

Keynote Address

Reconstructing the History of Modern East Asia

NAKANISHI Hiroshi

1. Introduction

I would like to start by expressing my sincere respect and gratitude for the great efforts made by everyone at the National Institute for Defense Studies to hold the International Forum on War History during the current COVID-19 pandemic. I am Nakanishi Hiroshi of Kyoto University. I will be giving today's keynote address. I apologize for participating via Zoom due to being in Kyoto.

Today's theme is the Security Environment in Modern East Asia and we are scheduled to hear speeches and discussions by professors studying East Asian history, with a focus on the inter-war period, from a variety of perspectives. I asked myself, "What can I contribute as a researcher of international politics from a historical perspective or using historical methods, and not a specialized historian?" In the end, I decided on the bold title of "Reconstructing the History of Modern East Asia." I hope you will forgive me if the content of my address does not live up to such a sweeping title.

In international politics, the issue of how to comprehend the past, particularly in the case of a war of such a scale that it transformed history, and how to define the present have a significant impact on each other. For example, as explained by Ueyama Shunpei, the perspective of the Allied Powers, primarily the United States and Great Britain, who saw World War II as a battle between democracy and fascism, heavily influenced the postwar order.¹ This stance subsequently evolved into the treatment of communism as an authoritarian system comparable to fascism and the construction of the Cold War order. Furthermore, when the Cold War ended, Francis Fukuyama famously declared the "end of history," which applied a Kojevian interpretation of Hegel to express the view that liberal democracy and free market capitalism, the modern manifestation of human reason, had ultimately established its supremacy over other ideologies, political systems, and socioeconomic systems.²

Even though Fukuyama's "end of history" rhetoric and the "new world order" slogan disappeared relatively shortly after the conclusion of the Cold War, the view that liberal democracy and free market capitalism led the post-Cold War world and lacked a genuine rival continued to be upheld until recently. One might even say this continues to this day. Its successor in international politics seems to be the liberal international order advocated by

^{*}This version has been adapted from the original keynote address delivered at the International Forum on War History with modifications added for publication.

¹ Ueyama Shunpei, "Daitoa Senso no Shisoshi-teki Igi [Significance of the Greater East Asia War in Terms of the History of Thought]," *Chuo Koron* (September 1961), pp. 98-107, in *Ibid*, *Daitoa Senso no Isan* [Legacy of the Greater East Asia War] (Chuo Koron-sha, 1972).

² Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (Free Press, 1992).

John Ikenberry in recent years.³ In other words, the post-World War II international order has been a liberal order under the generous hegemony of the United States, and maintaining this system should continue to be the goal of Western countries. I question whether the concept of “liberal international order” can be simply applied to the entire postwar era, considering the divergence of industrialized countries into capitalist and socialist systems during the Cold War, as well as the existence of rigorous domestic economic regulations in many countries up until the 1970s. Nevertheless, I do think it is the case that, since the 1980s and the age of neoliberalism driven by Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, the world has been dominated by the concept of liberalism and the liberal international order.

Today, however, serious questions and concerns have surfaced regarding whether liberalism and the liberal international order are history’s final winners and whether this really is a stable and dominant order. Liberalism is facing its largest challenge since World War II. This recognition had already emerged prior to the global outbreak of COVID-19. In China, the Xi Jinping administration, inaugurated in 2012, has taken on a greater autocratic character, compared to the phase of group-based leadership under Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, and Hu Jintao, and the country has expanded its influence in military, economic, and technology areas as a superpower second only to the United States. In Russia, Vladimir Putin, who called for the revival of a “strong Russia,” came to power at the start of the 21st century, and has since eradicated domestic opposition and maintained an authoritarian regime with heavy-handed methods for a considerable period of time.

Besides the presence of major powers, such as China and Russia, being led by governments that can hardly be called believers in liberalism, during the extended post-Cold War period, the free world has been unable to succeed in achieving the anticipated level of nuclear non-proliferation, aimed at preventing nuclear weapon proliferation in North Korea and Iran, nor in the promotion of global democracy, including the war on terrorism that has been vigorously pursued by the United States following 9/11. “Democracy under Siege,” the latest report by Freedom House, which advocates the promotion of democracy worldwide, assessed the 15 years through 2020 as 15 years of decline. It places countries into three categories – free, partly free, and unfree – and their respective numbers have shifted from 89, 58, and 45 in 2005 to 82, 59, and 54 in 2020. The latter half of the roughly 30 years since the Cold War ended can be said to have seen a shift toward non-democratic and authoritarian systems, rather than towards democratic ones.⁴ Just recently, we have witnessed the dramatic example of democratic decline in Myanmar.

