Japanese Perspectives on the Time/Space of 'Early Modernity'

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> Periodization is indispensable for history. To mark off a period, that is, to assign a beginning and an end, is to comprehend the significance of events.
> -- Karatani Kojin[2]

In recent years, Anglo-American historians of Tokugawa Japan (1600-1868) have begun quietly dropping the terms "premodern" and "feudal" to describe their period of interest, embracing instead the phrase "early modern."[3] What this shift signifies is not altogether clear, for early modernity is an ambiguous and contentious concept.[4] For some in the Japan field, it may simply be a useful approximation for the Japanese term *kinsei* (literally "recent centuries"). For others, it may signal a sense that Tokugawa society was at an early stage of "modernization." But a significant number of scholars have evidently embraced this rubric for a third reason: as a way to locate Japan in a broader global chronology. To the extent that the locution "early modern Japan" has gained popularity in recent decades, it would seem to suggest a desire to engage with the histories (and historians) of other parts of the world.[5]

Traditionally, the main avenue for such engagements has been comparative history. In practice, this has often meant measuring Japan's historical trajectory against one or another European-derived model of development.[6] While such exercises are always problematic, they have had the considerable merit of engendering productive discussions with scholars in other fields. Consider, for instance, the long-running debate over Japanese "feudalism." Whatever one concluded about its applicability to the Tokugawa political system, this debate had the merit of

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[2] From "The Discursive Space of Modern Japan." Karatani 1991:193.

[3] The first such usage is Hall and Jansen 1968. Recent books featuring "early modern Japan" in the title include Brown 1993, Elison 1986, Hall 1991, Janetta 1987, McClain *et al.* 1994, Totman 1993, Vaporis 1994, Wakabayashi 1986, and numerous others.

[4] For sharply contrasting views of the utility of "early modern" as a concept in world historical periodization, compare Bentley 1996 with Goldstone 1998.

[5] See, for instance, the contributions of two leading *kinsei* scholars to a special issue of *Daedalus* devoted to "early modernities": Berry 1998, Howell 1998. For articulations of the comparative optic that informs the *Daedalus* collection, see Wittrock 1998, Eisenstadt and Schluchter 1998. David Howell also organized an earlier SSRC-sponsored symposium at Princeton University, entitled "What's 'early modern' and what's 'Japanese' about 'early modern Japan'?," which provided the original inspiration for this essay.

[6] For a strident critique of such Eurocentric practices, see Frank 1998. For an extensive definition and spirited defense of the comparative method in history, see Goldstone 1991: 39-62.

putting Japanese history in a comparative framework, engaging Japanese historians in dialogue with the histories of medieval Europe.[7]

Yet such a formulation implied *comparison* without *connection*. Indeed, to call Tokugawa Japan "feudal" meant to place Japanese developments alongside European events *from a different era*, thus ensuring that firm boundaries would be retained around these respective domains of analysis. The formulation "Early Modern Japan" has the potential to accomplish something very different. The notion of early modernity performs a function like that which Karatani Kojin ascribes to the Christian calendar: both serve "to make explicit the fact that each nation's 'era/world' is only a communal, illusory space, and that a plurality of worlds (eras/worlds) exists simultaneously, maintaining relations with one another."[8] By putting Japanese history in the same time-frame as the rest of the world,[9] it suggests the possibility of transcending parochial boundaries in a different way, opening up vistas on transnational linkages. It implies that the Tokugawa experience may be not only compared, but also connected.[10]

In one sense, connected histories are nothing new. They have a distinguished pedigree among those who study diplomacy, trade, migration, missions, and the like -- subjects with an obvious international dimension. But for Japan during the so-called "seclusion" (*sakoku*) era, which began with the expulsion of most Europeans in the early 1600s, such subjects have been construed as special topics and minor themes. The main social, political, and economic developments of the Tokugawa period have accordingly been studied as an essentially domestic matter, within a circumscribed national framework. Under the sign of *sakoku*, connective history was relegated to the margins of Japanese historiography for most of this century.

This, too, has begun to change. In both Japan and North America, a growing chorus of historians has attacked *sakoku* as a retrospective label that grossly misrepresents Tokugawa diplomacy, showing that the door to Asia remained deliberately ajar throughout the era of the so-called "closed-door" policies. As Ronald Toby insists,

> Japan remained integrated into the East Asian region to a significant degree throughout the Tokugawa period, even after the 'completion of Japan's isolation' in the 1630s. The modes of that integration extended from the political and diplomatic realms to the intellectual, cultural, and scholarly, into areas of national security, defense, and intelligence, and to trade and the economy in the largest sense. Furthermore, these areas of integration, of interconnectedness, were two-way streets: the mutual significance of Japan and Asia for each other is a continuous datum in the history of each; Japan cannot

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7 See, e.g., Hoston 1986. Debates over the applicability of "absolutism" to the Tokugawa context have stimulated a similar round of cross-disciplinary exchange; in English, see Berry 1986, White 1988.

