This chapter is a survey of Japan’s relations with other Asian nations. It focuses on the ideology and movement known as Pan-Asianism, which emphasized Asian solidarity and unity, from the early Meiji era (1868–1912) to the present day. Throughout its history, Pan-Asianism has assumed many forms. Embodying the ideal of cooperation among the nations of East Asia against the threat of Western imperialism and domination, the movement was egalitarian in theory. Whereas the Japanese government’s diplomatic efforts (see Chapter 2 in this volume) focused on establishing and maintaining friendly relations with the Western powers, Pan-Asianist writers and activists emphasized the need for closer relations with Japan’s Asian neighbours and, in some circumstances, a Pan-Asian alliance against the West. However, in many cases, this aim also implied Japanese claims to leadership in Asia.

In the immediate postwar period, scholars avoided Pan-Asianism as a research subject because of its complex and ambiguous legacy; however, recent decades have seen much scholarly interest in the history of regionalism in East Asia, stimulated by the ongoing regional integration and its problems. The growing body of works on Pan-Asianism include studies by Koschmann (1997), Yamamura (2001), Arrighi, Hamashita and Selden (2003), Matsuura (2010), Aydin (2007), Hotta (2007), Saaler and Koschmann (2007), and Saaler and Szpilman (2011). Detailed studies on the role of Pan-Asianism in Sino-Japanese relations are now also available (Saga 2016; Sun 2000). All these works, and many others, too numerous to list here, cumulatively contribute to a better understanding of the dynamics of the region and of the issues related to national and transnational identities in modern East Asia.

Early Pan-Asianism: Japan and China

One of the central questions to ask when thinking about regional integration, past and present, is whether it is intended to serve the interests of the leading state or nation involved, or whether it is envisaged that all nations in the region should share in its benefits. Few Pan-Asianists have given a clear answer to this question. In this sense, Pan-Asianism has always been a morally ambiguous ideology that was mobilized over time by different actors for different aims. The earliest works on Pan-Asianism, written in Japan during the Edo period (1603–1868), gave priority to Japan’s national interest. Many of these writings could be characterized as expressions.
of proto-imperialism. Satō Nobuhiro (1769–1850), Aizawa Seishisai (1782–1863), Hirano Kunio-mi (1828–64) and other political commentators believed that Japan was a sacred country under the rule of the divine emperor (tennō), and thus took it for granted that it should be the leader of Asia.

Nevertheless, arguments for regional cooperation were not limited to such visions of a bloc under Japanese control. Many Japanese writers acknowledged the central position of China, the ‘Middle Kingdom’, in the international order in East Asia. They knew very well that China was the dominant regional power and, for cultural and historical reasons, they had great respect for Chinese civilization and its power as a nation. Japan had been under Chinese influence for many centuries. It was not until the defeat of China in the Opium War (1839–42) and the mid-century Taiping Rebellion, which nearly toppled the Qing dynasty, that China’s reputation began to be undermined in Japanese eyes.

However, until the last decade of the nineteenth century, an emphasis on cooperation with China remained an important facet of Pan-Asian discourse. Article 2 of the 1871 Sino-Japanese Friendship and Trade Treaty, concluded in Tianjin (Tientsin) between Qing China and Japan, specifically referred to ‘reciprocal assistance’ between the two nations in the event of a foreign threat. Prince Iwakura Tomomi (1825–83), one of the leaders of the new Meiji government, and Shiga Shigetaka (1863–1927), a scholar and journalist associated with the opposition, both continued to express the need for cooperation with China. Support for cooperation can also be found in the popular press of the time. As late as 1890, for example, the influential daily Asahi Shinbun published an editorial which argued for an alliance between the two countries against ‘European aggression’ (Oka 1961: 18).

In addition, China was an important trading partner of Japan, and advocates of close relations with China never tired of pointing out that ‘geography is destiny’. Japan, they insisted, could not ignore its proximity to the Middle Kingdom. Not surprisingly, Japanese traders and entrepreneurs active in China were outspoken advocates of Pan-Asianism. Among the first Japanese to set up a business in China was Sone Toshitora (1847–1910), who arrived in Shanghai in 1867. A naval officer, in 1877 Sone founded the Shin-A-sha, the first Pan-Asian association established in Japan.

Another important figure was Arao Sei (1859–96), a Pan-Asianist torn between Asian solidarity, on the one hand, and Japanese nationalism and the blind loyalty and obedience it demanded, on the other. To a degree, this same conflict was true of most Japanese active in Asia during this period. A serving army officer, in 1885 Arao was posted to the China Department within the Army General Staff. One year later, he was sent on an assignment to gather information in China. In effect, he was a spy. But he was also a Pan-Asian idealist, and his views did not necessarily reflect the views of the military on this question. Although he was a proponent of ‘reforming’ China under Japan’s guidance, Arao did not unconditionally approve of Japanese aggression in China. Japan’s victory over China in the First Sino-Japanese War in 1895 bolstered Japanese confidence in their ability to build an empire in Asia. Arao died of bubonic plague in 1896, too early to know how Japan’s victory would affect his views. It is clear, however, that in the memoranda he penned during and immediately after the war he opposed the imposition of large indemnities on the Qing government by the Japanese, believing that it would only cause resentment in China. For the same reason, he argued that Japan should not seek any territorial gains at the expense of China (Oka 1961: 36).

In hindsight, the threat of Western imperialism emphasized by these early Pan-Asian activists may have been exaggerated – but it is worth remembering that for the Japanese in the Meiji period, the situation seemed critical. For them, the danger was clear and present. As a result, the government’s main concern in the first decades of the Meiji period was to complete a
programme of domestic reform that would transform Japan into a modern state as rapidly as possible. The goal was to fend off any possible military threats to Japan’s independence and to obtain revision of the ‘unequal treaties’ that Japan had been forced to sign and which were perceived as a humiliating encroachment on Japan’s independence. Consequently, relations with neighbouring countries received less attention. However, developments in Korea soon became a matter of serious concern, precisely because of their perceived relevance to preserving Japan’s independence.

Japan and Korea

Japan’s relations with Korea were a matter of controversy right from the beginning of the Meiji period in 1868. Whereas some in the government demanded that domestic reform should take precedence over foreign policy issues, others argued that Japan should pursue a more offensive strategy on the Korean peninsula, which was seen as a threat to Japan’s security. The debate over the ‘chastisement of Korea’ – or, more accurately, conquering Korea (seikanron) – that erupted in the early 1870s reflected these discussions. Influential members of the Meiji government such as Saigō Takamori (1828–77) and Itagaki Taisuke (1837–1919) argued that troops should be despatched to Korea, whereas others, although not opposing such sentiments, argued that Japan was not yet ready for foreign adventures – the country must be modernized first.

Historians have disagreed over the motives of the advocates of an invasion of Korea. Some see the root cause as security concerns. The trope of the peninsula thrusting ‘like a dagger into the soft belly of Japan’, as German military advisor General Jakob Klemens Meckel (1842–1905) put it in the 1880s, reflected the fear that the Korean peninsula, if occupied by a third country, might serve as a springboard for an attack on Japan. Others see a projected invasion in terms of ‘social imperialism’: the despatch of an army of samurai, who were about to lose their privileged status and stipends, to fight in Korea would reduce discontent in their ranks and make it more difficult for samurai to foment rebellion against the new government. It is very likely that strategic, security and social considerations all played a part in the eventual annexation of Korea.

