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# The Regional Networks of the East Asian World: On the Historical Dynamism of Asian Perspectives as seen from Ryūkyū/Okinawa

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## **Introduction – The Re-emergence of the 'Local' in Globalization**

The rapid progression of globalization strongly demands a reconsideration of theories of Asia that have been developed through a perspective of the unilinear progression of world development. It demands reconsideration of theories of region too, in which everything from 'the world' to 'the local' has been hierarchically sequenced. As challenges occur ever more frequently on a global scale, a new role for global perspectives on locality and region, as well as the formation of a global regional subjectivity becomes a pressing concern. In current globalization, all regional space has become a connective unit mutually configuring annular relationships, not according to a top-down hierarchy or scale, but formed as a series of diversified networks. As for the

local networks themselves, while loose connections are often emphasized, it cannot be denied that these informal and non-institutional connections are promoted everywhere as an unavoidable 'force'. In addition to this, regional units such as oceans and cities – units that mutually connect and configure regional space – have been confirmed once again as having a tremendous influence and impact on human life. The regional dynamism that globalization has brought about not only brings into question the challenge of how we understand Asia, but also requires that we address how we might conceive Asian regional networks anew in the future.

## **1. Asia in a Global Age**

The opening and expansion of region as expressed under the term internationalization and 'worlding'

(*sekai-ka*) has changed significantly under globalization. Both internationalization and ‘worlding’ are, generally speaking, perspectives that have the state at heart. In contrast, one of the most significant characteristics of globalization is the regionalization of the state. However, changes to the order of regional space have not just meant the replacement of an order of region, with the state at its center, with one that consists of the global world. The regional dynamism of the global has placed all manner of regional space, beginning with that of the state, into an equal position.

The traditional world system organized the world around the state and, in particular, the territorial state as a basic form of the modern state through which regions were then arranged hierarchically. Spatial order was organized through a process of serialization ordering regional space along the vertical axis of a hierarchical relationship. The regional or ‘global’ had, until now, been understood within the framework of previous international relations. In other words, the world was considered to be at the top of the pile, followed by large regions such as the continents of Asia, Africa and America, then came the territorial state, followed by subordinate regions within it to whom ‘regional policy’ was aimed at, and then finally the ‘local’ as the terminal point in this sequence.

In the case of Japanese history, local-ness has been explained in the form of ‘local history’ (*jikata-shi*). Moreover, keeping the world as the highest level in these arrangements, in regional relations that converge on the state notions of the local and the indigenous have been emphasized and policies attempted in the United Nations and elsewhere have focused on local relations from below. However, even despite this, there had been no change in the basic hierarchy of relations. In contrast to this, under contemporary globalization, all regional space has become a one unit that makes up an annular

whole and regional relationships are represented as mutual multi-faceted networks without relationships of hierarchy or scale. Furthermore, as units which make up regional space, ‘oceans’ and ‘cities’, as regional space which has not directly related to the state until now, can be said to have come to exercise a tremendous role and influence on human life. In other words, the major characteristic of this regional linkage is not just that globalization has increased the size of the world to a global scale, but that it has shown us new combinations of inter-regional relations as expressed through the direct linking of the local and the global. Existing states have become one form of layered and shared regional space. At the same time, it should be noted that, when thinking about any kind of regional space, the proximity of the global as a dynamic has to be considered.

## **2. America’s ‘de-Europeanization’ and Asian Identity**

America today is attempting to globalize through ‘de-Europeanizing’ its own identity, particularly in the Pacific. For instance, in historical studies there is a movement today that emphasizes America’s ‘global history’ through illustrating how both the North and South American continent lay at the heart of world history in its position separating the Atlantic and Pacific. These discussions attempt to theorize Asia through America’s so-called Pacific experience. When we think of Asia, or the near future of Asia, this direction in thought contains within it the possibility of reexamining a wide variety of contexts with regard to Pacific regional relationships. To put this slightly differently, when we attempt to theorize East Asia, for example, we should not take East Asia out of context and move to divide its interior into analyzable segments, but look at the Asia enveloped within East Asia through a perspective that straddles the

Pacific from the end of the nineteenth century to today.

Furthermore, it certainly has not been the case that, when we think about Asia, the idea that Asia can only be thought about in the context of the world of the global ocean has disseminated as widely as we might like to think.

