-Mongolia-Manchuria to Korea-Japan. This book discusses the development of Buddhism in this vast area at diverse eras from a pluralistic perspective. With this cultural pluralism implied by “Toa” in mind, I would like to comment on the debates on “Toa studies” in progress here in Seoul or the debates on “Toa Confucianism” raised by the Taipei Symposium, and I will do it in a little while. After all, the term “Toa” in cultural sense was devised by the academic society of Imperial Japan, and therefore it was soon dominated by political implications that the Imperial Japan sought through the term of “Toa” or “Dai-toa.”

III. The Idea of “Toa Communal Society”

To describe the process in which “Dai-toa War” formed terms like  "Toa","Dai-toa","Toyo" and “Dai-ajia,” let me quote a Japanese social scientist.

5. Kanayama Shoko’s Toibukkyo (History of Buddhism in East Asia, Risosha, 1942) makes a periodization to discuss the subject. The Fifth Period (901-1260), for example, is composed of chapters such as ‘The Decline of Indian Buddhism and the Rise of South Sea Buddhism,’ ‘The Development of Lamaism,’ ‘Various Sects in Wudai-Songdai,’ ‘The Buddhist Classics in Wudai-Songdai,’ ‘The Denominations in Wudai-Songdai,’ ‘The Buddhism during Liao·Jin’ and ‘The Buddhism in Korea-Xixia and Other Regions.’

6. A research project on “modern Toa Confucianism” led by professor Huang Jun-jie at the University of Taiwan is in progress. The approach implied by “Toa Confucianism” comprises the Confucianism of China, Joseon and Japan, and describes Confucianism from a relative position rather than from the perspective of cultural monism. I am very much interested in this project and another one in progress in Taiwan, called “Taiwanese Confucianism.”
How could we put together Toa comprising Japan/Manchuria/China, Dai-toa including Nanyo, and other people including Indians; and lead them to fight against the invasion by Anglo-Americans? Japan has embodied the essence of 3000 year-old oriental civilization, formed a nation right in the middle of the continental civilization of China and India and the oceanic civilization of the Pacific Ocean (including the Indian Ocean and the South Sea), incorporated western culture and science in modern times, united eastern and western civilizations together, and thereby became the central power in the orient. Japan therefore is entitled to provide a vision and a blueprint for the future of the oriental civilization.\footnote{Hirano Yoshitaro, Daiatijiaishugi no rekishteki kiso (Historical foundation of great asianism, Kadodeshobo, 1945, Article 6.) Hirano was a Marxist social-scientist specializing in Chinese socio-economic history. During the war, he argued for Asia-centrism; after the war, he became an active pacifist and a theorist in the Communist Party.}

It is clearly shown in this quote that, with the outbreak of the imperialistic war, Japan’s strategic vision would be expanded and a regional concept would be devised. The new strategic concept of Asia would redefine Okakura’s “Toyo” used in the context of the history of civilization and Japan’s position in the history of oriental civilization. As Hirano Yoshitaro who spoke the citation above pointed out, political terms to designate a region like “Toa” and “Dai-toa” were devised with the outbreak of Pacific War in 1941 and with the expansion of the battle front towards the south. It is not correct to consider the political term of “Toa” as originating from the Asia-centric discourses in modern Japanese history.\footnote{The genealogical research on the political conception of “Toa” failed to reveal the influence of the war on the reconstruction of domestic/foreign perspectives. The war created a political and at the same time an academic view called geopolitics. Both “Toa geopolitics” and “Dai-toa geopolitics” were established after the war. Professor Komaki Saneshige in geography at Kyoto Imperial University wrote: “In oriental tradition, geography has been a practical science, crucial to politics. Therefore, we should not be satisfied with translating German works of geopolitics; rather we should make an effort to create a new geopolitics native to our tradition.” (Introduction, Yonkura Jiro, Noteisigaku - josetsu (Introduction to East Asian Geopolitics), Seikatsusha, 1941) Komaki wrote this in May 1941 (Showa 16), which was right before the outbreak of the}
and the rest of Asia put existing ideologies together to form a new one—concepts of “Toa” and “Dai-toa.” The new “Toa” implied a new order of Toa, and developed into the idea of “Toa communal society.”

“War shows the direction of the change that had begun earlier, and also determines it. With the development of war, the situation becomes clear and the course of history then becomes perceivable.”