Although Japan’s military inferiority to the West forced the early Meiji era policymakers to adopt a conciliatory approach over Korea, this moderate approach also reflected the fact that the Joseon Kingdom (Korea) was under Chinese suzerainty. A more aggressive policy toward the peninsula threatened to involve Japan in a war with China. Nevertheless, to increase its influence in the Korean peninsula, Japan forced the Joseon Kingdom to sign the Japan–Korea Treaty of 1876 (Nitchō shūkō jōki, known in Korea as the Treaty of Ganghwa). The treaty demonstrated that Japan regarded its national interest as more important than Asian solidarity, as it was essentially an unequal treaty that closely resembled the one-sided treaties that Japan had been forced to sign with the Western powers.

Whereas there were many vocal advocates of cooperation with China, few in Japan proposed cooperation with Korea. There were a number of reasons for this. First, Korea did not inspire as much admiration as China, which was the acknowledged centre of East Asian civilization and the greatest power in the region. Second, Japanese armies, despatched by warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537–98), had invaded and devastated the peninsula at the end of the sixteenth century and were forced to withdraw from Korea only as a result of Chinese military intervention. This did not inspire confidence in Korea as an effective ally against the Western threat.

Nevertheless, there were some supporters of such an alliance in Japan. One of the earliest advocates of Japanese–Korean cooperation was Tarui Tōkichi (1850–1922), who, after travelling extensively throughout the peninsula in the 1880s, became convinced of the necessity of reforming Korea. The chief obstacles to implementing such reform, he thought, were the antiquated royal family and the feudal system that supported it. Korean conservatives, who were adamantly
opposed to change, looked to China for help, whereas Korean proponents of reform looked to Japan as a model. Tarui and other like-minded Japanese formed ties with the progressive camp, which included Kim Ok-gyun (1851–94), who had visited Japan and been impressed by its modernizing efforts. Kim was convinced Korea should throw in its lot with Japan – otherwise Korea would inevitably be swallowed up by Russia or another Western power.

To realize their reformist programme, Kim and his comrades staged a coup d’état (the Gap-sin Coup) in 1884, but they lacked broad support: their revolt was quickly suppressed with the help of Chinese troops, called in by conservative elements in the government that the coup was seeking to unseat. Following this fiasco, Kim fled to Japan. The Korean government continued to regard him as a threat and sent agents to Japan to assassinate him, but without success. However, in 1894 Kim was murdered during a visit to Shanghai by a Korean government agent. The assassin returned to Korea to a hero’s welcome. The body of the failed reformist was sent back to Korea, where it was hacked to pieces and put on display throughout the country as a warning to other would-be pro-Japanese reformers (Kim 2011; Saga 2016).

Meanwhile, Tarui was putting his views on Korea on paper. His book Daitō gappōron (Treatise on the Great East), a product of many years’ writing and revision, was a Pan-Asianist treatise calling for Japan and Korea to unite to counter the menace of Western imperialism. Whether Tarui envisioned an alliance on equal terms is debatable (Kim 2011), but he certainly believed that Korea could only be reformed with Japanese assistance. The unfortunate Kim is also on record as having discussed the idea of sending Japanese to help reform Korea with Tōyama Mitsuru (1855–1944), the leader of the Genyōsha (see Joos 2011), in the 1880s. Some responded to Tarui’s cue. By 1890, a number of Japanese had infiltrated the Korean peninsula where they supported anti-government activities. Many of these men had been involved in the Freedom and People’s Rights Movement in Japan, which had lost its impetus by the late 1880s. Finding no outlets for their activism in Japan, they pursued their reformist ideals in Korea. Many espoused Pan-Asian sentiments, albeit of a vague and ill-defined nature.

As the Japanese presence in Korea increased, tensions with China – which, like Japan, maintained a significant presence in Korea – led to a deterioration of relations between the two countries. When Korean peasants, suffering from increasingly heavy taxation and resentful of foreign intrusion, staged an uprising in the 1890s, some of the Japanese activists on the peninsula – against the stated policy of the Japanese government – chose to assist the rebels. One celebrated band of these ‘continental adventurers’ (tairiku rōnin) was the Ten’yūkyō (Chivalrous Knights of Heavenly Assistance). Many of these men came from Fukuoka and Saga on Kyushu; others from Fukushima and other prefectures. Although the extent of their support for the Korean rebels is unclear, it had little practical effect. When the beleaguered Korean government appealed to China for help, the Chinese sent a detachment of troops to help quell the uprising. China’s intervention led to the outbreak of the First Sino-Japanese War in 1894. The members of the Ten’yūkyō turned their energy to assisting Japan’s war effort as spies and interpreters, and the organization was dissolved (Szpilman 2016, 337–48). However, its goals and ideals would be kept alive by the Kokuryūkai (Amur Society or Black Dragon Society, see Saaler 2014a), founded by Uchida Ryōhei (1873–1937) in 1901, which many Ten’yūkyō veterans joined.

With hindsight, it is easy to dismiss Japanese activities in Korea as serving the interests of Japanese imperialism, and there is much evidence to support this view. The young Japanese who were active in Korea were, first and foremost, nationalists whose primary concern was to protect Japan’s interests (Jansen 1954). But it is also true that they were in part motivated by ideas of Asian solidarity and a desire to protect their fellow Asians from Western imperialism.

Nor should we forget that some well-educated Koreans shared this view. Although Koreans acknowledged the threat of Japanese imperialism, they were also aware of other threats, more
immediate and more acute – such as that posed by Russia – and Japan was seen as a model for successful modernization and the preservation of national independence. For example, in a series of eight articles published in 1901, An Kyong-su (1853–1900), first president of the reformist Independence Club (see Oh 1995) and a former minister of war in the Joseon government, argued for a tripartite alliance between Japan, China and Korea (An 1900). Even some anti-Japanese activists, such as An Jung-geun (1879–1910, no relation of An Kyong-su), supported such an alliance. An devoted his last days before his execution for assassinating Prince Itō Hirobumi (1841–1909), Japan’s Resident-General in Korea, in 1909, to writing a ‘A Treatise on Peace in the East’, in which he also argued for cooperation between Japan, China and Korea (see Rausch 2012).

However, the assassination of Itō strengthened the position of those in Japan who argued for an annexation of Korea – though not on equal terms as demanded by Tarui, but as a colony and a bridgehead for further expansion onto the Asian continent. Although Tarui himself failed to object to the annexation of Korea in 1910, the Kokuryūkai approved of it without reservation as the realization of its long-desired goal – the union of Japan and Korea.

Nevertheless, some members of the Kokuryūkai criticized Japan’s Korean policy following a large-scale anti-Japanese uprising in Korea in 1919 known as the March First Independence Movement. They took this as proof that the Pan-Asian unity they advocated was failing to materialize. In 1921, these dissidents founded the Dōkōkai, an association which promoted equality for the Korean subjects of the Japanese emperor. Showing a strong awareness of international support for ‘self-determination’, the association stated that

the basic principle of the annexation of Korea, on the part of Japan, was to establish equality between the two nations, it being quite foreign to Japan’s intention to discriminate against Korea. . . . The urgent task, therefore, for Japan and Korea is to bring themselves into a harmonious whole and act in perfect brotherhood, so as to give effect to the spirit of the annexation.

(cited in Sailer 2011b: 66)

Clearly, the Dōkōkai had no doubts that annexation was the right way to bring about unity between Japan and Korea. However, their calls for equality fell on deaf ears. Koreans continued to suffer discrimination in the Greater Japanese Empire until colonial rule ended in September 1945.

The institutional development of Japanese Pan-Asianism

Japanese Pan-Asianists began organizing themselves into pressure groups in the 1880s with the objective of influencing both the government and public opinion. They resented their government’s policy of friendly relations and cooperation with the Western powers and objected to what they saw as the government’s failure to maintain relations with Japan’s Asian neighbours. Their goal was to change this situation.