Another challenge to liberalism comes from the combination of mankind, nature, and technology, as expressed in the term “globalization.” Contemporary liberalism sees the minimization of political regulations as an ideal and argues that the free flow of people, goods, money, and information with as little political regulation as possible is the path to peace and prosperity. However, the flow and concentration of money in connection with

³ G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

⁴ *Freedom in the World 2021: Democracy under Siege*, p. 4.
(https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/FIW2021_World_02252021_FINAL-web-upload.pdf)

the latest technology have repeatedly caused international financial and economic crises, as best demonstrated by the Global Financial Crisis. Additionally, the current global COVID-19 pandemic has surely arisen due to mankind's encroachment into nature further than ever before, as well as the rapid movement of people around the world alongside advances in globalization, contrasted by highly vulnerable international systems of medical and healthcare governance. The impact of global warming, accelerated by industrialization worldwide, is also unignorable and is viewed as yet another common global threat.

Entering the 2010s, globalization is considered to have started eroding politics in the United States and the United Kingdom, countries that had been its foremost proponents. There, the development of so-called global supply chains appears, in particular, to have led to the de-industrialization of their economies and the collapse of the middle class, which had supported the stability of politics in such developed countries in the 20th century, while at the same time accelerating the inflow of migrants, thereby creating political divisions. This trend clearly manifested itself in 2016, a transformational year that saw the U.K. vote for Brexit in a national referendum and the election of Donald Trump, an advocate of anti-globalism, as the U.S. president. In 2020, President Trump lost the presidential election against a backdrop complicated by COVID-19, with the United States recording the highest number of cases worldwide. Meanwhile, after various twists and turns, the United Kingdom managed a "soft" Brexit by successfully concluding a trade and cooperation agreement with the European Union. In the United States, however, as symbolized by the riot at the U.S. Capitol Building on January 6, 2021, the domestic discord driven by the polarization of U.S. politics shows no signs of abating. Similarly, in the United Kingdom, its relationship with the EU and the states of Ireland and Scotland are sources of potential instability.

2. "Short 20th Century" Viewpoint

In light of this, it is possible, and might actually be necessary, to rethink and, to put it more grandiosely, restructure 20th century history from a new perspective, one that differs from the viewpoint that has dominated since the end of the Cold War. The "short 20th century" interpretation presented by Eric Hobsbawm, a British historian, soon after the end of the Cold War deserves notice. This view redefines the 20th century as the period from World War I to the end of the Cold War. His book on the subject is an excellent work of history with a broad perspective befitting the excellent historian he is. Its fundamental assertion is that the 20th century consisted of three wars or quasi-wars: the two World Wars and the Cold War.⁵

The Hobsbawm view fit best in Europe. As John Maynard Keynes and Stefan Zweig have described, until the outbreak of war in 1914, Europe undoubtedly believed in peace and progress as the natural global dominant presence.⁶ The devastation of the war and the subsequent emergence of the United States and communism, as well as disruptions in the

⁵ Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: 1914-1991* (Pantheon, 1995).

⁶ Stefan Zweig, *Zweig Zenshu: 19, 20, Kino no Sekai: 1, 2* [The Collected Writings of Zweig, Vol 19-20: The World of Yesterday, Part 1 & 2] (Misuzu Shobo, 1973); John Maynard Keynes, *The Collected Writings of John Maynard Keynes: Vol. 2, The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (Cambridge University Press, [1919] 2012).

economy, society, and culture, destabilized the post-World War I world, and the “twenty years’ crisis” (E.H. Carr) led to the outbreak of World War II, with fascism pitted against democracy and the Axis Powers against the Allied Powers.⁷ Thereafter, the United Nations and other international organizations established by the Allied Powers failed to foster international cooperation as was originally hoped, geopolitical and ideological tensions surfaced between East and West, and Germany and Europe each became divided, leading to the over 40 years of stark confrontation of the Cold War. German unification and European reintegration, brought about by the end of the Cold War, dramatically changed the situation in Europe.

It can also be said that the “short 20th century” viewpoint, albeit with modest modifications, was highly influential in relation to Japan’s modern history, which it describes as follows. The period from the Meiji Restoration to World War I is characterized by Westernization and modernization. As the only modern East Asian nation, Japan emerged victorious in the Sino-Japanese War and Russo-Japanese War, and attained a similar status to the Western powers as an imperialist sovereign nation. Nevertheless, even though Japan entered World War I and was among the victors, thereby participating in the postwar international order as one of the major powers, there was a steadily growing divide between Japan, which was unable to abandon its imperialist foreign policy, and the concept of a liberal democratic world order in the United States and Great Britain. In the 1930s, Japan, led by its military, which was firmly set on a path of imperialism, showed ever greater hostility towards the liberal democratic world order led by the United States and Great Britain. This eventually led to Japan’s participation in World War II as an Axis Power allied with Germany and Italy, and ultimately its defeat and the dissolution of its empire. Recognizing its errors, postwar Japan focused on economic advancement as a liberal democratic nation and emerged as an important proponent of the liberal international order. This view of history was apparent in the statement issued by former Prime Minister Abe in 2015 on the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II. It has roots in the ideas of U.S. historians of Japan from the 1960s, such as Edwin Reischauer and Marius Jansen, and also the modern historical perspective shared by Shiba Ryotaro in the so-called “Shiba view of history.”⁸

3. 1890 as the Starting Point

Looking back now, meanwhile, it seems that one cannot simply apply the “short 20th century” view to East Asia. For example, 1989 saw the collapse of the Berlin Wall and also the Tiananmen Square incident in China. Despite the latter, China’s path of reform and opening up, started by Deng Xiaoping, continued into the 1990s and beyond, balancing both one-party

⁷ E.H. Carr, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis, 1919-1939* (Palgrave Macmillan, [1946] 2016).