This is a quote from The Ideal of Toa Communal Society; written by a sociologist. It shows that the doctrine of Toa communal society was a discourse produced after the war broke out, and designed to legitimize it. As the Chino-Japanese War broke out unexpectedly, it pressed scholars and elites to devise a theoretical justification of the war. Most of the writings regarding “Toa communal society” were thus retrospective discourses on the war. Ozaki Hotsumi, a specialist in contemporary China, puts it as follows: “‘Toa communal society’ is a historical product formed in the process of Japan-China Incident to establish a ‘new order’ in reality.”

What Ozaki called ‘new order’ here was based on prime minister’s statement made after the capture of Wuhan in November 1938—that is, the “Toa new order” statement in which he declared, “what the Empire seeks is to establish the new order, which would lead to permanent security in Toa. Jiang Jie-shi immediately refuted this argument by saying “the construction of a new order called Toa is nothing but a nickname for the annexation of China.”

Nevertheless, as if to follow the statement, the idea of “Toa communal society” and the new

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10. Ozaki Hotsumi, “Toakyodotai no rinen to sono kyakkantekina kiso (Ideal and Objective Foundation of Toa Communal Society),” in the Gendaishinaron (Discussion of modern China), Keisoshobo, 1964, p.194. Ozaki’s article appeared in the 1930 November issue of ‘Chuokoron.’ Ozaki, who would be executed in November 1944 for being involved in the Sorge Affair, says in this article, “the current Toa Communal Society could not be established without voluntary and active participation of Chinese people. (Ibid., p.200).
order of world rapidly evolved in Japan. This ‘new order’ was the answer to the existing ‘old order of world’ devised by western imperialist powers to rule the world, and at the same time was a request to reorganize the latter. Replacing the ‘old order of world,’ the communal world of Toa would serve as the basis of the new order. The doctrine of “Toa communal society” was thus formulated.

The argument for ‘new order’ to form “Toa communal society” thus supports Japan’s imperialistic move in East Asia to establish supremacy, and legitimizes a holy war by the joint force of Japan/Manchuria/China against Britain and the United States. The argument allows Japan, an advanced nation in Asia but less-advanced as an imperialist nation, to pretend to be a representative of undeveloped Asian peoples’ desire for independence, and thereby restructures the world order. In the work to devise a theoretical justification of the war against China, participated a wide range of people: those who supported Asia-centrism, historical philosophers influenced by Nishida’s philosophy, historians and politicians of academism, literary people of Japanese romanticism, and Marxist social-scientists specializing in China and Asia. In other words, a vast number of scholars and elites in early Showa were involved in this. Therefore we, considering the issue of Asia from Japan, must analyze the idea of “Toa communal society” carefully enough not to allow the same type of idea comes again. The fact that a lot of scholars and elites in Showa experienced the Asia by participation in producing this idea, should be memorized as negative heritage for us. The idea of “Toa communal society” in this sense was the first historical experience in which the majority of contemporary Japanese scholars/elites participated in order to produce a theoretical foundation for the issue of Asia. The idea therefore poses various questions towards those who attempts to keep it from reappearing.  

It would be enough to quote a brief passage which reveals the logic and the questions inherent in the idea of “Toa communal society.” We need to note the way in which imperialist Japan’s pursuit for supremacy

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12. The theory of “Toa Communal Society” called for the reconsideration of various issues. It proposed to ‘overcome the modernity’ through a critique of European modernity, to restructure the world by establishing large-unit area with a pluralistic concept, and to analyze the oriental society historically and sociologically.
leads to the holy war to establish a new world order.

The construction of “Toa communal society” would be possible by making Manchuria an area for heavy-industry, China for light-industry, and Japan for advanced-industry. This idea was necessitated by the development of war, and by the historical inevitability. Japan’s worries to shake off poverty, or China’s anxiousness to achieve a unified nation-state through modernization would be solved by this cooperation between Japan and China. When this cooperation becomes complete, the order of capitalism and communism in the old world would be replaced by the order of nation-states in the Orient.13

IV. From “Toa” to “Dai-toa”

The outbreak of “Dai-toa War” extended “Toa” to “Dai-toa.” This extension was caused by the strategic extension of imperialist policies towards the South Pacific region. This strategic extension resulting from military purposes required scholars to devise theories to justify it. Yano Jinichi, the most exemplary of these scholars, defines the history of Dai-toa as follows:

The boundary of the history of Dai-toa coincide with that of Dai-toakyoeki (the mutual prosperity Area of Great East Asia.) With Japan at the center, it include those people around China—the previous center in East Asian history—, who had been under the influence of China’s politics and culture, and the people in south who had been influenced by India and the Arabs, rather than China, in economics, religion and culture.14