### 3. China's 'De-Asianization' and Theories of Japanese Culture via America

As globalization increases exponentially, China has sought to 'de-Asianize' and has deepened multi-faceted regional connections with South East Asia and the countries of Central Asia, while all the while taking the United States as its major trading partner. This phenomenon is not limited to international relations, but can also be seen to be influencing civilian culture as well. For example, up until today, whenever people spoke of literature by expatriate Chinese, it was always that of expatriates in Malaysia or Singapore that was mentioned. Today, however, it is becoming more common to mention the expatriate Chinese literature of America. In regard to the contemporary Chinese understanding of Japan too, theories of Japan and Japanese society that have entered China through the mediation of the United States have also been on the rise.

To give one example, we might offer the continuous work of intellectuals like Chuang Xichang, who first translated Ruth Benedict's *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* of which a number of different translations have appeared since. As a method for understanding Japan, the postwar American anthropologist, Ruth Benedict's *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* was translated as, *Júhūa yǔdǎo: rìběn wénhuà de zhū móshì* (ed. Xichang Zhuang, trans Zhimin Sun, Xiaohe Ma and Lisheng Zhu, Beijing: Jiuzhou Press, 2005) containing many extra illustrations and photographs and it became a bestseller.

Translations such as this have attracted many readers and the phenomenon of new illustrated and descriptive editions continuously appearing has not let up. There are already more than six different translations and secondary texts on *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*. Needless to say, this book considered Japan to be a 'different culture' in the context of the postwar United States' occupation and governance of Japan, and expressed this perspective on cross-cultural understanding through the methodology of psychological analysis. One particularly symbolic argument of the book was that, against the 'culture of guilt' that could be observed in Europe, Japan had a 'culture of shame' and that each was fundamentally different. The book has been read as a representative work of the 'theories of Japanese culture' genre and is read around the world even today.

It must be said that the contemporary efforts of Chinese intellectuals to understand Japan through this analytical method of 'cross-cultural understanding' is different from the cultural theories of the influence of Chinese culture on East Asia that we have seen before. Incidentally, this book is the first book in a three volume illustrated series called, 'Understanding Japan' (*Liǎojiě rìběn*) of which the other two volumes are Chitao Tai's *Rìběn lùn* ('On Japan') and Yakumo Koizumi (the Greek-Irish, Lafcadio Hearn)'s *Japan and the Japanese* (translated by Min Yan). Intellectuals that Kōjiro Yoshikawa recommended as important for understanding Japanese culture, such as Zouren Zhou's *Nihonjin-ron* (Theories on the Japanese) and Inazō Nitobe's *Bushidō* have also been published. The introduction of these kinds of theories of Japanese culture 'via the United States' by Chinese intellectuals, of which the publication of *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* proved to be a catalyst for, is probably the first time such a phenomenon has occurred in China's history.

#### 4. The Formation of a New ‘Asian Regional Subject’: The Pacific/Indian Ocean Coastal Cities Network

Globalization has liquefied previous hierarchical regional relationships through the concept of the local at its core and, through incorporating the state into its regional dynamism; the regional subjectivity of Asia has begun to change. If we take the perspective of oceanic Asia from the Pacific to the Indian Ocean, we can see the emergence of the coastal cities as major subjective actors in the region. These various networks formed by coastal cities spread out across the sea will no doubt from now on be required to form regional subjective ties of socio-cultural opportunity, rather than just political or economical. The dynamism of this new Asian regional subjectivity that emerges through the connection of coastal cities at its base overlaps exactly with contemporary challenges in the global world. Historically speaking, the relationship between the Canton region and the United States has existed since the seventeenth century. The regional name Canton has a genealogy in which it was named for all sorts of reasons by states such as Arkansas, Connecticut, Dakota, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Montana, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas, West Virginia and Wisconsin, and Canton emerged as a city that symbolized both China and Asia on the other side of the Pacific.

Moreover, if we are to consider the potential challenges of these networks of coastal cities in the Pacific/Indian Ocean region seriously, then the UBC: Union of Baltic Cities also exists as an oft-quoted historical example. This network is one of the mechanisms of the European Union in which a hundred and five Baltic coastal cities have qualified to participate and gather to debate specific themes according to their rela-

tionship to them. They consider common themes and challenges, competitive challenges and all sorts of points of negotiation. For instance, they might discuss the construction of skyscrapers in coastal cities, or issues concerning the environment, such as water reserves. It is a framework through which global scale issues are addressed through city coalition. Of course, it could be said that this Baltic coastal city cooperation illustrated by something like the Hanseatic League represents a long tradition of trading and cultural networks that date back to the Middle Ages, and that what is happening today is the globalization of these networks. In this sense, it is an important example of how coalition and cooperation takes place on issues that are both global and at the same time local in Asia and East Asia.