⁸ Kokunai Josei Kenkyukai [Domestic Affairs Research Committee], ed., *Sengo 70-nenn Abe Danwa Zenbun – Murayama/Kono/Koizumi Danwa mo Zenbun Shuroku* [Full Text of the Abe Statement on the 70th Anniversary of the End of the War: Including Also the Full Texts of the Murayama, Kono, and Koizumi Statements] (Goma Books, 2015); Advisory Panel on the History of the 20th Century and on Japan’s Role and the World Order in the 21st Century, *Sengo 70-nen Danwa no Ronten* [Points of Debate over the Statement on the 70th Anniversary of the End of the War] (Nikkei Shimbun Publishing, 2015); Mitani Hiroshi, *Meiji Ishin wo Kangaeru* [Considering the Meiji Restoration] (Iwanami Gendai Bunko, 2012).

rule under the Communist Party and the dramatic expansion of the market economy through to the present. Today, the relationship between the United States and China, which have different political systems, is clearly the most important bilateral relationship in the world, even among those between major powers.

The view of Japan, as seen from the present day, is also likely to change. While Japan might have been at the cutting edge of technology from its modernization in the 19th century until the end of the Cold War, in the 30 years of the Heisei Period that followed the Cold War, the Republic of Korea (ROK), Taiwan, China, and others have caught up to and overtaken Japan in most areas of manufacturing, which had been the main driver of Japan's economy. Furthermore, in its response to COVID-19 since last year, Japan has lagged behind in terms of PCR testing and the use of digital tools. At the same time, Japan continues to face diplomatic friction with China and the ROK over historical and territorial matters, which is restricting Japanese diplomacy. In fact, Japan's historical disputes with China and the Korean Peninsula are undeniably rooted not only in the history of Japanese aggression from the 1930s, but also Japan's initial empire-building in the Meiji era. It is therefore not possible to simply apply the "short 20th century" historical perspective to modern East Asian history.

First of all, I believe that important changes occurred around 1890 that laid the groundwork for East Asian relations in the first half of the 20th century. There are two main factors. One is related to the regional order in East Asia. During the 19th century, and particularly during the Opium War in 1840, Western powers stepped up their imperialist advances in East Asia. Up until the 1880s, however, the international order in East Asia still relied on the traditional order under the Qing Dynasty. These conditions started changing in the 1880s and 1890s. Particularly as a result of Japan incorporating the Ryukyus as a prefecture in the Ryukyu Disposition in 1879, the Qing Dynasty attempted to formalize its relationship with Taiwan and tributary countries.⁹

However, the attempt by the Qing Dynasty to partially revise yet still uphold the traditional order in East Asia collided with the second main factor in this period. This factor was a new stage in globalization, or globalization of the political system in the West. The structure of Western influence in East Asia up until that point had been treaty port arrangements for trade and co-existed with the traditional order of East Asia centered on China.¹⁰ At the end of the 19th century, however, the principles that separated the West from Asia and Africa began to disappear due to the strengthening and reorganization of the Western imperialist system, and there were growing attempts to apply Western-style logic and order uniformly throughout the world. This led to the application of principles that defined Western countries' internal policies and the relations between them to all parts of their empires and, thus, the globe. This formalization of formerly ambiguous circumstances made the separation of sovereign nations in the West and non-Western colonial empires, as well as their co-existence, difficult. Territorialization, meanwhile, steadily advanced. Previously, areas on the periphery

⁹ Motegi Toshimitsu, *Henyo Suru Kindai Higashi Asia no Kokusai Chitsujo* [Changing International Order in Modern East Asia] (Yamakawa Shuppansha, 1997).

¹⁰ Kokaze Hidemasa, "Unequal Treaty System as a Sub-system of World System in 19th Century," *East Asian Modern History No. 13* (March 2010), pp. 122-142.

of empires where frontiers and national borders were not precisely delineated, especially in the interior areas of continents. To address the increasingly fierce imperial competition, the legal principle was introduced whereby a country must demonstrate effective control over a territory to be able to assert that it is part of its sphere of influence. This can be said to have resulted in fierce colonial competition spreading deep across continents and such competition taking on political and militaristic overtones. Meanwhile, there was also growing interest in a global order beyond the framework of colonial empires and treaty ports. For example, Great Britain and the United States called for the opening up of colonial areas and equal opportunities within them.¹¹