The first significant Pan-Asian organization was the Kōkai (Raise Asia Society), founded in February 1880 (Kuroki 2007). Sone Taketora, who had founded the Shin’A-kai in 1877 and whom we have already encountered in this chapter, together with diplomat-cum-politician Watanabe Hiromoto (1848–1901), were the moving spirits of the Kōkai. The association also included an impressive number of senior Foreign Ministry officials (including Viscount Nagoaka Moriyoshi, 1842–1906, and Viscount Enomoto Takeaki, 1836–1908), some military figures (notably Katsura Tarō, 1848–1913, future prime minister, field marshal and prince) and a handful of journalists.
Although it is questionable whether the Kōakai’s more illustrious members were actively involved in its day-to-day operations, the fact that they lent their names to it invested it with enormous prestige. The society gained even more fame when the Imperial Household Ministry donated 1,000 yen to the organization, and two imperial princes, Kitashirakawa and Komatsu, became members. Some Chinese living in Japan were also co-opted as members (Kuroki 2005: 623). The Chinese, however, resented the name Kōakai, which to them implied inequality, as it was Japan that was assumed to be ‘raising’ an underdeveloped or less developed Asia. To placate them, the name was changed to Ajia kyōkai (Asia Society) in 1883 (Kuroki 2005: 263). The association founded branches in various cities throughout Japan.

Advocates of greater involvement with China included the members of the Tōhō kyōkai (Eastern Association), which was founded in July 1890 in Tokyo. Some of the founding members, such as Fukumoto Makoto (Nichinan, 1857–1921), were also members of the Kōakai and were close to Kuga Katsunan (1857–1907) and the Movement to Preserve National Essence, which was conservative and generally anti-Western in outlook. The Pan-Asian views of the Tōhō kyōkai were publicized in Shinbun Nihon (Newspaper Japan) and the short-lived periodical Katsu Nihon (Vigorous Japan), among other outlets.

In the 1890s, Japanese confidence was buoyed by its victory in the Sino-Japanese War (1894–95) and then deflated by the so-called Triple Intervention which deprived Japan of most of the spoils of war (see Chapter 2 in this volume). Pan-Asianists took the Triple Intervention as renewed proof of the hostile intentions of the Western powers and of Japan’s need to ally itself with its Asian neighbours.

Prince Konoe Atsumaro (1863–1904), a scion of the most senior branch of the ancient Fujiwara family, who had received his doctorate at Leipzig, wrote in the popular journal Taiyō (The Sun) in January 1898: ‘We must ally ourselves with those of the same race, and we must study the China problem’ (Jansen 1980: 113). Konoe also advocated an ‘Asian Monroe doctrine’, although he believed that the conditions for enforcing such a doctrine were not yet in place (Zachmann 2011). Konoe regarded East Asia as a battlefield where the ‘White and Yellow races would fight each other for world domination’. Alarmed that ‘too many Japanese had oriented themselves toward the West’, he determined to stop this ‘dangerous trend’ (Jansen 1980: 114) by founding, in June 1898, the Dōbunkai. The organization’s name expressed the Pan-Asian notion that China and Japan shared the same culture (dōbun) and the same script.

But the Dōbunkai proved short-lived. Five months later, in November 1898, it merged with the Tōhō kyōkai and the Zenrin kyōkai to form the Tōa Dōbunkai (East Asian Shared Culture Association). The Ajia kyōkai also merged with the new association in 1900 (Kuroki 2007: 48). The Tōa Dōbunkai aimed to establish branch offices in the major cities of China and Korea and to facilitate exchanges of students between China, Korea and Japan, presumably to foster a common East Asian consciousness and identity. Prince Konoe’s aristocratic status ensured support for his cause from the imperial navy and army and from business circles, but also from the Foreign Ministry (Jansen 1980: 114–5). The ministry possibly sensed the opportunity to ‘outsource’ some of the policy tasks it could not properly (or officially) address by itself, as its primary focus was improving relations with the Western powers. Konoe died prematurely at age 42 in 1904, but the organization he founded proved durable. By 1945, when the Tōa Dōbunkai was dissolved at war’s end, it had become the longest-lasting and most influential Pan-Asian association.

With hindsight, it is easy to dismiss these various bodies as mere advance guards of Japanese imperialism. Yet they also embodied a strong element of idealism and a genuine desire to assist other Asian nations. It is impossible to doubt the lofty motives of some members of the Pan-Asianist movement. Even Arao Sei, though initially posted to China by the Army General Staff as an intelligence officer, was, as we have seen, critical of the Japanese government’s harsh
policies toward China in 1895. Nevertheless, as Japanese confidence grew with continuing military successes in the Sino-Japanese War, the Boxer Rebellion (1899–1901) and the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–05, feelings of national superiority among Japanese Pan-Asianists intensified. There was now more talk of Japan becoming the leader (meishu) of Asia and an increased emphasis on Japan’s taking the lead in introducing reform to China and Korea (not to mention the rest of Asia) as a precondition to securing the independence of the region.

This emphasis on Japanese leadership of Asia was clearly reflected in the writings and activities of the Kokuryūkai, founded by Uchida Ryōhei in 1901 (see Saaler 2014a). Uchida hailed from Fukuoka, where his uncle, Hiraoka Kōtarō, was a coal-mine owner and a leading member of the Genyōsha. Uchida was proficient in judo and other martial arts. He had been involved in political activism on the Korean peninsula in the 1890s as a member of the Tenyūkyō and in China and Russia. Ostensibly working as a judo instructor in Vladivostok, he devoted himself to gathering military intelligence in the Russian Far East. Uchida remained a prominent leader of the Japanese Pan-Asian movement until his death in 1937; the Kokuryūkai continued as an active association until 1947, when it was outlawed by the Allied occupation authorities as an ultranationalist society. Although, in contrast to the Tōa Dōbunkai, the Kokuryūkai was at no time supported directly by the Japanese government, its views influenced some members of successive administrations in their decisions (see Saaler 2014a).

The Treaty of Portsmouth (1905), which formally concluded the Russo-Japanese War, reinforced the close relationship between Pan-Asianism and Japanese imperialism and expansionism by extending Japan’s colonial empire to the southern part of Manchuria. Still, the terms of the peace treaty sparked massive riots in Japan. The unrest was triggered by a rally in Hibiya Park in central Tokyo on 5 September 1905 staged by prominent Pan-Asianists, including Tōyama Mitsuru, Uchida Ryōhei, Inukai Tsuyoshi (1855–1932) and other members of the Anti-Russian Society (Tairo dōshikai), which had been formed by Prince Konoe Atsumaro shortly before his death in 1904. The rally quickly turned into a riot. The rioters were disappointed that, under the terms of the treaty, Japan had failed to gain any Russian territory (except the southern part of Sakhalin) or the large indemnities they had anticipated. Misled by the triumphalist tone of government propaganda echoed uncritically by the press, the Tokyo rioters were unaware of Japan’s weak military and economic position following the war. Similar riots took place in Japan’s other big cities.

Despite martial law being imposed and the riots quashed by government troops, Pan-Asianists continued to lobby for an anti-Western, Asian-oriented foreign policy. New Pan-Asian societies and journals emerged, representing diverse forms of the movement on both the right and the left of the political spectrum. In 1908, the journal Daiō (The Great East) was launched, which was subsequently declared the official organ of the Ajia gikai, a Pan-Asianist association probably founded in 1910, with members drawn from various Asian countries, as well as the Middle East.