#### 5. The Regional Networks of Asian Perspectives from Ryūkyū/Okinawa

Even if we limit ourselves to intellectual debate after the late nineteenth century, the Asian perspectives coming from Ryūkyū/Okinawa have encompassed historical Asian perspectives from over five hundred years in around just a hundred and fifty years of Ryūkyū an/Okinawan history over five generations. For example, 1) Okinawan traditional society and Japanese nationalism as viewed since the Meiji Restoration, 2) the Ryūkyū Shobun (procedure/dismantlement) and international relations with Japan and Qing China, 3) Asia’s trade networks and the relationship between the Ryūkyū Kingdom and the Ming and Qing dynasties, 4) The postwar United States and Okinawa/Japan, 5) Intellectual exchange with the United States and 6) Foreign migration and the consciousness of being *uchinanchu* (Okinawan). These different themes also represent the changes to Ryūkyūan/Okinawan history over a five hundred, hundred and fifty and fifty year timespan, how-

ever, in recent years we have seen a deepening of our understanding of Ryūkyūan research and the era of the Ryūkyū Kingdom has come to occupy a central place in that understanding. This is closely related to Okinawan identity. Against the fact that Okinawa is often positioned and debated about within the context of foreign countries such as Japan and the United States due to its governance switching between these two countries, research into the Ryūkyū Kingdom has taken the *sea* as a key point of reference and emphasizes the networked identity of Ryūkyū/Okinawa spreading out far into South East Asia. Similarly, this Ryūkyū Kingdom research has proposed a perspective in which Asia can be considered in relation to both Japan, and, to an extent previously unattempted, in relation to China. However, not only has this research focused upon the relationship of the Ryūkyū Kingdom, which had existed as a tributary state for five hundred years, with China, it has also observed how the Ryūkyū Kingdom created multifaceted networks throughout East and South East Asia and how Ryūkyū traders developed long-distance trade and exchange routes throughout the region.

It has shown how Ryūkyū/Okinawa was a kind of networked or regional world in itself. Indeed, the Ryūkyū Kingdom was a tributary state in which diplomatic tributes were sent to China from the Ryūkyū government in Shuri. However, at the same time, it was also sovereign in its own right, itself receiving tributary goods from the surrounding Miyako and Yaeyama islands. This kind of Ryūkyū Kingdom historical perspective is not just limited to issues of historical consciousness or developing a new understanding of Okinawa. Rather, through emphasizing Okinawa's networked constitution, its oceanic character, and its expansion into the wider Asian world; this research has structurally clarified Okinawa's internal character as well.

Against the tendency in Ryūkyūan/Okinawan research to view Okinawa in relation to each of its negotiating partners, or to examine differences in governing regimes from the Qing to Japan, or then the United States and Japan once again, the view that it is impossible to classify Ryūkyūan/Okinawan history according to changes in upper governing bodies has developed a powerful incentive to reveal the Ryūkyūan/Okinawan world has a unified whole in itself and develop a oceanic vision for the region. In this sense, Okinawan research that is carried out through the perspective of the Ryūkyū Kingdom poses new challenges both methodologically and for the actual situation in the contemporary object of that research.

## **6. In the Footprints of the GARIOA Exchange Students**

One further thing I want to focus on is the presence of Okinawan and Asian perspectives that appeared among postwar Okinawan intellectuals through the mediating factor of the United States. This involves two generations of Okinawan intellectuals, and all of the complex issues covered above interact and form a kind of historically annular Asian perspective from Ryūkyū/Okinawa that is making a reappearance today. I want to think about the historical characteristics of this issue through taking up the 'Preface' to the book, *GARIOA Ryūgakusei no Ashiato* [The Footprints of Government Appropriation for Relief in an Occupied Area Exchange Students] published in 2008 by the GARIOA Fullbright Okinawa Alumni Association. The book concerns intellectuals who travelled on exchanges to the United States from postwar Okinawa as so-called 'Government Appropriation for Relief in an Occupied Area Exchange Students'.

Just as with other occupied territories such as West Germany and Japan, the US Congress spent Government and Relief in Occupied Area funds in order to support the residents of the Ryūkyū archipelago. These funds were used for a variety of programs ensuring commercial stability, economic infrastructure and the promotion of education. They were first made available in 1947 and renewed every year for ten years. The US government also used these funds to send exchange students to the United States from Okinawa. Okinawa effectively remained under US military occupation for twenty years after the 1952 Peace Treaty with Japan from which Japan regained its independence. During this time, despite the fact that the name of this government spending has changed, the exchange students from Okinawa still relied on scholarship funds from the US Army and thus can be regarded as ‘GAR-IOA Exchange Students’.