These developments had complicated impacts on East Asia. The Qing Dynasty's attempt to restructure its traditional empire while incorporating Western logic clashed head on with empirical Western international law, which had become systematized at that time. A multi-tiered international legal regime existed across the globe in this period, consisting of civilized countries, which were imperial sovereign nations, countries that were partly open based on unequal treaties with civilized countries, and uncivilized areas under the control and protection of civilized countries. The establishment of this regime clashed with the formalization of the traditional Sinocentric order, particularly over the Korean Peninsula from the 1880s.¹² Mutsu Munemitsu, who was Japan's Foreign Minister during the Sino-Japanese War, referred, after the war, to the relationship between the Qing Dynasty and Korea as an "ambiguous suzerainty" from the standpoint of the international legal regimen of the West and justified his position on the basis of the inevitability of a confrontation between traditional East Asian civilization and new Western civilization.¹³

Additionally, Russia and the United States emerged as players in East Asian power politics. While Russia and the United States had involvement in East Asia, their influence had been limited. At the end of the 19th century, however, the United States started to see itself as a Pacific nation and entered the fray as a major maritime power in East Asia. Meanwhile, Russia was ramping up its development of Siberia, thereby connecting East Asia and Europe. In 1890, Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan wrote "The Influence of Sea Power Upon History," and Yamagata Aritomo penned an opinion that defined the Yalu River as Japan's "line of interest" based on the teachings of Germany's Lorenz von Stein. Then, work on the Trans-Siberian Railway started in 1891.¹⁴

¹¹ The Berlin International Conference on West Africa held at the invitation of Prime Minister Bismarck in 1884 and the following year provided the catalyst for stipulating rules related to colonial rule in international law. See Stig Forster et al., *Bismarck, Europe, and Africa: The Berlin Africa Conference 1884-1885 and the Onset of Partition* (Oxford University Press, 1989).

¹² Okamoto Takashi, *Zokkoku to Jishu no Aida: Kindai Shinkan Kankei to Higashi Asia no Meiun* [Between a Client State and Autonomy: Modern Qing-Korea Relations and the Fate of East Asia] (Nagoya University Press, 2004).

¹³ Mutsu Munemitsu, *Kenkenroku: A Diplomatic Record of the Sino-Japanese War, 1894-1895* (Princeton University Press, 1983).

¹⁴ Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783* (Dover Publications, [1890] 1987); Muranaka Tomoyuki, "Yamagata Aritomo no 'Rieki Sen' Gainen – Sono Gensen to Hitsuzensei [Yamagata Aritomo's Line of Interest Concept: Origins and Necessity]," *The Journal of Military History No. 165* (2006), pp. 76-93.

4. Construction of an East Asian Order Centered on Japan

Amid such changes to the international environment in East Asia, Japan defined itself as an Asian nation that embodied the Western order and sought to overturn the traditional Sinocentric traditional order and build a new order by pitting itself against Qing China. After its military defeat to Japan, China was subjected to territorial imperialism by several countries, and this encroachment of its territory continued from the end of the 19th century until just prior to World War I. However, at this stage, the path of imperialism started to diverge in a pronounced way. In East Asia, Russia bolstered its involvement in China and Korea as part of its territorial imperialism aimed at adjacent countries. The United States and Great Britain, meanwhile, cited the principles of “open door” and “equal opportunity” and sought to maintain a free-trade regime that was an extension of the treaty port system. In other words, globalization based on the system of territorial states and globalization premised on the removal of borders and liberalization advanced simultaneously in East Asia from the end of the 19th century.

At this point, it must be said that Japan was faced with a major contradiction. In terms of its overall direction, Japan proceeded on the path of colonial imperialism akin to the Western powers, but with no model for its structure, the Japanese regime was inevitably an ambiguous one.

First, even though Japan wanted friendly relationships with Great Britain and the United States as geopolitical counter to Russia on the continent and did in fact have an alliance with Great Britain, in economic matters, it increasingly rejected the open-door principle espoused by the two and strengthened its control over the Korean Peninsula and Manchuria. Japan and the United States forged diplomatic arrangements at the start of the 20th century with the Root-Takahira Agreement in 1908 and the Lansing-Ishii Agreement in 1917. However, it became increasingly difficult to implement such arrangements from the 1920s.

Second, Japan’s colonialization of Korea and part of China, with which it had been co-existing, albeit imperfectly, under the traditional order, resulted in a structure that differed from that of the Western colonial empires, which was tacitly premised on the separation of the West and non-West. Would Imperial Japan be a tiered empire with Japanese people at the top, would it be a massive Japanese nation with people living under colonial rule being Japanized, or would it be similar to a traditional empire with the co-existence of the Asian peoples? Japan maintained a sense of ambiguity, retaining all of these aspects without fully committing to any single one. Furthermore, turmoil in China after the Xinhai Revolution created room for Japan to expand its Manchurian rights, and Japanese control of the South Sea Islands north of the Equator as mandated territory following World War I further increased the ambiguity. In addition, the nationalist March 1st Movement and May 4th Movement in Korea and China, respectively, sparked by Woodrow Wilson’s diplomacy and the Paris Peace Conference, together with the emergence of the revolutionary Soviet Union from the Russian Revolution, as well as the spread of communism in East Asia, were destabilizing forces in Northeast Asia.