8 Karatani 1991:193.

9 Needless to say, not all historians in other parts of the world recognize an "early modern" period in their respective domains. The histories for which early modernity is routinely invoked are limited to western Europe, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Japan, and occasionally China (although "late imperial" is still more commonly used to identify these centuries in the Chinese past). Historians of Africa and the Americas rarely identify an early modern period in those continents' histories, favoring instead the terms "precolonial" (or pre-Columbian) and "colonial." For a recent defense of applying the term to South Asia, see Richards 1997.

10 Subrahmanyam 1997 issues a call for just such a connective approach to early modernity.

be removed from Asia, nor Asia from Japan, whether by shogunal edict or by historiography.[11]

Yet the legacy of studying Tokugawa life without reference to its international context leads to a central tension in conceptualizing a Japanese "early modern." In the annals of world history, early modernity is the era of connection *par excellence*; the "discovery of the sea," leading both to the Americas and to more direct sea-routes to the far ends of Eurasia, is among its dominant themes. Here and elsewhere, transnationalism is at the core of the early modern experience. Such themes still have little resonance for many historians of Japan, for whom *kinsei* has the opposite set of geographical associations. Since the era of Tokugawa rule has long been symbolized by *sakoku*, early modernity in Japan continues to have connotations of closure and isolation.

Nonetheless, by appropriating a periodization term from the lexicon of global history, historians of Japan are in effect mapping Tokugawa developments onto a global historiography that increasingly emphasizes connections. This essay probes the implications of invoking that broader space-time for thinking about Japanese history. I begin by sketching the vision of early modernity that is emerging from Indian Ocean studies, a perspective that might be termed *world networks history*. I then analyze related developments in the Japanese historiography, focusing on three recent attempts to resituate Japan in Asia. The essay concludes with a brief reflection on the promise -- and problems -- of what turn out to be strikingly different modes of visualizing the connective time/space of early modernity.

A World Networks Perspective

In recent years, a spate of new research has appeared on the Indian Ocean region, effectively fusing comparative and connective history to analyze local developmental rhythms within a highly-developed map of cross-cultural exchange. This historiography has yielded a new perspective that might be called world networks history: "world" to suggest its trans-oceanic reach, "networks" to highlight its emphasis on patterned interactions, and "history" to underline a concern with the formation and transformation of these socio-spatial interactions over time.[12]

World networks history is distinguished from world-system theory in crucial respects. For one, it does not posit a single hegemonic "system" composed of "[a] set of relatively stable economic and political relationships that has characterized a major portion of the globe since the sixteenth century." Nor does it insist on a "single, worldwide division of labor" with an enduring core, periphery, and semi-periphery performing specialized functions for the system as a whole.[13] Instead, it uncovers a more fluid and mutable set of interpenetrating and overlapping circuits,

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[11] Toby 1984:22. See also Innes 1980 and Tashiro 1989. For a survey of Japanese revisionist scholarship on *sakoku*, see Katô 1994. Katô's review essay is the first of five articles in a special issue of *Acta Asiatica* on the theme of "Foreign relations of Tokugawa Japan: *Sakoku* reconsidered."

[12] The following description of world networks history -- like the phrase itself -- is my own rendering of the principles I perceive to be animating the literature cited below. I prefer this formulation to Philip Curtin's (1984) "comparative world history," which fails to convey the centrality of cross-cultural linkages. Michael Mann's (1986) insistence that socio-spatial networks of power constitute the essential units of analysis for comparative historical sociology has been formative for my conceptual vocabulary. See also the appreciative discussion of "nested networks" in Owens 1998.

[13] This characterization of the world-system perspective is taken from Shannon 1989:20-24.

linking far-flung cities and their hinterlands through shifting flows of power, money, goods, and ideas. In structural terms, this circuitry is portrayed as sustaining multiple cores and peripheries, rather than a monolithic spatial hierarchy;[14] likewise, in terms of methodology, its chroniclers attend not only to top-down or center-out causality, but also to the ways in which interstitial and "peripheral" peoples have shaped the patterns of global exchange.[15]

Early modernity is characterized in this literature as a particular configuration of global relationships: one brought about by new modes of navigation, finance, and weaponry in the fifteenth century, and brought to an end by the appearance of still more potent technologies of power at the end of the eighteenth century. In crude terms, the early modern configuration could be said to have been created by the gunpowder revolution *circa* 1450, and superseded by the spread of industrial capitalism and European imperialism after 1800.[16]