In 1945 the US occupation army of Okinawa gradually began to embark upon the promotion of higher education in Okinawa. In the second year of the occupation, the authorities used the field camp in what is now Uruma city and opened an educational school with the purpose of training school teachers and a foreign language school that would pool English language educational materials. With these two schools as its foundation the Ryūkyū University was established on the remains of Shuri castle in 1950 and this same year so-called *Nichi Ryū* (exchange to Japan) progression to universities on the Japanese mainland was recognized, as was exchange from Okinawa to the United States, so-called *Bei-Ryū* (exchange to America). The young Okinawan elite, which had a burning desire to learn at this time in Okinawa’s postwar history, chose ei-

ther way to educational advancement, but they were all similar in their sharing the common experience of war and often employment in the US Army bases on Okinawa.

According to the ‘Okinawa Scholarship Roster for US Government Aid’ published by the Okinawan Alumni Association in 2001, the GAR-IOA exchange students from Okinawa consisted of only two people in the first year of the program in 1949. But in 1950 there were fifty-three, and as the program was carried out annually the numbers grew and in the last year of the program, 1970, a total of nine hundred (or a thousand and forty five students if we include multiple exchanges) travelled on these scholarships. Of course, within that number are included around twenty students from the Amami Islands which were reverted to Japan in December 1953, however, even if compared to the seven thousand two hundred GAR-IOA Fulbright exchange students that had travelled to the United States from the Japanese mainland recorded in 2008, it is clear that the number of exchange students who travelled from Okinawa was considerable.

The various majors chosen by the exchange students ranged widely to include the humanities, the social and natural sciences, law, agriculture, engineering and medicine and the opportunity to change majors was completely open. As to the result of their studies, as far as can be known accurately, around fifty-eight students were awarded the highest doctorate degrees. This number is both eye opening and illustrative of the ability and effort put into achieving these kinds of results on behalf of the exchange students and commends their perseverance. It need not be said that many of these new

PhDs had also gained either undergraduate or masters degrees at universities in the United States and Japan.

From this account, we can see how postwar Okinawan intellectuals crossed the Pacific and built up a direct connection to American academic culture as well as began to debate Asia from an American perspective.

One more typical example of this perspective can be seen in the recent publication of the *International Journal of Okinawan Studies* (Kazuyuki Tomiyama, Editor-in-Chief, Vol.1(1) March, 2010, Kenkyusha). Also, work such as Gary Y. Okimoto's 'Okinawan Studies and Its Interventions', Nishizato Kikō's 'Rethinking Sino-Ryūkyūan-Japanese Relations in the Ming-Qing Successive Period: With a Focus on the Ryūkyū Kingdom's Tributary Problems', Iyori Tsutomu's 'Fiction and Reality in Ryūkyū Ritual', Gregory Smits' 'Romanticizing the Ryukyu Past: Origins of the Myth of Ryukyuan Pacifism', and Joyce N. Chinen's 'Okinawan Labor and Political Activists in Hawai'i' can all be said to be based upon a vision of annular and myriad Asian perspectives in both time and space originating with Ryūkyū/Okinawa.

Asia is now debated across the Pacific and Indian oceans. Asia is also debated through the network of coastal cities in the region. Even with regard to Sino-Japanese relations, this will now have to be debated through the coastal cities of the Pacific Ocean and the entire ring of the China Sea. What this means is that, in thinking about the regional dynamism of Asia, the element of the Pacific Ocean is an essential part of this story, as is the influence of the Indian Ocean. In traversing the Asian perspectives that are annulated through the Asian seas and emanate from Ryūkyū/Okinawa, and by visiting the process through which contemporary Okinawan intellectuals are synthesizing these perspectives,

we can finally begin to start talking about an Asian way of knowledge.

## Conclusion

Asia has come to be talked about as something spanning the Pacific, and the same is true for both China and Japan. What this phenomenon means is that, for the time being, thinking across the Pacific will derive the context from which the status of Asia will be debated. This challenge of the 'Pacific' forces us to realize that all history, politics, economics, societies and culture since the seventeenth century have consisted of a Pacific experience and this perspective is also extremely significant for Japan.

Asian Studies, which have until now advanced within the context of postwar American Asia policy, have had a huge influence of the formation of an intellectual class in Asia, not only just politically or economically, but also many connections and new turning points can be observed within the realm of culture too. The investigation of trans-Pacific relationships will no doubt continue to shape the near future of Asia, and in particular East Asia. One example of how the near future of Asia will be reshaped will surely be to see how an alliance of coastal cities around the Pacific might eventually be conceived.

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