Against this backdrop, under the Washington Naval Treaty, Japan, the United States and Great Britain eased mutual military tensions through the reduction of their respective naval forces and the dissolution of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. Furthermore, various

interests were coordinated, namely the open-door policy sought by the United States and Great Britain, respect for Chinese sovereignty as sought by China, and retention of Japanese vested interests as sought by Japan, and conditions moved towards stabilization with the ending of the internal strife in China and the country's modernization. Soviet involvement in China, as well as the anti-Japan movement in the country, resulted in formation of the First United Front. Meanwhile, despite tensions between Japan and the United States over the Immigration Act of 1924, Great Britain, China, and Japan established diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union by January 1925, and relations stabilized to some extent.¹⁵ This could be seen as an attempt led by Japan and Great Britain to reorganize the trade-based imperial framework that existed from before World War I.

However, the Special Tariff Conference in Beijing, which started in October 1925, destabilized the situation, with cracks appearing between Japan with its emphasis on military factions such as that of Duan Qirui and Great Britain on the side of the Kuomintang. Then, in 1926, Chiang Kai-shek launched the Northern Expedition and quickly undermined any short-lived stability. The United States and Great Britain decided to support the Chinese reunification effort led by Chiang, as part of the strengthening of relations between the United States and Europe with the signing of the Kellogg-Briand Pact and other agreements. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union, where Joseph Stalin was consolidating his power, faced isolation arising from the suppression of Communist forces by Chiang and the United Kingdom's severing of diplomatic ties with the Soviet Union. It therefore sought to accelerate acts of revolution by communist movements in various countries via the Comintern. As for Japan, it was drifting apart from the United States and Great Britain, which were bolstering their support for the Kuomintang, which made no secret of the fact that it ultimately wanted to restore Chinese interests. At the same time, it had increasingly tense relations with the Soviet Union due to concerns over Manchuria and Mongolia, and the ideological threat posed by communism in Japan. Furthermore, amid growing political bickering over the impact of the financial crisis, the issue of Japan's ratification of the Kellogg-Briand Pact, how to deal with the Huanggutun incident, and the issue of the London Naval Treaty, the Japanese military continued to increase its political power. The military's growing desire to take independent action in Manchuria eventually resulted in the Manchurian Incident of 1931.¹⁶ With this, Japan aimed to stabilize its control by incorporating its continental rights into its own colonial imperialist regime.

Nevertheless, Japan did not immediately slip into a state of international isolation after the Manchurian incident. In fact, the period after this incident until about 1935 might have marked the zenith of the Japanese colonial empire. The independence of Manchuria was proclaimed in January 1932, and, following the May 15 Incident in the same year, the Saito Makoto Cabinet, under military influence, accepted the military's action in Manchuria as a fait accompli. Then, in March 1933, Japan announced its withdrawal from the League of Nations to protest the Report of the Lytton Commission. However, China's Kuomintang adopted a

¹⁵ Hattori Ryuji, *Higashi Asia Kokusai Kankyo no Hendo to Nihon Gaiko 1918-1931* [Changes in East Asia's International Environment and Japanese Diplomacy, 1918-1931] (Yuhikaku Publishing, 2001), chapter 2.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, chapters 3-5.

policy of “pursuing internal stability and resisting foreign invasion” that prioritized opposing the Communist Party, and concluded the Tangu Truce between the Chinese military and Kwantung Army in May 1933. Similarly, the Soviet Union, concerned about the rise of the Nazi government, adopted a conciliatory stance toward Japan and sold the Chinese Eastern Railway to Manchuria. Meanwhile, the United States and Great Britain, which adopted a policy of non-recognition grounded in the Kellogg-Briand Pact, did not take concrete countermeasures at this time, despite not approving of Japan’s actions.¹⁷ Great Britain, which had left the gold standard, focused on policies related to the Sterling Bloc, which was centered on the British Empire, while the United States put priority on domestic policies as it struggled with the Great Depression. In some ways, it could be said that Japan’s policy of controlling Manchuria had the possibility of stabilizing, amid such a framework of regional blocs.

Japan, however, was unable to decide whether it preferred the area of mainland China to be divided or to be unified under a government favorable to Japan. Ishibashi Tanzan and Yoshida Shigeru, who were both pro-British, tried to revive a system of cooperation led by Japan and Great Britain by working with the British Treasury to implement currency reforms. However, anti-Japan protectionists in the United Kingdom had strong misgivings toward Japan, while the Japanese military remained adamant about maintaining the upper hand in China and seeking to advance into North China and resisted any policy of cooperation. The formation of the East Hebei Autonomous Council (later the East Hebei Autonomous Government) in North China, led by local Japanese military forces, on November 1935 was a major shock to the Kuomintang government and strengthened anti-Japan sentiment. Ultimately, it was the United States and Great Britain, without Japan, that supported Chinese currency system reforms, and Japan withdrew from the London Naval Conference in January 1936 as well, without its divisions with Great Britain and the United States being repaired. Thereafter, Japan’s relationships with the two continued to worsen.¹⁸