Another organization, the Asiatic Humanitarian Brotherhood (Ashū washinkai), was founded in Tokyo in 1907 by socialist activists from various Asian countries. The Chinese journalist and philosopher Zhang Taiyan (Bailing, 1868–1936), in exile in Japan, was elected president. Its founding members included other noted Chinese intellectuals such as the romantic poet and translator Su Manshu (1884–1918); the first secretary-general of the Communist Party of China, Chen Duxiu (Ch’en Tu-hsiu, 1879–1942); and Indian nationalists. There were also participants from other colonized Asian countries such as Korea, Annam, Burma and the Philippines. Japanese participants included some of the leaders of the early socialist movement, such as Kōtoku Shūsui (1871–1911). Because of its socialist and anti-imperialist views, the Japanese authorities obstructed the activities of the association, which was effectively forced to disband little more than a year after its foundation (see Cai 2011).
Although these smaller organizations proved ephemeral, their activities show that Tokyo had become an important Pan-Asianist hub where activists from China, Korea, India, the Philippines and Vietnam nurtured their Asian and national identities while swapping ideas and experiences and discussing plans for their struggle against Western imperialism and colonialism.

The impact of World War I

World War I, which erupted in Europe in August 1914, gave an enormous boost to Pan-Asianism, while also providing an unprecedented opportunity for Japan to expand its interests in China as the European powers all but withdrew from East Asia to concentrate on their struggle for survival in Europe. The Japanese quickly filled the resulting power vacuum. Whereas before 1914 some ideologues had promoted the idea of a racial struggle between the ‘Whites’ and the ‘Yellows’ (Saaler 2007b), the Japanese government was careful not to give the impression that it intended to lead a racially motivated anti-Western crusade. Consequently, any accusations of this by the sensationalist Western press (the ‘yellow press’) and by Western politicians were strenuously dismissed as nonsense; the Japanese press poured scorn on such charges, and emissaries were sent to Europe and America to deny them (Saaler 2007b; 2011c).

After 1914 the situation changed. The government, although still insisting that it was cooperating fully with Britain and France – which, after all, were Japan’s allies – began to conduct an active, even aggressive, policy toward China, taking advantage of the power vacuum created by the war. The occupation of the German territories in Qingdao (Tsingtao) was followed in January 1915 by the so-called Twenty-One Demands to China – in effect an ultimatum, which, if accepted in its entirety, would turn China into a quasi-colony of Japan. However, protests by Britain and the United States forced Japan to soften its stance on this issue. Undeterred, Japan continued its efforts to bring a divided China under its influence. Attempts were also made to gain control over Mongolia and the whole of Manchuria by encouraging various separatist movements (Hatano 2001) with the help of numerous Japanese adventurers and army agents, most notably Kawashima Naniwa (1865–1949).

Although the government was pursuing an increasingly aggressive imperialist policy toward China, journalists and intellectuals continued to popularize Pan-Asian ideas, which were more and more characterized by anti-Western rhetoric, directed in particular at the Anglo-Saxon countries.

The term ‘Pan-Asianism’ gained currency during World War I. Although the expression had been used occasionally in the period preceding the war, the publication of the first book-length study of Pan-Asianism by the politician and entrepreneur Kodera Kenkichi (1877–1949) stimulated a boom in writings on Pan-Asianism. Dai-Ajiashugi-ron (Treatise on Greater Asianism; Kodera 1916), the first book wholly dedicated to the subject, represented also the first attempt to define Pan-Asianism in concrete terms. Kodera provided a list of commonalities that, in his view, constituted Asian identity. These were a) race, b) language and script, c) the political system, d) the legal system, e) religion, f) popular culture and g) geographic proximity. These elements, he noted, applied only to East Asia at the time of writing, but would inevitably be extended to include other Asian regions in what would be a lengthy process of integration comprising many stages until final unity was achieved (for a summary of Kodera’s views, see Saaler 2007c). Other commentators followed Kodera’s lead by popularizing Pan-Asianism as an ideology, so that by the war’s end the term had entered the Japanese popular lexicon.

In the pages of a monthly journal launched in 1917 by the Kokuryūkai, the Ajia jiron (Asian Review), the term ‘Pan-Asianism’ appeared for the first time in 1918. Around the same time, the leaders of the Kokuryūkai had concluded that the Pan-Asian cause must also be propagated
among non-Japanese. To this end, they launched an English-language periodical, *The Asian Review*. To assure high editorial standards, foreign expatriates were recruited. They included Frenchman Paul Richard (1874–1967), whose Pan-Asian views and condemnation of Western imperialism and hypocrisy found a receptive audience in Japan (Szpilman 2011a), and James Cousins (1873–1956), an Irish poet and a professor at Keio University. Both men had strong links to theosophy and to India, where they had each spent some years; both were opposed to British imperialism and favoured Indian independence. Richard, an obscure figure in the West, was highly influential in Japan at the time. His works, some of which were translated into Japanese by Ōkawa Shūmei (1886–1957), were presented to Crown Prince Hirohito. The newfound respectability of the Kokuryūkai and the Pan-Asian ideology it had been popularizing is clear from the public endorsement of *The Asian Review* by prominent Japanese figures, including Prime Minister Hara Takashi (1856–1921).

Among other things, World War I had the effect of radicalizing the movement and stimulating the formation of further Pan-Asian organizations. Most notably, in 1918, the Rōsōkai (Old and Young Society) was established; its members covered the entire spectrum of political opinion, ranging from the extreme left to the extreme right. The Rōsōkai was founded as a study group, lacking a well-defined political programme or ideological focus. Its members included two Pan-Asian radicals: journalist Mitsukawa Kametarō (1888–1936, organizer of the Rōsōkai) and Ōkawa Shūmei, a freelance translator who had been educated at Tokyo Imperial University (on Ōkawa, see Szpilman 1998a; 2011c; on Mitsukawa, see Szpilman 2007). Unhappy with the ideological vagueness of the Rōsōkai, in August 1919 the pair launched the Yūzonsha (Society of Those Who Remain), an organization dedicated to political reform in Japan and the propagation of Pan-Asianist ideology. In January 1920, the radical Pan-Asianist agitator Kita Ikki (1883–1937) joined the society as its ideologue-in-residence (Szpilman 2011b).

In acting as they did, the radicals in the Yūzonsha were reacting to two major factors: the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia and the global diffusion of Wilsonianism—in particular, the idea of national ‘self-determination’. In the immediate postwar period, the leaders of the Yūzonsha had high hopes for the former and were extremely hostile to the latter. Kita called Wilson a ‘worthless mediocrity’ (Szpilman 2002: 468). He and others rejected pacifism and the League of Nations as Anglo-Saxon tricks. But they were sympathetic to Bolshevism, which they viewed as a threat to the West—but not to Japan, which was supposedly immune to communism because of its unique national polity. Ōkawa even went so far as to claim that the Bolsheviks were pursuing a Pan-Asian agenda.

Even mainstream figures such as Prince Konoe Fumimaro (1891–1945), true to the anti-Western Pan-Asianism of his father Atsumaro, published an article in *Nihon oyobi Nihonjin* in 1918 in which he questioned the motives behind Anglo-American peace efforts. He also argued, very much like Kita, that pacifism and the League of Nations were devices to prop up a status quo that benefited the Anglo-Saxon powers, but was distinctly disadvantageous to Japan (Hotta 2011). Konoe’s stance helps us understand why in Japan, which remained technically at war with Germany until 1919, public opinion tended to sympathize with the enemy, rather than with Japan’s official allies (Saaler 2014a). This attitude of hostility to Britain and the United States was not restricted to radical circles. It was also shared by many bureaucrats, academics and journalists. These diverse critics condemned Japan’s policy of cooperation with the Western powers, including the signing of armament reduction treaties as well as the policy of non-intervention in China pursued by successive cabinets in the 1920s, which was seen as a betrayal of Japan’s ideals as an Asian country.