To answer the question “How to write the History of Dai-toa?,”

14. Yano Jinichi, Dai-toaishiti no koso (An Idea of Dai-toasa), Meguroshoten, 1944. The author explains that this title was specified by the authorities as he took on the lectures on culture hosted by the Ministry of Education at Hiroshima University in 1943. The subtitle of this book is ‘questions on the outline of Dai-toa history, its people, and its culture.’ Yano, professor at Kyoto Imperial University, was a government-patronized scholar specializing in Chinese studies, and was an active writer/speaker during the war.
Yano had to fix the boundary of Dai-toa, and in doing this he displayed that historians’ research was not too different from politicians’ work of justification. “History of Dai-toa” is an extended version of “the history of Toa.” As a scholar of China studies, Yano calls this extension a geo-historical one by which countries and people both within and without the range of China’s influence—such as the people in “Nampo area”—was incorporated. By the people in “Nampo area,” he meant those conquered, oppressed and shackled by western imperialist powers.

To be more specific, the countries in “Nampo area” were the colonies of Britain, the United States, and Netherlands in the South Pacific. The extension of Japan’s imperialistic vision towards these countries was a novel experience for Japan itself. “Nampo area” emerged as a new component in Japan’s perception of the outer world. Toa, combined with “Nampo area,” became Dai-toa. Dai-toa then became an ideology through a dichotomous logic such as west vs. east, colonialism vs. nationalism or subjugation vs. independence. Japan had already created “Toa communal society” and claimed itself to be the fictitious leader; now it was about to repeat the same logical process on an international scale.

“Nampo area” in this way became the focus of imperialist Japan’s strategy and perception. 15 “Nampo area,” on the other hand, is distinguished from “Japan/Manchuria/China,” which was identified with Japan and thus considered as the inner part. “Nampo area,” instead, was considered as the “outer part within Asia.” It means that imperialist Japan was planning to redefine Asia as Dai-toa including “Nampo area.” Even after the term “Dai-toa” vanished, this new definition of Asia survived.

“Dai-toakyoeiken” was an ideal formed through the extension of

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15. As Japan extended its colonist vision towards nampo, a new conception of Asia was required, and various epistemological problems turned up. All these result from the extension of Japan’s domination beyond Manju, Joseon and Taiwan which had already been incorporated into Japan’s territory. First of all, beside the national language, the Japanese language needed to be taught. Other issues also emerged, which influenced Japan’s perception of the rest of the world. On the question of the Japanese language, see Koyasu, “A Critique of the International/Japanese Language” in What is the Doctrine of Multi-language?, Fujiwara Press, 1997.
Japan’s strategic and conceptual interests towards “Nampo area.” This ideal was utilized to extend the concept of “new order of Toa” to “Dai-toa.” Yet the extension to “Nampo area” also reinforced the imperialistic logic of “new order of Toa.” Japan now proclaimed as the ideal of “kyoeiken ãит” the independence of Asian countries from the colonial rule of Britain and the United States, and the cooperation among them. The Joint Statement of Toa at the Conference of Toa held in Tokyo in 1943 explained this as follows:16

The fundamental principle to establish world peace is that all countries obtain what they deserve, depend on one another and help each other to attain mutual prosperity. Britain and the United States, however, oppress other countries for their prosperity, exploit and enslave Dai-toa in particular, and thereby destroy the security in Toa. Here are the reasons for the “Dai-toa War.” Countries in Toa should cooperate to win the war, free themselves from the shackles, construct Dai-toa based on the principles mentioned above, and thereby establish world peace.

This statement manifested five principles, the second of which reads as follows: “Every country in Toa, respect other’s independence, achieve mutual aid/friendlinessû»ð¾ÔÄÙÎ, and establish peace in Toa.” The fifth reads as follows: “Every country in Toa extend its companionship to the rest of the world, abolish racial discriminations, share culture with others, open one’s resources, and thereby contribute to the progress of the world.”17

The Conference of Toa, in fact, was convoked to extort cooperation for the war turning unfavorable from the participants including “nanpo area” which was the outer part within Asia. Nevertheless, it had to announce ‘independence’ and ‘the abolition of racial discriminations.’ In

16. Dai-toa Conference was held in Tokyo on November 5-6, 1943 (Showa 18). In this conference, participated representatives from Japan, Manchuria, Thailand, Philippines, Burma and the Wang Jo-myeeongûï government of China.
In this sense, the joint statement was an irony which Japan cast against Britain and the United States from the viewpoint of Asian.