Communist forces, meanwhile, steadily expanded their influence, while adjusting their strategy and composition. The Soviet Union established diplomatic ties with the United States in 1933, entered the League of Nations in 1934, thereby improving relations with the United States and Great Britain, and proposed a popular front and an anti-fascist alliance at the Seventh World Congress of the Comintern in 1935. In China, the Communist Party fled to Yunnan after completing the Long March while being pursued by the Kuomintang during 1934 and 1935. Mao Zedong, a “homegrown” communist who was not heavily influenced by the Soviet Union, rose to prominence in the process. Overall, from the late 1920s through the mid-1930s, it can be said that international politics in Europe and East Asia became increasingly intertwined due to stronger involvement by the United States and Soviet Union, in contrast to their retreat from international politics after World War I, while Japan and the United Kingdom saw their influence shrink as they dealt with the various vulnerabilities in their imperial regimes that were being exposed. In this process, China received international

¹⁷ Lu Xijun, “Manshu Jihen to Nicchu Senso [Manchuria Incident and the Sino-Japanese War],” in Kawashima Shin and Hattori Ryuji, eds., *Higashi Asia Kokusai Kankei Shi* [History of International Relations in East Asia] (Nagoya University Press, 2007).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 147-149.

assistance from the United States, the Soviet Union, and others and was beginning to set itself on the path of modernization through its resistance against Japan's expansionist policies. Despite the establishment of the Second United Front in 1936, with priority on resisting Japan, China had not determined whether it would aim to be a Western-style nation state or whether it would pursue a Soviet-style communist state in the future.¹⁹

5. Synchronization of Power Politics in Europe and East Asia

In the period from the mid-1930s to World War II, Japan unexpectedly found itself in all-out warfare in the Sino-Japanese War and moved closer to Germany and Italy with the aim of curtailing assistance to China from the Soviet Union as well as from the United States and Great Britain. Power politics in Europe and East Asia thus became intertwined. The Nazi government gradually switched from a policy of strengthening ties with both Japan and China to one that emphasized Japan from the start of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937. The Soviet Union, meanwhile, concluded a treaty of non-aggression with China and provided large-scale arms assistance. At the same time, it leveled major attacks on the Japanese military in the Battle of Lake Khasan (July 1938) and the Nomonhan Incident (May 1939) near the Soviet Union's border, which successfully pushed Japan to shift its military policy toward southern advances. In October 1937, U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt delivered the Quarantine Speech that called for quarantine from aggressor countries and demonstrated his determination that the United States would lead the international order, while also taking into account the isolationist public opinion domestically.

The period from 1939 to 1941 saw dramatic changes in the relationship between Germany and the Soviet Union, and Japan selected the course of confrontation with the United States and Great Britain by forming the Tripartite Pact with Germany and Italy, while also concluding a neutrality pact with the Soviet Union and maintaining said neutrality even after the outbreak of war between Germany and the Soviet Union. Tensions between Japan and the United States subsequently escalated, and Japan decided to wage war against the United States, Great Britain, and the Netherlands in December 1941. Following this development, the four major powers of the United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and China formed the Allied Powers, fighting against the Axis Powers of Japan, Germany, and Italy and going on to build the postwar order. With the framework of the Allied Powers versus the Axis Powers thus cemented, global international politics, in which the United States and the Soviet Union connected Europe and East Asia, had taken shape, at least in the Northern Hemisphere.²⁰

Nevertheless, Europe and East Asia did not come together in a completely symmetric space, and East Asia's asymmetry with Europe was demonstrated by three respects.

First is the issue of an officially imperialist or colonialist regime. Through joining the Allied Powers, China concluded a treaty to eliminate the extraterritorial rights of the United States and Great Britain. Thus, these rights disappeared and concessions were returned to

¹⁹ Ibid, pp. 150-153.

²⁰ Waldo Heinrichs, *Threshold of War: Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Entry into World War II* (Oxford University Press, 1988).

China in January 1943.²¹ In response to the actions of the United States and Great Britain, Japan also presented a proposal to the Nanking government, which was run by Wang Jingwei, to eliminate Japanese concessions and its unequal treaty with China. This is not the only example of how the Pacific War contributed to ushering in the end of colonial and imperial regimes. In its southern expansion, following the start of the Pacific War, Japan rapidly expanded its control over European and U.S. colonial territories in the Pacific, Southeast Asia, and South Asia under the slogan of creating a Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere, but that is not to say it had a systemized concept for governing them. Nevertheless, it sought to cultivate local forces for a number of reasons, including resisting the Allied ideals listed in the Atlantic Charter and forming a sense of shared Asian-ness, and because it was needed to support Japan's occupation policy. These developments severely impacted Western Europe's colonial empires, and, either through cooperation with or resistance against Japan, local forces that would become drivers of their countries' postwar independence movements developed.²²

The second asymmetry was retention of neutrality between Japan and the Soviet Union until just before the war ended. This enabled the Soviet Union to avoid attack from Japan and focus on its fight against Germany. Furthermore, the Soviet Union leveraged its participation in the war against Japan as a means of bargaining with the United States and Great Britain at the Yalta Conference for restoring its East Asian interests lost in the Russo-Japanese War and acquiring the Kurile Islands. However, the Soviet Union's non-involvement in East Asia influenced the actions of the United States and Great Britain, which became increasingly suspicious of the Soviet Union following the death of President Roosevelt and his replacement by Harry S. Truman, and because of friction over the Soviet Union's occupation of Germany and Eastern Europe after Germany's defeat. The Truman administration came to view Soviet participation in the war against Japan as undesirable.