It is not surprising that such a global perspective on early modernity should have been pioneered in Indian Ocean studies.[17] This region was arguably "the hub of world trade in early modern times,"[18] and participated intensively in the new global configuration. But crucial contributions to world networks history have been made by students of other places and topics as well. Among the most important are studies of firearms and related military innovations,[19] the Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, and English commercial empires,[20] the much-disputed "seventeenth-century crisis,"[21] the intercontinental exchange of food crops and diseases,[22] the nomadic empires of Central Asia,[23] the Chinese and other trading diaspora,[24] and the circulation of precious metals and other monetary media.[25] As this list suggests, world networks history to date has been (understandably) preoccupied with technology and political economy, most especially with military and monetary history. Guns and silver were, after all, the leading edge that sliced through long-standing regional boundaries.[26] Yet cultural and intellectual developments are

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14 Janet Abu-Lughod insists that systems terminology is fluid enough to encompass structures with multiple discrete cores, such as she sees in the thirteenth century (Abu-Lughod 1989). While I agree with her in the abstract, I am less sanguine that the language of "world systems" can readily be divorced from the more rigid Wallersteinian framework in which it arose. In any case, I find the terminology of networks to be less mechanistic and more appropriate, especially for pre- and early-modern configurations of power and exchange.

15 For a cogent critique of world-system theory on this point, see Stern 1993.

16 This set of markers is more suggestive than definitive, however. In practice, the temporal boundaries identified as bracketing the early modern vary by as much as a century either way, depending on the domain in question.

17 The sources I have found most stimulating are Chaudhuri 1978; Perlin 1983; Reid 1988, 1993a, 1993b; Subrahmanyam 1990; and Lieberman 1993a -- a very modest sampling of a vast literature.

18 Wink 1993:106.

19 Hodgson 1974; McNeill 1982; Parker 1988, 1991; Tilly 1990. For a useful review of the literature, see Lynn 1991.

20 Braudel 1979; Parry 1981 [1974]; Tracy 1990, 1991; Flynn 1991.

21 Again, the literature is vast; of most relevance for Japanese historians is the *Modern Asian Studies* forum on the seventeenth-century crisis in Asia (Atwell 1990, Richards 1990, Reid 1990, Steensgaard 1990).

22 McNeill 1977; Crosby 1972, 1986.

23 Fletcher 1985, Abu-Lughod 1989, Barfield 1989.

24 Curtin 1984, Blussé 1986, Wang 1990. See also Ownby and Heidhues 1993.

25 Perlin 1986; Tashiro 1976, 1989; Richards 1983.

26 In a longer historical view, the "leading edge" may have been spices. Wolfgang Schivelbusch writes that "in their cultural significance spices were wholly medieval ... [yet] they existed like foreign bodies in the medieval world, forerunners of the loosened boundaries of modern times. The medieval spice trade had already done away with narrow local borders." He goes on to speculate that it would be rewarding "to study how long the process of

being fruitfully reexamined from a connective perspective as well.[27] In Victor Lieberman's view, international linkages in this period tended to nurture nationalistic reactions everywhere, promoting "exclusive and isolating" cultural orthodoxies throughout the Eurasian rim, from Burma and Viet Nam to Russia, France -- and Japan.[28]

This corpus of work proposes a way to conceive of early modernity as a global phenomenon, acknowledging Europeans' role without exaggerating it or making it somehow paradigmatic. Research on Indian Ocean and China Seas trade has made it clear that Europeans neither created nor quickly dominated exchange networks in these regions of Eurasia. Throughout the eastern four-fifths of that landmass, the newcomers remained dependent for many decades on local traders' capital and commercial expertise, and were obliged to accommodate themselves to long-established conventions of exchange. Accordingly, the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in Indian Ocean literature have been pointedly characterized as "the age of commerce"[29] or "the age of partnership"[30] rather than "the age of conquest."[31]

At the same time, historians of earlier periods have definitively shown that long-distance integration was not created *de novo* by the new technologies of the fifteenth century. It is now widely accepted that both maritime and overland trade links were well established in earlier eras, bridging the whole of what Marshall Hodgson called "the Afro-Eurasian ecumene." The conventional chronology suggests that early modern integration was in part a revival of contacts that had lapsed in the wake of the Black Death, and that it represented not the first but at least the fourth major surge of pan-Eurasian interaction in historical times.[32] Likewise, the agricultural, demographic, and commercial intensification that marked the early modern era is also understood to have been under way for some time before 1450.[33]

'reorientation,' so to speak, lasted, whereby [the Spaniards'] lust for pepper was transformed into one for precious metals." Schivelbusch 1993:12.

[27] The subject of the cross-cultural exchange of ideas is only now being brought into an explicit world-networks framework. For a survey of the spread of world religions to 1500 that adopts this perspective, see Bentley 1993; for a bold thesis linking national cultural standardization throughout Eurasia to the diffusion of firearms and the creation of centralized polities, see Lieberman 1993a.

[28] Lieberman 1993a:531.

[29] Reid 1988, 1993a.

[30] Pearson and King 1979.