The new prominence of anti-Western and pan-Asian sentiments had a marked effect on the younger generation of Japanese. For example, in 1921 army cadet Nishida Mitsugi (1901–37) organized the Seinen Ajia dōmei (Young Asia Alliance) at the Army Academy. He and his fellow
cadets, soon to receive their commissions, formed friendships with Kita Ikki, Mitsukawa and other radical Pan-Asianists, who told them of their plans to reform Japan and liberate Asia. Such contacts, demonstrating the popularity of Pan-Asianism among the junior military ranks, marked the beginning of the radicalization of junior army officers that led to the terrorist incidents and assassinations of the 1930s.

The critics of the government could give further reasons for their anti-Westernism by citing the rejection by the Anglo-Saxon powers of the Japanese proposal to insert a racial equality clause into the covenant of the League of Nations. The issue of racial discrimination emerged again, providing more reasons to lambast Western hypocrisy, when the United States banned practically all immigration from Japan following the Immigration Act (Johnson-Reed Act) of 1924 (see Stalker 2006). In a reaction to such racist attitudes in the United States, Pan-Asianism and Japan’s mission to liberate Asia continued to attract support among the general public in Japan.

World War I also expanded the geographic scope of Japanese Pan-Asianism. The movement’s ideologues now turned their interest to India, Western Asia and the religion of Islam. Ōkawa and Mitsukawa were pioneers in this regard; their books devoted much space to discussions of Turkey, Iran and Mesopotamia. By the 1920s, Wakabayashi Han and Tanaka Ippei (1882–1934), both converts to Islam, were advocating grandiose schemes involving Japan’s leading hundreds of millions of Muslims to rebel against European domination (see Worringer 2014). Though these schemes were hardly realistic, during World War II they fed fears in Great Britain and the United States of a united front of Asian peoples marshalled against the West.²

A Pan-Asian utopia in Manchuria

When, after World War I, it became clear that the Western powers had no intention of allowing Japan a free hand in China, and given the growing threat posed by Chinese nationalism, Japanese foreign policy focused on securing control over the northeastern region of China known as Manchuria. Here, the idea of extending Japanese influence on the continent without causing offence to the Western powers converged with the grand visions of Pan-Asian ideologues and activists. It was in the course of extending Japanese control over Manchuria that Pan-Asian slogans were employed for the first time in government documents, with the intention of providing an official explanation of Japan’s foreign policy.

In the late 1920s, this ideological convergence was exemplified by the actions of the Kwantung Army, the Japanese force stationed in Manchuria to protect the Japanese-owned South Manchurian Railway (Mantetsu) and the leased territory on the Liaodong peninsula (Kantōshū). Kwantung Army officers drafted plans for an ‘independent’ – but Japanese-controlled – state in Manchuria that would be a ‘paradise on earth’ (ōdō rakudo), founded on the ‘harmony of the five races’ (gozoku kyōwa) that inhabited the area. The ‘five races’ did not include all the nationalities found in the area, but comprised both the predominant ethnic groups and those which the Japanese planners considered to have made the greatest contribution to the cultural development of Manchuria: Japanese, Koreans, ethnic Chinese, Manchurians and Mongolians (Yamamuro 2004: 131).

In September 1931, a group of Kwantung Army officers blew up part of the Japanese railway line with the intention of creating a pretext for the annexation of Manchuria. Within a few months, Kwantung Army troops, with the help of other Japanese army units, occupied the whole of Manchuria and, in March 1932, ‘founded’ the state of Manchukuo, a republic which was turned into a monarchy in 1934. It was headed by Emperor Pu Yi (1906–67), the last emperor of the Qing dynasty who had occupied the Chinese throne between 1908 and 1912 and who was now pulled out of retirement to act as a Japanese puppet.
The Japanese land-grab provoked a flurry of criticism in the West. The League of Nations sent in a commission to Manchuria headed by Lord Lytton (1876–1947) to investigate the situation. The report of the Lytton Commission, though it showed some understanding and sympathy for Japan’s actions, was overall critical of the take-over. When in a general session of the League in 1932 Japan’s annexation of Manchuria was condemned, Japan withdrew from the League. Despite the façade of independence, which Japan strenuously maintained, and despite the government’s stream of Pan-Asian rhetoric and propaganda (see Figure 3.1), in reality Manchukuo

![Figure 3.1 A propaganda postcard: girls with flags of Japan, China and Manchukuo as a symbol of ‘Pan-Asian unity’.](image-url)
was not much more than a puppet state. Political power was monopolized by the Japanese military and bureaucrats. The mobilization of manpower and material resources in Manchuria was so comprehensive that historian Yamamuro Shin’ichi has called Manchukuo a ‘concentration camp state’ (Yamamuro 2006).

As a result of the war frenzy that followed the occupation of Manchuria, army officers grew convinced of the invincibility of the Japanese army. If professional military planners succumbed to such war hysteria, it is scarcely surprising that enthusiasm for war gripped the majority of the population, who had little access to accurate information. Domestic newspapers, even the hitherto liberal Asahi Shinbun, waxed ecstatic over the nation’s military successes, going so far as to describe Japanese troops as ‘angels of peace’. Japan’s actions were increasingly justified in the domestic press on the grounds that Japan was engaged in a mission to liberate Asia from the yoke of Western imperialism. Even if most Chinese and Koreans, who saw Japanese aggression in action, found such claims completely unconvincing, they were generally accepted at face value by the Japanese public, which was increasingly exposed to Pan-Asian propaganda (see Figure 3.2 and Chapter 18 in this volume).

Figure. 3.2 A propaganda leaflet: Japan breaks the chains of Western colonialism.
Japan’s military successes in China stimulated radicals to expand their vision from Asia to the entire world. In the 1930s, Kanokogi Kazunobu (1884–1949) talked of the ‘emperorization’ of Asia (*sumeru Ajia*), and Mitsukawa Kametarō advocated the emperorization of the world (*sekai no kōka*) (Szpilman 2007; 2013). Others came up with grandiose schemes that drew on ancient myths and referred to *hakkō ichiu* (the eight corners of the world under one roof), a slogan that expressed the idea of placing the world under the rule of the Japanese emperor – in effect, the conquest of the world by Japan. The detachment of such visions from reality did nothing to prevent their use in propaganda, which also extended to the construction of monuments celebrating the concept. Throughout Japan, *hakkō ichiu* towers and memorials were erected, some of which have survived to the present day (see, for example, Edwards 2003; Saaler 2005: 111–2; Figure 3.3).

![Hakkō ichiu Tower in Miyazaki (photo by Sven Saaler).](image)

*Figure 3.3*  *Hakkō ichiu* Tower in Miyazaki (photo by Sven Saaler).
From fringe to mainstream: Pan-Asianism as government policy, 1932–45

Given the spread of Pan-Asian ideology in government circles as a result of growing war hysteria, it is not surprising that Pan-Asian organizations were now exerting more influence on policymaking than ever before. In 1938, the Tōa Dōbunkai, subsidized by the government, had the ‘academy’ it had founded in the 1900s in China, the Tōa Dōbun Shōin (Same Culture Academy), upgraded to university status. With the exception of imperial universities in Taipei (Taiwan) and Keijō (present-day Seoul, Korea) and Kenkoku University in Manchuria, this was the only Japanese university founded outside the Japanese archipelago. Its role was to educate local elites who shared the vision of a Pan-Asian mission and to train Japanese students as China experts (Reynolds 1989).