As a result, the heightened suspicions between the United States and Soviet Union also affected the process of ending the Pacific War. The United States and Great Britain observed developments within the Japanese government that suggested an early surrender and were aware that Japan was trying to limit the terms of surrender to relinquishing its empire but upholding the imperial system known as the *kokutai* (national polity). They therefore looked into the possibility of realizing Japan's early surrender by providing some type of guarantee around the Emperor's position. At the same time, the Manhattan Project provided them with the prospect of developing nuclear weapons. The United States and Great Britain decided to present terms of surrender to Japan in the form of the Potsdam Declaration, while using nuclear weapons to force Japan into an early peace. Indeed, Japan surrendered in August 1945 prior to a mainland invasion. Nevertheless, the Soviet Union entered the war against Japan just before the Japanese surrender and successfully took control of Manchuria, a portion of the Korean Peninsula, the Kurile Islands, and Sakhalin. The Korean Peninsula, Taiwan, and Okinawa,

²¹ Lu Xijun, "Asia Taiheyo Senso to Higashi Asia Kokusai Seiji no Henyo [Asia-Pacific War and Transformation of East Asian International Politics]," in Kawashima and Hattori, eds., *Higashi Asia Kokusai Kankei Shi*, p. 175.

²² Hatano Sumio, *Taiheiyō Senso to Ajia Gaiko* [The Pacific War and Japan's Diplomacy in Asia] (University of Tokyo Press, 1996).

meanwhile, were separated from the Japanese mainland and placed under occupation. Taiwan was placed under Chinese control and Okinawa under U.S. military occupation, but the Korean Peninsula was split up and occupied by the Soviet Union and the United States.²³

The third asymmetry with Europe was the emergence of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as an entity relatively independent of the Soviet Union. Just before Japan's surrender, Chiang concluded the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance and prepared for its confrontation with the CCP after Japan's defeat through the transfer of rights in northeast China. However, the Kuomintang was initially unable to enter Manchuria, which was controlled by the Soviet Union, and the CCP used the area as a base for acquiring arms and other supplies and resuming its civil war with the Kuomintang. U.S. efforts to broker a truce failed, and an all-out civil war ensued. Although the Kuomintang initially had the upper hand, it gradually lost strength and was eventually overpowered and forced to flee to Taiwan in 1948. The establishment of the People's Republic of China was declared in October 1949. This marked the creation of the first unified government of all of mainland China since the Xinhai Revolution.²⁴ However, the national borders of Qing China, which had been treated as a partially opened country by the major world powers, were inadequately defined, leaving the issue of ill-defined borders between China and the Soviet Union, India, and the Korean Peninsula, as well as in maritime areas. China obtained sovereignty not as a Western-style nation state with formally established territories, but as a Communist state with remnants of its historical imperialist traits. Its ambiguous borders and multiethnic nature were also consequences of that.

The power vacuum created by Japan's early surrender and China's communist transformation was most pronounced in the post-World War II Korean Peninsula. With the United States and the Soviet Union facing off at the 38th parallel and the legitimacy of Japan's colonial governance structures having been lost, local political battles became intermingled with the Cold War in Europe, and a Cold War structure, with its global and military tensions, took hold. After its occupation by the United States and Soviet Union, the Korean Peninsula saw the return of nationalist forces from around the world, including Manchuria, various parts of China, the Soviet Union, and the United States. They intermingled with various weak domestic forces, resulting in repeated power struggles. There was also broad opposition to the initial proposal by the United States and the Soviet Union to make the Korean Peninsula a trust territory under the United Nations. Governments were ultimately formed with administrations led by Syngman Rhee under U.S. control and Kim Il-sung under Soviet control but they lacked legitimacy, and the United States and the Soviet Union continued to restrict any movements to unify Korea across the dividing line.²⁵ However, the Truman administration, which wanted

²³ Hasegawa Tsuyoshi, ed., *The End of the Pacific War: Reappraisals* (Stanford University Press, 2007); Waldo Heinrichs and Marc Gallicchio, *Implacable Foes: War in the Pacific, 1944-1945* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

²⁴ Kubo Tooru, *Syakai Syugi eno Cyosen 1945-1971* [Challenge to Socialism, 1945-1971] (Iwanami Shinsho, 2011), chapter 1.