[31] In Southeast Asia, the tide had turned by the mid seventeenth century, and in South Asia by the late eighteenth, but in East Asia the balance of power favored indigenous regimes until the mid nineteenth century. As Peter Klein puts it, "With the arrival of Vasco da Gama in Calicut on 27 May 1498 ... the European *economie-monde* had somehow or other succeeded in breaking through the spatial limits of its regional confinement. ... But did they really succeed as far as the maritime space of the China seas is concerned? It is my contention that they did not. At least not until after the middle of the nineteenth century when conditions had become quite different." Klein 1989: 64. For related views see Boxer 1969, Murphey 1977.

[32] The previous three high-points of inter-Eurasian trade coincided with the establishment of stable, large-scale polities across the continent during the era of the Han and Roman empires (2nd c BC - 2nd c AD), the early Medieval age (6th - 11th c), and the brief period of Mongol unification (ca. 1250-1350 AD). See, e.g., Abu-Lughod 1989, Curtin 1988, and Bentley 1993. Frank and Gills (1993) argue that similar pulses of intercontinental exchange can be traced back to the Bronze age. Whether the Indian Ocean circuits shared in the otherwise widespread decline of the fourteenth century in unclear; see Wink 1993.

[33] This is suggested, for instance, by the "medieval agricultural revolution" in various parts of the world, and by evidence that a growing demand for monetary media *preceeded* the great flows of Japanese and Peruvian silver into India and China (on the latter, see Perlin 1986). I am indebted to André Wink for suggesting that such developments represent a general secluar rise in the density of social and economic life across Eurasia, the product of patient

In short, world networks historians do not envision the fifteenth century as the sole or even necessarily the greatest watershed in human history. If scholars nonetheless single out the fifteenth century as the beginning of the modern world, it is because of two important discontinuities. One was the unprecedented scope of long-distance contact. Not only did Europeans begin to turn up in Gujarat and Malacca, they also stumbled onto the Americas. Only in the late fifteenth century did the history of these two old worlds become entangled; only then did the global network begin to assume its modern dimensions.[34] The other momentous change of this era was the appearance of reliable and powerful firearms. These new killing tools everywhere "accelerated centralization by conferring an enormous cumulative advantage on the wealthiest, most innovative powers in each region -- and, conversely, by raising the cost of warfare beyond the means of more local units."[35] These two developments, then -- a radical increase in the *spatial scope of social interaction*, and a comparable leap in the *spatial concentration of social power* -- marked the onset of early modernity, initiating the first round of the "time-space compression" that geographer David Harvey identifies as the *leit motiv* of modern life.[36]

New Metageographies in Japanese *Kinsei* Studies

To conceptualize Japan's early modernity as beginning, not with *sakoku* in the 1630s, nor with the wars of unification in the 1560s, but a full century earlier raises new questions about everything from politics to culture in what we usually think of as the "late medieval" period. For a century before the Portuguese landed in Tanegashima, Japanese traders and pirates participated in the "age of commerce" heralded by Zheng He's expeditions of the early 1400s. Their exposure to "the mobile, commercial, competitive order of the early modern period" worked to "loosen the controls" of an earlier age, contributing to the "entrepreneurial, fragmented, and competitive society" of Sengoku Japan.[37] Yet few English-speaking historians have yet to explore how such linkages with the wider world (however tenuous and fragmented) might have impinged on, say, the spread of a cross-class "national culture" in this period, or the "culture of lawlessness" in Kyoto after the Onin War.[38] By the chronologies of global early modernity, these domestic dramas were played out in an expanding geohistorical field, and should be interrogated in light of similar developments outside the archipelago.[39]

As it happens, our colleagues in Japan have been pursuing precisely this vision. Even as Indian Ocean historians have been hammering out a network-geography for early modernity, historians in Japan are articulating their own compelling international perspectives. The last

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spadework that began well before 1450.

[34] *The Discovery of the Sea* is the title of J.H. Parry's celebrated study of navigation, mapping, and ship design in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Parry 1981 [1974]).

[35] Lieberman 1993a:527.

[36] The notion of time-space compression is elaborated in Harvey 1989, Part III. In Harvey's view, the dazzling, dismaying developments of finance capital in the 1980s (compounded in the present decade by capital's forays into cyberspace) are but the latest round in this continuing process, and might better be termed hyper-modern than post-modern.

[37] Quotations are from a description of early modern South China in Ownby and Heidhues 1993:5, 21.

[38] Ruch 1990, Berry 1994.