In Japan, the influence of the Tōa Dōbunkai was rivalled by the Dai Ajia kyōkai (Greater Asia Association), the brainchild of Shimonaka Yasaburō (1878–1961), formerly a member of the now-defunct Rōsōkai and the Yūzonsha. Shimonaka, president of the publishing house Heibonsha, had maintained his links with Pan-Asian activists in the Yūzonsha and in April 1932, together with Mitsukawa and Nakatani Takeyo (1898–1990), he founded the Han–Ajia kyōkai (Pan-Asian Society), a study group which took as its brief Asia as a whole, including Southern, Central and Western Asia. The Indian independence activist Rash Behari Bose (1886–1945), who had been granted asylum in Japan and was now a naturalized Japanese subject (see Nakajima 2005), and the Vietnamese Prince Cuong De (1882–1951) also joined.

General Matsui Iwane (1878–1948), the army’s most experienced China hand, well known for his Pan-Asian views, suggested that the Han–Ajia kyōkai be restructured into a broader organization with the aim of promoting a Pan-Asian movement among the masses. The new organization, renamed the Dai Ajia kyōkai (Greater Asia Association), was officially launched on 1 March 1933. Its stated goal was to promote ‘the unification, liberation and independence of the Asian peoples’ (Weber 2011a: 138). It attracted a membership that read like a ‘who’s who’ of the Japanese establishment in the 1930s. In addition to Shimonaka, Mitsukawa and Nakatani, members included two future prime ministers (Prince Konoe Fumimaro and Hirota Kōki), generals and admirals, diplomats, entrepreneurs, distinguished scholars and journalists. The association published a monthly journal, Dai Ajia (Greater Asia), and made attempts to achieve an international profile by setting up branches in Taiwan, Seoul, Tianjin, Manila and other foreign cities.

Despite these efforts, the focus of the Dai Ajia kyōkai remained on ‘culture’, and its tone, in the assessment of one prominent commentator, was ‘theoretical’ and ‘dull’ (Weber 2011a: 140). It is difficult to discover any evidence of its activities beyond publishing and the opening of branches. However, as its large and illustrious membership indicates, the organization demonstrated the advances made by Pan-Asianism: by the 1930s the basic principles of radical Pan-Asianism, such as the East Asia Monroe Doctrine – Japan’s mission on the continent – had been accepted by the mainstream of Japanese public opinion.

In April 1934, Pan-Asianism received what amounted to an official endorsement by the Japanese government when Amō (Amau) Eiji (1887–1968), director of the Information Department of the Japanese Foreign Ministry, asserted, albeit in an informal statement (danwa), that Japan had ‘special responsibilities’ to maintain peace and order in East Asia and would therefore brook no interference in China by the Western powers. Amō stressed that Japan opposes any joint action on the part of foreign Powers that tends to militate against the maintenance of peace and order in Eastern Asia. . . . Owing to the special position of Japan in her
Japan and Asia

relations with China . . . it must be realized that Japan is called upon to exert the utmost effort in carrying out her mission and in fulfilling her special responsibilities in East Asia.

(Saaler and Szpilman 2011: 39)

The Amō statement effectively amounted to a proclamation by Japan of the 1823 ‘Monroe Doctrine’ transposed to the East Asian region.

Its informal character notwithstanding, the Amō statement was widely cited in the Western media as evidence of a troubling shift in Japan’s foreign policy and its increasingly aggressive posture. The Foreign Ministry in Tokyo explained that Japan was committed to maintaining the ‘open door’ policy in China and did not intend to infringe on the rights of the Western powers, but such denials were given little credence at a time when Japanese forces were expanding their operations in northeast China.

Although Japanese diplomats sought to deflect Western criticism and denied accusations that Japan harboured ambitions to build an empire in East Asia, other Japanese, officially or privately, spoke enthusiastically of the inevitability of Japan’s imperial mission in Asia and the construction of a ‘self-sufficient’ zone in Northeast China. Predictably, such statements exacerbated tensions with the Chinese government under Chiang Kai-shek (1887–1975), which by the late 1920s had gained control of most of China.

Under the circumstances, some senior Japanese military figures favoured dealing Chiang Kai-shek a knockout blow, thus forcing him to recognize Manchukuo and accept the Japanese position in China. Others, however, believed that becoming embroiled in a full-scale war with China would be a serious mistake and should be avoided at all costs. This view was shared by the architect of the Manchurian takeover, Ishiwara Kanji (1889–1949). Japan, he believed, must first develop Manchuria’s industrial capacity as a major step toward the construction of an autarkic Japanese zone in East Asia (Brown 2011b). A committed pan-Asianist, Ishiwara entertained apocalyptic visions of Japan assuming the leadership of Asia and then going on to conquer the entire world after winning a ‘final war’ (saishū sensō) between the coloured races, led by Japan, and the white race. Despite such flights of fancy, Ishiwara was realist enough to recognize that incursions into China or the Soviet Union, preliminary to this final conflict, could not be made before Manchuria’s resources had been properly developed (on Ishiwara, see Peattie 1975).

However, the Chinese Nationalists (Guomindang) showed no intention of abandoning Manchuria to the Japanese. This attitude encouraged some Japanese army officers, imbued with boundless confidence in Japan’s military might, to favour annihilating the Chinese forces in a short campaign rather than continuing to put up with a hostile and unstable neighbour. When in July 1937 a skirmish between Japanese forces and Chinese Nationalist troops occurred, the local Japanese commanders decided that this was the right moment to deal such a blow. They followed up their initial success by expanding the fighting, but failed to deliver a decisive blow. The Chinese refused to sue for peace and continued resistance. Unwilling to make any concessions to the Chinese in the middle of a successful campaign, the General Staff in Tokyo had no option but to escalate operations, and the Konoe Fumimaro cabinet, which had been in office for little over a month, had no option but to support the General Staff. Tokyo sent in more troops as reinforcements and, by year’s end, what had started off as a local skirmish had turned into a full-scale war. Japanese forces captured the nationalist capital of Nanjing, committing war crimes in the process (the so-called Nanjing Massacre; see Wakabayashi 2007).

Both Prime Minister Konoe and General Matsui Iwane (1878–1948), the commander of the troops that had captured Nanjing, were pan-Asianists. Konoe gave the escalating conflict in China a distinctly Pan-Asian twist when he issued a statement that described the war as part of ‘a greater struggle to create a “New Order” in East Asia’ (Brown 2011a: 188). Konoe defined his
‘New Order’ as ‘a tripartite relationship of mutual aid and co-ordination between Japan, Manchukuo and China in political, economic, cultural and other fields’, whose object was to secure ‘international justice’ (Brown 2011a: 189).

In 1938, as part of Konoe’s vision for reshaping Asia, the Kōa-in (the Agency for the Development of Asia) was created. It was a cabinet-level body whose main role was to coordinate Japan’s political, economic and cultural activities with respect to Asia, as well as to conduct and promote research on China and Asia more widely. Kōa (Raising Asia) had been an influential pan-Asian slogan in the Meiji period: as noted earlier, the Kōakai was the name of one of Japan’s first Pan-Asian associations. The establishment of the Kōa-in can be interpreted as proof that the government had finally adopted Pan-Asian ideology as official policy. It also triggered a vogue for the term Kōa – over the next few years: countless cultural associations, student organizations and political pressure groups (and even businesses) gave themselves names containing the expression, and events were staged to celebrate Japan’s ‘holy war to raise Asia’ (see Figures 3.4 and 3.5). One of the organizations founded in those years – a leading insurance company, Sonpo Japan Nippon Kōa (Kōa Sonpo for short) – is still in business today.