Yet the fallacious ideal of “Dai-toa kyoeiken” could not mask the nature of imperialistic war. What the war of imperialist Japan, the Dai-toa War, left to the countries and the people in Asia was nothing but the distrust of Japan, the self-professed leader.

V. Is “Toa” Dead and “East Asia” Born?

The defeat in 1945 meant the decline of ideas such as “new order of Toa” or “Dai-toa kyoeiken.” “Toa” as a political term to designate a region is dead. With its death, was the new conception of “East Asia” born to replace it?

After the war, it would be accurate to say that Japan suspended any official judgment on the Asian issue, rather than it checked itself from having a perspective towards Asia and East Asia in particular. At this time of holding official judgment, the Cold War era begun in East Asia. Then the only option for Japan towards East Asia was to follow the decisions of America. Even after Japan came back to international society, it sought nothing more than a gradual recovery of foreign relations with Asian countries. It was not different in the relations with China and Korea to whom Japan inflicted most severe damages. Japan did not attempt to build a new relationship with those nations by clearing off the past on the government level. The result of this attitude is the recurrence of the distorted historical accounts.

“East Asia” points to the region of Asia with which Japan has been holding the attempt to rebuild a new relationship. In other words, “East Asia” was a region lost for Japan. Instead of “East Asia,” new concept of Asia with a focus on South-East Asia emerged with Japan’s economic recovery and its return to the position of international power. “East Asia” then became the key word in regional studies.

On the damages inflicted by the Dai-toa War on South-East Asia, see Goto Kenichi, Kindai nihon to tonanajia-nanshin no shogeki to isan (Modern Japan and Southern Asia - Shock and Inheritance of Invasion toward the South), Iwanami Shoten, 1995.
Yet the decline of the Cold War era since the end of 1980s resulted in the reorganization of international order. To find an appropriate position in this new order, “Asia” came back to the center of debates. The current movement towards reorganization of world order at the turn of the century implies changes in the nation-oriented relations which characterized the world order during the twentieth century. The movement awakens nationalism on the one hand, and urges a reorganization in Asia and East Asia based on international blocks. This tendency is clearly expressed by the recent surge of terms like nationalism and “Asia” as hot issues in Japan. As long as Japan, who watched the death of “Toa,” does not attempt to clear it off, conceptualization of a new term like “East Asia” seems out of the question.

As we have watched the death of “Toa” as a political term to designate a region, it is time to produce another concept, “East Asia,” for ourselves. For this purpose, I would like to go back to “Toa” as a cultural term. “Toa” in the context of cultural history aims to relativize Sinocen-

19. Socio-economic studies on South-East Asia led by Asiakeizaikenkyusho have been encouraged as a matter of national policy, and obtained considerable results. Tonanasiakenkyusho at Kyoto University has recently established ‘South-East Asian Studies’ and published Lectures on South-East Asian Studies (10 Volumes, Kobundo).

trism. While it acknowledges that its culture originated from China, it encourages the development of multi-national culture. In this sense, “Toa” goes beyond its cultural implication to take on a wider meaning: politically, as well, it refutes ethnocentrism to a certain extent. The term thus provides us with an insight to formulate “East Asia” as a regional concept.

It means to define “East Asia” as a regional term signifying the multi-layered and diverse exchanges among the residents of this region. By understanding the term in a wider sense based on cultural consensus, we could relativize ethnocentrism and make the term applicable to various areas of life from economy to culture, and to various spaces of exchange. Then the term would highlight not the relations among nations but the exchanges among people. This is how to make a new “East Asia” for ourselves out of “Toa” soiled by the hegemonism of imperialist Japan.

Glossary

Dai-toa グラッド東アジア
Dai-toakyoeiken セガッソ東アジア共栄圏
Koyasu Nobukuni 以下 Nobukuni
Nampo サブノース
Nanyo サブヨーソース
Toa communal society チャイナ東アジア共同体
Toyo オーオー東

21. Tosa Masaki’s remarks are very suggestive: “The commerce forces us to check ethnocentrism with precaution. In pre-war Japan, for example, the coexistence of multiple people has been apparently emphasized due to presence of the alien people within its territory. Iran’s doctrine of “anti-secularism, too, restrain the tendency of self-praise in consideration of other Islamic nations. “Asia,” in this sense, is a rhetoric produced by the negotiation between ethnocentric tendency and the consideration of international circumstances, and by the complex interrelationship in real politics. “kankoku no hanajateki paradaimu,” Ajia teki kachi towa nanika.