[39] For suggestive analyses of how quickly the Europeans' impact could reverberate beyond the limited zone of direct contact in the Americas and Africa, see Wolf 1982 and Meinig 1989.

fifteen years in particular have seen a surge of interest in the twin themes of "Japan in Asia" and "Asia in Japan." Significantly, this effort is opening new perspectives on the temporal as well as the spatial dimensions of Japanese history. In the words of Murakami Tadashi, "*kinsei*'s uniqueness as a period is being questioned in close connection with the effort to rethink the developmental principles of world history."[40]

The touchstone for the new Japanese historiography is a substantial body of revisionist work on *sakoku*, starting with pathbreaking research by Asao Naohiro, Arano Yasunori, and others.[41] In numerous publications, these scholars argued that the essential intent -- and achievement -- of early Tokugawa diplomacy was to create a Japan-centered "order of civilized and barbarian" (*ka-i chitsujô)* independent of China.[42] A number of scholars have since confirmed that there were not one but four "gates" (*yottsu no kuchi*) between Tokugawa Japan and its neighbors, important contact zones at Satsuma, Tsushima, and Ezo supplementing the better-known case of Nagasaki.[43] As a result of this revisionist work, it is clear that Japan throughout its history can only be understood as part of "the regional networks of the East Asian world."[44]

Since the mid 1980s, this new map of the Edo world appears to have thoroughly taken hold of the Japanese scholarly imagination. The editors of the 1984 *Kôza Nihon Rekishi* series adopted as one of their main themes "placing Japanese history in East Asia"; in the 22-volume *Iwanami Kôza Nihon Tsûshi* of 1994, Asia is equally foregrounded, no doubt reflecting Asao's presence on the editorial staff.[45] Meanwhile, other authoritative compendia on *kinsei* history increasingly open with essays on such themes as "Early Modern Japan in world history,"[46] or "Early Modern Japan as it unfolded in Asia."[47] Moreover, a number of major collections that take up this theme have appeared in the last few years. A closer look at three such compendia, however, suggests that there are strikingly different ways to situate Japanese history in an Asian context.[48]

One bold attempt to map Japan into the time-space of early modernity is reflected in a six-volume anthology published by the University of Tokyo Press, under the title *A New History of*

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[40] Murakami 1989:8. See also the December 1995 issue of *Nihonshi Kenkyû*, a special issue on periodization, with essays from a variety of temporal and topical perspectives.

[41] See note 11 above.

[42] See Arano 1983, 1988; Asao 1970, 1975. For a discussion of this literature, see Kamiya 1991:52.

[43] E.g., Katô *et al.* 1989, Tsuruta 1994. For fuller discussions of this work, see Oguchi and Bitô 1994 and Kamiya 1995; for a short, accessible summary, see Hamashita 1999; for an important distinction between the normative ideal of a Japan-centered world order and the rather less exalted system that was actually created, see Toby 1990.

[44] So proclaims the title of an important new volume of essays edited by Hamashita Takeshi (1999), written by scholars but directed toward a nonspecialist readership, which synthesizes much of the latest work in the field. See especially Mitani's (1999) contribution, which reassesses the significance of "*sakoku*" for Japan's modern transformation.

[45] Asao *et al.* 1994.

[46] Murakami 1989.

[47] Aoki and Hosaka 1991.

[48] It bears emphasizing that the following discussion takes up a very small sample of a very extensive literature. To gauge the scope of Japanese research on regional networks in East Asia across all historical periods, see the ten-page bibliography in Hamashita 1999.

Japan in Asia. The opening lines of this "new history" express deep concern about contemporary relations between the Japanese and their neighbors in the 1990s:

> Japan is being drawn more and more into the orbit of Asia ... but this condition does not automatically engender mutual understanding or friendship between Japanese and Asians. ... Our concern, in this age when even the firmest of national boundaries is proving transitory, is to break free of that mode of thought which puts the national interest above all else, and to envision a free, multi-sided exchange among peoples and regions. In line with that aim, we think it essential to explore the historical relationship between Japan and Asia, to ground a proper relationship with Asia in the present.[49]

The volume accordingly opens with a radically original essay (co-authored by all three editors) on the spatial and temporal boundaries of Asian history. The authors begin by stating that the spatial dimensions of Asia cannot be fixed in a trans-historical fashion. Until the sixteenth century, they note, "Asia" for Japan essentially designated a China-centered cultural sphere; after the arrival of the Europeans, however, this Sino-centric Asia began to be displaced by a vastly larger region encompassing Islamic and Hindu civilizations as well -- a region that originally had little geographical coherence, save as Europe's "shadow."[50]

Having established this fluid geographical frame, the authors then proceed to argue for an unorthodox periodization scheme. Combining a search for general rhythms in the history of Asia as a whole with a sensitivity to more local rhythms in the Japanese archipelago's relationship to its neighbors, they identify ten distinct epochs between 300 BCE and 1895 ACE. The eighth of their ten periods (1540s-1680s) is described as the age when unlicensed traders [*wakô*] undermined the Chinese investiture-and-tribute system and a new order began to emerge; Period 9 (1680s-1800s), as an age marked by the stabilization of the early modern order and the deepening of its contraditions; and Period 10 (1800s-1890s), as the era of Asian modernization and nationalism. In a word, major breaks in the late seventeenth and early nineteenth centuries are seen as giving form to the Japanese/Asian timeline.[51] Such a chronology suggests a dramatically new understanding of *kinsei*, remapping the rhythms of Japanese development with reference to broader Asian developments.[52]

No comparable periodization scheme is attempted in a second noteworthy collection: a seven-volume series called *Thinking From Asia [Nihon kara kangaeru],* subtitled in English *Series Asian Perspectives*. In contrast to *A New History of Japan in Asia, Thinking From Asia* is relatively diffuse and decentered, with individual papers covering everything from trans-regional networks in the Bay of Bengal[53] to images of Asia in early modern Japanese geography texts.[54] The editors eschew any attempt to impose an overarching historical vision on their contributors. Instead, the eclectic essays that make up this collection are simply grouped into volumes under

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[49] Arano *et al.* 1992:ii.