From the late 1930s on, successive Japanese cabinets used Pan-Asian rhetoric in their diplomatic relations with China. Baron Hiranuma Kiichirō (1867–1952), who replaced Konoe as prime minister in January 1939, reaffirmed his commitment to Pan-Asian ideals when he proclaimed in an official statement that ‘the forces for construction of the new East Asia are rearing their heads with a strength that nothing can resist’ and described Japan as striving to complete the ‘Heaven-ordained task’ of turning East Asia into a ‘utopia of everlasting peace’ (Szpilman 2011d). Although this message had a hollow ring to countless Chinese in areas occupied by Japanese troops, this high-sounding version of Japanese Pan-Asianism managed to gain some local adherents, such as Guomindang politicians Wang Jing-wei (1883–1943) and Zhou Hua-ren (1903–76) (Weber 2011b: 23).

In 1940, the Japanese had close to 1 million troops in China, but they were no closer to victory than they had been at the outset of hostilities. Chiang Kai-shek continued to resist. In a desperate move, the Japanese army tried to isolate Nationalist China under Chiang by occupying the northern part of French Indochina (modern northern Vietnam and Laos). The French, defeated by Nazi Germany in Europe, were in no position to resist. The Japanese government again resorted to Pan-Asian rhetoric to justify this move. Japan’s Foreign Minister Matsuoka Yōsuke (1880–1946) declared in 1940 that Japanese forces had occupied French Indochina because the area constituted ‘an important link in the sphere of common prosperity in Great East Asia, which Japan is endeavoring to establish’ (Saaler 2011d: 224).

This attempt to cut Chinese supply routes turned out to be counterproductive. It failed to bring Chiang Kai-shek to his knees and only caused a marked deterioration in the already strained relations between the United States and Japan. Bogged down in a seemingly endless war in China, desperate for war materials and eager to achieve economic self-sufficiency, the Japanese began to make plans to invade the British and Dutch colonial possessions in Southeast Asia. The Dutch East Indies had large deposits of oil, and British Malaya produced rubber and other raw materials, all of which Japan needed for its efforts to achieve self-sufficiency. But an attack on these territories, unlike the occupation of French Indochina, would spark war with Britain and the Netherlands (although the Netherlands was occupied by the Germans, the Dutch government in exile retained control of the Dutch East Indies). Because war with Britain would almost certainly lead to war with the United States, the Japanese decided to act before the Americans inevitably attacked.

Thus, on 7 December 1941 (8 December Japan time), in what one historian has recently called a ‘delusional’ move (Hotta 2013), Japanese forces attacked the U.S. naval base in Pearl Harbor,
while, almost simultaneously, invading the U.S. colony of the Philippines in addition to Malaya
and other British possessions in East Asia.

These attacks marked the start of the Pacific War or, as the Japanese government called it,
the ‘Greater East Asian War’ (Daitōa sensō). This appellation was intended to signify the final
stage in the struggle to expel the Western colonial powers from Asia, even if the Japanese decla-
roration of war contained no explicit reference to the ‘liberation of Asia’. It was only several
months later that the ‘liberation of Asia from Western imperialism’ was included in Japan’s list
of war aims (Hatano 1996). However, Pan-Asian rhetoric served to legitimize the war and, the
Japanese hoped, to win support from Asian nations for Japan’s war effort. This expectation had
also motivated the proclamation of the East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere, which represented the clearest expression of Pan-Asian ideals ever given by any Japanese government (Saaler 2011d: 224).

However, this lofty rhetoric was undermined by the behaviour of Japan’s military forces and civilian agents in China and other occupied territories. Far from living up to its promises of ‘liberating’ colonized nations, the Japanese fobbed off the demands of Southeast Asian independence activists with the argument that ‘the time was not yet ripe’ for independence (Narangoa 2011: 244). Under the circumstances, Japanese professions of Pan-Asianism were no more than rhetoric. The authorities in Tokyo and the armies of occupation saw little need to grant independence or even autonomy to the territories that had come under Japan’s control since the outbreak of the war. In most instances, Japanese occupation turned out to be even harsher than Western colonial rule: between 600,000 and 2 million people died in a famine in north Indochina in 1944–45 (Gunn 2011), and several millions perished in forced or quasi-forced labour – between 2 and 3 million in the Dutch East Indies alone (Kratoska 2002; 2005).

As the Japanese suffered a series of military setbacks, by 1943 prospects for victory were rapidly receding. In response, the Japanese government, the military and the civilian administrators of the occupied territories modified their approach. They launched a concerted effort to win the hearts and minds of the Asian peoples under their rule. Specifically, in May 1943, the government published the ‘Greater Asiatic Policy Guidelines’, which made concessions to Japan’s Asian ‘allies’ in the name of Pan-Asian ideals. In the same year, Japan abolished the extraterritorial privileges of Japanese nationals in China; gave chunks of Burmese and Malayan territory to Thailand, whose dictator Phibun Songkhram (1897–1964) was nurturing grandiose ambitions of creating a Pan–Thai empire; and recognized the independence of Burma (August) and the Philippines (October).
These efforts to use Pan-Asian ideals to attract the support of its Asian possessions in Japan’s struggle against the United States intensified as Japan’s military situation grew more desperate. In November 1943, for example, the Japanese government hosted an Assembly of the Greater East Asian Nations (Daitōka kaigi) in Tokyo. Political leaders from Manchukuo, China (the Nanjing government of Wang Jing-Wei), Burma and the Philippines attended. Subhas Chandra Bose (1897–1945), president of the Provisional Government of Free India, was also present as an observer. The Assembly represented an effort by the government to obtain the cooperation of Asian nations for the war effort and to reinforce the Japanese people’s faltering conviction that they were engaged in a ‘just struggle to liberate Asia’.3

By this stage, the policymakers thought it expedient not to insist that the Asian bloc they were building must be kept firmly under Japanese control. Instead, they emphasized the principle of mutual respect for sovereignty. This was intended to cast the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere in a new light, where no single country, not even Japan, appeared to hold a dominant position. As if to test the limits of this newly granted independence, the leaders of the Japanese-backed government in the Philippines refused to declare war on the United States, as did Thailand’s dictator Phibun, who in addition did not show up at the Tokyo Assembly, instead sending a minor royal figure as his representative.

Japan’s Pan-Asian propaganda was belied by the reality in the territories occupied by the Japanese, where the troops continued to behave arrogantly and often criminally toward subject Asians. The ideals of Pan-Asian brotherhood had a hollow ring in these areas and, unsurprisingly, attracted few recruits to the Japanese cause.

The situation was different in those Asian countries beyond the reach of the occupying Japanese armies, notably India, where people had little reason to doubt Japan’s Pan-Asian claims or suspect its motives. The Indian National Army, set up by the Japanese, had no trouble finding recruits among captured Indian soldiers, as well as civilian volunteers drawn from the Indian communities of Southeast Asia. In a short time, Chandra Bose, placed in charge of this force, had tens of thousands of men under his command. In contrast to the Philippines and Thailand, the Government of Free India declared war on Britain and the United States on 23 October 1943, and the Indian National Army was despatched to fight the British in Burma. Their attempt to invade India proper ended with the defeat at Imphal in July 1944. Down to the present day, this battle has remained a potent historical symbol of the struggle for Pan-Asian ideals and figures prominently in the discourse of apologists for the nation’s war record in contemporary Japan.