²⁵ Hirayama Tatsumi, *Higashi Asia Reisen no Kigen – Chosen Hanto Bundan no Kozu* [Origins of the East Asian Cold War: Structure of the Divided Korean Peninsula] (Shinzansha, 2002).

to see China's communist rule as an expression of nationalism rather than China becoming a Soviet satellite state, scaled back assistance to Korea, and a speech given by Secretary of State Dean Acheson in January 1950 placed Korea outside the U.S. island-based defensive perimeter. Around the same time, Stalin, who concluded a new Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance with Mao, returned the northeastern rights to China and encouraged Mao to lead the revolution in Asia. He also allowed Kim to launch a military invasion into the ROK and backed offensives in East Asia.²⁶

The United States, meanwhile, saw North Korea's push into the south as the first step of a military offensive by communist forces and intervened via the United Nations. It also curtailed expansion of the battleline between China and Taiwan by dispatching its forces to the Taiwan Strait. When counteroffensive by UN troops pushed North Korea into a crisis, the Soviet Union asked China to intervene and Mao made the heavy decision to join and fight against the U.S. troops. UN troops had not expected China to intervene and considered attacking China or using nuclear weapons at one point, but ultimately aimed for a ceasefire around the 38th parallel. Japan concluded a peace treaty mainly with Western countries, as a U.S. ally, and provided forward deployment bases for U.S. troops in East Asia, as did the ROK and the Philippines. However, the biggest outcome of the Korean War was heightened military tension between the East and West worldwide, including Europe. In Europe, the remilitarization of West Germany and its participation in the Western alliance was a point of serious consideration. Within the Cold War framework, international politics in East Asia and Europe were closely interconnected as the first and second fronts.²⁷

At the same time, the entrenchment of an international order identical to the global Cold War structure in East Asia from the time of Japan's surrender through the Korean War prevented the formation of a sovereign nation system consisting of the different countries in East Asia, just as the traditional Sinocentric international order in the 19th century and the East Asian order built around Japan's colonial empire in the first half of the 20th century had done. This is evident in Japan's postwar settlements as well. Japan did not establish fundamental relations via a multilateral peace treaty with China, the Soviet Union, the ROK, and North Korea and instead settled postwar issues and defined diplomatic relations with them via individual treaties. The issue of building a stable, multilateral international order in East Asia has been left unresolved since the end of the Cold War through to the present and can be said to pose a fundamental issue to security in the region.

²⁶ Anatoly Vasilyevich Torkunov, translated by Shimotomai Nobuo and Kim Sung-ho, *Chosen Senso no Nazo to Shinjitsu – Kim Il-sung, Stalin, Mao Zedong no Kimitsu Denpo ni yoru* [Mysteries and Truths of the Korean War: Confidential Telegrams of Kim Il-sung, Stalin, and Mao Zedong] (Soshisha, 2001); Zhu Jianrong, *Mou Takuto no Chosen Senso – Chugoku ga Ouryoku-ko wo Wataru made* [Mao Zedong's Korean War: Lead Up to China Crossing the Yalu River] (Iwanami Gendai Bunko, 2004).

²⁷ William Stueck, *The Korean War: An International History* (Princeton University Press, 1995).

6. Concluding Remarks

This was a very rough review of developments in East Asia in the first half of the 20th century. While it might not have achieved my stated aim of “reconstructing the history of modern East Asia,” I would like to conclude my address by commenting on two points.

The first point is that, while China is obviously a frontrunner today, the national strength of other Asian countries has risen as well, and this region enjoys a greater bearing in global affairs. In contrast, Russia has seen its influence reduced and the United States has experienced a relative decline in its influence as well. Given these conditions, China might seek to restore its centrality in East Asian international politics along the lines of what existed through to the 19th century. Nevertheless, despite some setbacks, the globalization of the world is a reality. The possibility of the East Asian international order reverting to a relatively closed state as seen prior to the 19th century is gone. It is necessary to restructure the global order to reflect the relative importance of Asia, and frameworks such as China’s Belt and Road Initiative and those centered on the concept of the Indo-Pacific should be analyzed from this perspective. The growing interest of European countries in the Asia-Pacific region may also have significance in this context.

The second point is that applying the principle of sovereign nations as the one true principle for defining international relations in East Asia is problematic and likely undesirable. Since the 19th century, East Asian international relations incorporated some form of imperialist or hegemonistic principle. As a result, many territorial, ethnic, and other issues exist that cannot be neatly resolved by the principle of sovereign nations. Even if China becomes the leading presence in the East Asian international order, any attempts to position its past empire as a nation state could result in significant frictions and conflicts. China’s tendency towards rejecting the ambiguity that existed in the positions of Hong Kong and Taiwan is already raising tensions with related countries. One of the lessons of history may well be the importance, to contemporary East Asian security, of establishing a foundation based on the principle of sovereign nations, and combining it with the principle of order based on agreements over matters that cannot be neatly resolved by sovereign states.

This completes my address, though I realize that it overlooked many things and I am not certain how illuminating it will be to history researchers such as yourselves. In any case, thank you for your attention.