[50] Arano *et al.* 1992:1-2. It should be noted that Japanese Buddhists always envisioned a broader Asia centered on India. See Unno 1994:371-76.

[51] Arano *et al.* 1992:11-12 and 37-50.

[52] Subsequent volumes of the series adopt this periodization scheme to address issues of diplomacy and war, maritime trade, "region and ethnos," understandings of self and other, and "culture and technology," respectively.

[53] Shigematsu 1993.

[54] Torii 1993.

the broad themes of Asian diversity, Asian regional systems, history from the periphery, society and the state, figures of modernization, long-term social change, and "the construction of world-views."

Nonetheless, there does seem to be an agenda underlying *Series Asian Perspectives*: a desire to strengthen Japanese identification with a pan-Asian imagined community. This ambition comes through quite clearly in an article on regional research in Asia, where Hamashita Takeshi claims that

> the terms *Ajia*, *gôren* [commonwealth], *Tô-A* [East Asia], and *renpô* [federation] all reflect different kinds of large-scale regional polities that the intelligentsia of East Asia have imagined, based on their conciousness of Chinese civilization. ... These conceptions have sometimes been unconditionally criticized, because this mentality has at times led to confrontations and quarrels and eventually war. ... [But] we believe it is time to switch from a paradigm of national interest to a paradigm of transnational regionalism, aiming at regional stabilization."[55]

This is a pan-Asianism for the '90s: an inclusive, eclectic, and pacific vision of regional geopolitics. The notion that Japan (or any other single country) should constitute the core of such a regional configuration would be antithetical to Hamashita's conception. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that the author makes a point elsewhere of celebrating "the energy of the periphery" as the source of regional dynamism,[56] as well as of conceptualizing Asia as essentially a maritime rather than a continental region.[57] Both conceptions have the effect of peripheralizing the traditional centers of civilization in the landmass's core, while elevating marginal, maritime Japan to a kind of centrality in the time-space of Asian history.

Finally, a third distinctive vision of Japan in Asia has emerged from a symposium series entitled "World History Perspectives Reexamined," whose proceedings were published in the journal *Rekishi Hyôron* beginning in 1992. Two arresting essays on early modernity emerged from this symposium: Yabuta Tôru's "Japanese early modernity as comparative history," and Kawakatsu Heita's "Japanese and European early modernity as a process of 'Leaving Asia.'"[58]

Yabuta begins by reviewing the long-standing effort to fit Japanese history into a succession of comparative frameworks. The lesson of this retrospective is simply stated: western-derived schemes have not worked. "Defining early modernity according to a 'western model' of periodization," he concludes,"leads to common problems in Japan, China, and all of Asia (indeed, one might say in all the non-western world)."[59] The core of the problem, Yabuta argues, is that historians of Japan have approached periodization in comparative but not connective terms. The author faults his predecessors for focusing exclusively on developmental stage theory, without

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[55] Hamashita 1993.

[56] This latter is the theme of Hamashita 1994.

[57] "The fact that countries and regions and ports at the far ends of Asia have influenced each other is one of the major historical peculiarities of this large-scale region," he contends, going on to observe that "Asia's chain of linked seas is the most complex and the most extensive among all the offshore sea-systems in the world." Hamashita 1993:7.

[58] The latter is listed as a contributor to a forthcoming volume in *Series Asian Perspectives* as well.

[59] Yabuta 1993:76.

considering "the multi-layered model of cores and peripheries that has been developed in world-system theory."[60]

Yabuta argues instead for situating *kinsei* Japan in its Asian context. After reminding his readers that both Japan and China were completely outside the modern world-system until the nineteenth century, he goes on to claim that Japan was located not in a "world economy" at all, but in

> a China-centered "imperium." Therefore, to analyze Edo-era Japan as "early modern" in the same sense as Europe is a fundamental error, not on the grounds of differences in their developmental stages ... but because of vast differences in their historical environments. From the perspective of world-system theory, we can say that Japanese early modernity corresponds to the period between the dissolution of the Chinese imperium and Japan's later incorporation into the modern world system.
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> Viewed in this way, Japan's early modern experience can be seen as a process of breaking free from a position on the periphery of Chinese civilization, or, in other words, a journey toward becoming another core.[61]

For Yabuta, "breaking free" consisted essentially of two achievements, which together constitute the major themes of Japan's early modern history: "the establishment of *'national sovereignty'* and *'national identity'*."[62] Yabuta leaves no doubt as to the appropriate backdrop against which these steps toward core-status should be considered. He urges his colleagues to measure Japan's historical accomplishments, not against those of Europe, but against "the whole undeveloped world of Micronesia, Polynesia, and Southeast Asia."[63] Accordingly, in the remainder of his article -- which surveys the major cultural, economic, political, and ideological developments of the era -- Yabuta draws most of his comparisons from within this broad region.