The postwar demise of Pan-Asianism and its resurgence

Japan’s propaganda efforts, drawing as they did on ideals of Pan-Asian solidarity, did nothing to change the outcome of the war, which by late 1943 had become a foregone conclusion. On 2 September 1945, Japan signed an instrument of unconditional surrender, and the subsequent Allied occupation (1945–52) ended the country’s Pan-Asian aspirations. Pan-Asianism now appeared thoroughly discredited. In the countries that had borne the brunt of Japanese aggression, like Korea and China, Pan-Asianism was condemned as a hostile ideology and was proscribed. In Japan, the occupation authorities took the view that Pan-Asianism was simply window dressing to disguise Japan’s imperialist and colonialist ambitions and refused to acknowledge any of its positive features. Proponents of Pan-Asianism were purged from office and Pan-Asian organizations outlawed. Pan-Asian slogans such as the ‘Greater East Asian War’ and ‘Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity’ were banned, and official censorship ensured that they did not appear in print.
Japan’s government and its mainstream politicians preferred to forget Pan-Asianism following the country’s complete defeat in a war fought ostensibly ‘to liberate Asia’. Besides, in the immediate postwar period, the Japanese concentrated on rebuilding their devastated country and had little inclination to get involved in Asia. They blamed a clique of militarists, ultranationalists and fascists and their Pan-Asian views for starting the war and for the disaster of Japan’s defeat. The mass media spurned Pan-Asianism as forever tainted by its associations with Japanese militarism and fascism. As a mainstream ideology, Pan-Asianism was dead, in Japan and everywhere else.

The division of Asia by the Cold War also undermined the rhetoric of Asian solidarity. The communists under Mao Tse-tung (Mao Zedong, 1893–1976) gained control over continental China, whereas Chiang Kai-shek and his Nationalist Party, the Guomindang, were confined to the peripheral island of Taiwan. Korea was divided between the Soviet-supported communist North and the American-occupied South. Vietnam, which in 1954 won its independence following a long war with the colonial power, France, was also split between the communist North and the American-backed, ‘capitalist’ South. In these circumstances, national unification took precedence over the ideals of Asian solidarity – ideals that were in any case tarnished by their wartime associations with Japanese imperialism.

Yet although they vanished from the mainstream, Pan-Asian ideas did not disappear completely, either in Japan or in other Asian countries. In Japan, they survived in diluted form among a diverse range of both right- and left-wing critics of the government and other opponents of the country’s dependence on the United States. For example, in 1949, Ōkawa Shūmei, who had gained fame before the war as a right-wing ideologue with Pan-Asianist leanings, wrote of the ‘close resemblance between today’s communists and the early Muslims’. He envisaged ‘a second battle of Tours–Poitiers’ to be fought between the communists and the Western powers – a contest which would result in victory for the communists who, in his view, represented Asia (Szpilman 1998a: 61).

Another prewar right-wing activist, Tsukui Tatsuo (1901–89), developed a highly positive view of China (Tsukui 1956). According to a U.S. counter-intelligence report, in the mid-1950s Tsukui brought a large sum of money from mainland China to Japan, which he handed over to former Japanese Army colonel Tsuji Masanobu (1902–61?). Tsuji, who had been on the run as a wanted war criminal during the occupation, emerged from hiding after it ended to become a National Diet member, making no secret of his Pan-Asian sympathies (Tsuji 1950).

One of the earliest examples of the revival of Pan-Asianism in the international arena was the Bandung Conference of 1955. Although officially it was a conference of non-aligned nations from Asia, Africa and Europe (the Non-Aligned Movement), its Pan-Asian roots could be traced back to the First International Asian Relations Conference held in Delhi in 1947. The Bandung Conference, to which Japan sent a delegation, proposed a new Asian leadership cohort that would help solve global conflicts and bring the ongoing struggle against colonialism to a successful end. Thus, at Bandung, although prewar Pan-Asianism was echoed in its critique of Western colonialism, the Cold War division of the world prompted a new emphasis on non-alignment and the idea of a ‘Third Way’ (Dennehy 2011: 301).

In response to the Vietnam War (1955–75) an anti-war movement developed in Japan, which, as elsewhere, was characterized by anti-imperialist and anti-American sentiment and also by a sense of Asian solidarity. A leading citizen group within the peace movement, the Betonamu ni heiwā o! shimin rengeō (Citizens’ League for Peace in Vietnam, usually abbreviated to Beheiren), frequently appealed to Asian brotherhood in its statements.
Rightist and conservative circles also continued to nurture Pan-Asian sentiments, which occasionally found their way into statements by political figures. In 1973, for example, Diet member and the founder of the Kajima Institute of International Peace, Kajima Morinosuke (1896–1971), who during the war had maintained that ‘the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere is inconceivable without Japan’s leadership’, publicly abandoned his insistence on Japanese leadership and proposed a Union of Asian Countries for the ‘cooperation of Asian countries[,] comprehending both politics and [the] economy with the view to establishing peace and order in Asia’ (Kajima 1973: 24). This informal confederation, Kajima explained, would be a union of ‘Asia by Asians for Asians’ that would be ‘controlled and administered by international institutions formed by voluntary agreement of its members’ (Kajima 1973: 26).

Prospects

In 2017, political relations in East Asia are overshadowed by territorial disputes involving China, Japan and the two Koreas. Nevertheless, China, Japan and South Korea hold regular meetings in the form of trilateral summits (see http://tcs-asia.org) or within the enlarged framework of the Association of Southeast Asian States (ASEAN), known as ASEAN+3. Occasionally, statements advocating Pan-Asian solidarity are made by representatives of these three countries. The current Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi is on record as praising Pan-Asianism as an important historical movement linking China and Japan (see Weber 2011c). In Japan, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) – well known for their critical views on neo-imperialist tendencies in international relations – have also espoused the ideals of Pan-Asianism and Asian solidarity (for an example, see Hatsuse 2007). Hatoyama Yukio, a former Japanese prime minister and an outspoken advocate of friendship between Japan and its Asian neighbours, is well known for his advocacy of an ‘East Asian Community’ (see Victoria 2016; Mulgan 2009), which he has been promoting since his retirement from active politics through his think tank, the East Asian Community Institute (www.eaci.or.jp/).

At the time of writing, it appears unlikely that any form of close regional integration will develop in East Asia in the near future. However, the frequent references to transnational solidarity made by intellectuals, politicians and educators throughout the region (see Fuchs, Kasahara and Saaler 2017) suggest that the idea of regional integration, underpinned by the growing – and seemingly irreversible – interdependency of East Asian economies, is likely to assume an important role in regional and global politics.

Notes

1 Several Japanese terms have been used to describe this ideology, including Ajishugi (Asiavism), Han-Ajishugi (Pan-Asiavism), Dai-Ajishugi (Greater Asiavism) and Zen-Ajishugi (All-Asiavism). See Saaler and Szpilman 2011.
2 See Office of Strategic Services, Research and Analysis Branch (1943), R&A No. 890: Japanese Infiltration Among the Muslims Throughout the World, Washington: State Department, 15 May 1943.
3 For a newsreel covering the conference, including excerpts of speeches by the delegates, and the Daitōa kokumin keshi kai (Greater East Asian People’s Solidarity Rally), which took place at the same time, see www.youtube.com/watch?v=HPB_eccLYhc.
4 Japan has territorial disputes with China, Korea and Russia. For the Japanese government’s perspective on these issues, see www.mofa.go.jp/territory/index.html; for the official South Korean view of the Japanese-Korean territorial controversy over the Takeshima/Dokdo islets, see http://dokdo.mofa.go.kr/eng/. See also the introduction and Chapter 30 in this volume.
Further reading