If Yabuta's vision of early modernity amounts to a declaration of independence from European paradigms, Kawakatsu Heita's essay in the same journal goes a step farther, reframing European experience in Japanese terms. On this economic historian's map, "Europe" and "Japan" constitute parallel geo-historical units, occupying comparable positions at the opposite ends of the Eurasian landmass. Both were minor cultural peripheries during the medieval period, when civilization was anchored in the older heartlands of Asia (Islamdom and India). But in the early modern era, says Kawakatsu, *both* Europe and Japan broke away from Asia. The process of "leaving Asia" had a conceptual component, in that both Japanese and Europeans gradually "began to distinguish themselves from the 'barbarians' and become conscious of themselves as 'civilized.'"[64] But it was an economic process first. The perceptual shift came about only after both regions found ways to reduce their dependency on "old Asia" for the material accoutrements of advanced civilization: textiles, dyestuffs, sugar, ceramics, and the like. Europe's path out of Asia came through colonizing the Americas; Japan's, through import substitution. One choice gave rise to the modern world-system, the other to *sakoku*.[65]

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[60] Yabuta 1993:77.
[61] ibid.
[62] Yabuta 1993:79; emphasis in the original.
[63] ibid.
[64] Kawakatsu 1993:44.
[65] Kawakatsu 1993:43-53.

As different as these two formations clearly were in spatial organization and extent, the emphasis here is on their temporal and functional congruence. In Kawakatsu's chronology, both the world-system and the *sakoku* system took shape from 1450-1640, and independence was achieved at both ends of Eurasia at the beginning of the nineteenth century. "Until 1800, the flow of advanced culture and products was outward from the old civilizational cores of Asia toward both Europe and Japan. After 1800, the flows were reversed; it was now Asia that paid in cash and raw materials for the goods of Europe and of Japan. The early modern period was the age when the foundation for this reversal was laid."[66] Moreover, he insists on functional parity between the European and Japanese routes to autonomy. "Neither of these two paths was superior to the other; nor can one be held up as a standard or archetype of the process. Both represented practical allocations of resources in their respective environments, and both achieved freedom from the need to import Asian goods."[67]

Several features of Kawakatsu's conception of early modernity deserve comment. The first is the way it naturalizes Japan's Asian colonial exploits. In an important passage, the author draws a causal connection between the two paths "out of Asia" and the later paths of European and Japanese imperialism. "Both [Europe and Japan] ended up, in the later nineteenth century, advancing into the same regions of Asia from which they had once imported cotton, now to sell their own cotton textiles." Britain did this in India, Japan in China and Korea, each establishing a market on the basis of the comparative advantage they had attained during the early modern era.[68] The analytical language here is strictly economistic; Meiji imperialism in China and Korea was merely an "advance" into a natural market area, based on a "comparative advantage" established in prior years. No mention is made of the results of this process for the colonized, save for a passing comment that "as 'civilizations' arose at both ends of 'the Orient,' the old civilizational core was transformed into the 'Third World.'"[69]

Kawakatsu is not entirely blind to the military dimension of this process. But he handles it in a way that points the blame squarely at Europe. In a final aside on the role of firearms in early modern statecraft, the author readily concedes that, in Japan as in Europe, the *kinsei* state was built on physical force. But he contends that the political philosophies through which violence was managed were not the same in the two regions. In Europe, the theory of legitimacy that prevailed after the Treaty of Westphalia hinged on a state's ability to win and defend territory in war. In Japan, by contrast, the Tokugawa bakufu adopted a Confucian theory of government, based not on domination but on virtuous rule. As a result, it gave birth not to "power politics" as in Europe, but to a distinctive "moral politics."[70] Only when confronted by the modern world-system in the 1850s was Japan forced to switch to the military tactics of a European-style "power politics."

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[66] Kawakatsu 1993:57.
[67] Kawakatsu 1993:58.
[68] Kawakatsu 1993:55. A later passage on the same page continues, "When Japan was incorporated into the modern world-system, it had to compete for markets in silk, tea, sugar, and cotton: all plant materials that Japan had domesticated from East Asia in the *kinsei* era and become self-sufficient in. It was by establishing a superiority in this intra-Asian competition that modern Japan was able to establish a foothold in East Asia."
[69] Kawakatsu 1993:44.
[70] Kawakatsu 1993:56.

In all these ways, Kawakatsu's map of world history puts Japan in a decidedly flattering light. The early modern Japanese come across not only as economic equals of their European counterparts, but as their moral betters. The resonance with prewar rhetoric about Japan's superior virtue may not have been intended, but the echoes are hard to miss.

Conclusion

This last example from the Japanese literature leaves us on a somber note. Clearly, world-historical perspectives can be bent to many different kinds of politics. Just as Western comparativists can use European experience to find the rest of the world wanting, so Japanese historians can propose world-historical yardsticks that unduly flatter Japan.

For balance, I believe, we must turn back to the less triumphalist vision of the Indian Ocean historians. Their scholarship on trans-regional networks offers us a perspective on early modernity from within "old" Asia -- the part that now finds itself in the "Third World." For historians of Japan, attending seriously to these scholars can be a bracing experience. It can also provide a more inclusive vocabulary for comparative analysis, for the cross-cultural isomorphisms that have long struck historians of these centuries are not limited to Europe and Japan.[71] As Victor Lieberman in particular has argued, the diffusion of firearms and the appearance of new forms of mobile wealth created similar problems and potentials for states from one end of Eurasia to the other. Japanese responses to those challenges bore structural resemblances to their counterparts, not only in Europe, but elsewhere in Asia as well: territorial integration, fiscal reform, an elaboration of commercial reticula, and the spread of central cultural norms appear to have defined the early modern experience in much of the Eurasian rim.[72]

It is only against this backdrop that we can begin to appreciate what is peculiarly "Japanese" about Early Modern Japan. Each early modern society experienced the challenges of the age in a different way, depending not only on its distinctive cultural legacy but also on such *relational* considerations as who its neighbors were, whether it harbored resources that foreign merchants desired, its accessibility and defensibility given the technological conditions of the time, and the like.[73] Military technology and mercantile capital created similar imperatives over a broad terrain, but their operation was still constrained by the friction of distance and by the contours of physical and social space. A keen sense of Japan's position in the global trading world is thus indispensable if we would apprehend what was unique about Japanese early modernity without falling into purely culturalist explanations. As Tosaka Jun has written,

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[71] Parker 1988, 1991; Lieberman 1993a.

[72] For a richly suggestive essay on the comparability of these processes in Western Europe, Russia, mainland Southeast Asia, and Japan, see Lieberman 1993a, especially pp 521-540; for a critical response to Lieberman's model, see Subrahmanyam 1999 and the other thoughtful contributions to the same special issue of *Modern Asian History*. While few have traced parallel processes across so vast a terrain, many analysts of early modern Japanese state formation have been struck by the parallels with European absolutism; see for instance Grossberg 1981, Arnason 1988, White 1988, and McClain *et al.* 1994.

[73] For instance, historians of insular Southeast Asia are quick to point out that not all Asian regimes had the option the Tokugawa exercised of minimizing and controlling European trade. Some were simply too exposed geographically and too dependent on the income from exchange, lacking the sort of intensive agriculture and well-developed internal market that would have been required to survive after rebuffing the military-backed European traders (Reid 1993a, ch. 5). Likewise, historians of the Spanish empire can help us appreciate how singular -- and significant -- it was that the Japanese had copper to fall back on when their silver reserves ran low (Flynn 1991).

"Japaneseness" itself "should be examined as a concrete link in the chain of the international context."[74]

If approached in this spirit, connective history can function not to displace comparative history but to discipline it, by subjecting comparisons to thorough contextualization. This may be the single greatest advantage that a world-networks perspective offers to students of early modernity in disparate national contexts. Wariness in the face of superficial analogies is appropriate, but to eschew a comparative vocabulary altogether would be to adopt a policy of scholarly *sakoku*. Only in dialogue with historians of other places can we fully appreciate what was unusual about a given country's experience -- and only through such a dialogue can we grasp the magnitude of any country's contribution to the early modern world. For the challenge in world networks literature is not only to bring the world back in, but also to place national history firmly on the map of the wider early modern world.

However that challenge is met, periodization will matter -- not only for fixing the temporal boundaries of our subject, but for ascertaining its geographical extent as well. What Steensgaard has said of the seventeenth-century crisis could equally be said for early modernity: both concepts pose "as much a problem of the space of history as of the time of history."[75] The future of our field will be significantly determined by how we collectively resolve these intertwined problems. As Karatani insists, "to mark off a period, that is, to assign a beginning and an end is to comprehend the significance of events. One can say that the discipline of history is, to a large extent, fought out through the question of periodization, for periodization itself changes the significance of events."[76]

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[74] Tosaka Jun 1966[1935]:292 (*Nihon ideorogii-ron*, in *Tosaka Jun zenshû*, vol. 2 [Tokyo: Keisô shobô]), cited in Kawamura 1988:8.
[75] *ibid*.; emphasis added.
[76] Karatani 1991:193.

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