

Book Review

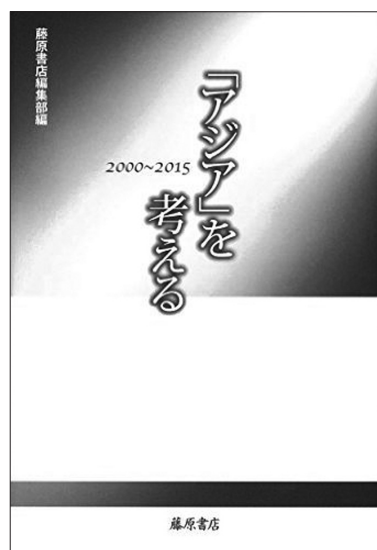
Review of *“Ajia” o Kangaeru 2000–2015* (Thinking about “Asia,” 2000–2015), Fujiwara Shoten editorial staff, ed., June, 2015.

Fujiwara Shoten’s “Relay Series: Looking at ‘Asia’ Now” has been compiled into a book. Having been polished for over fifteen years since the project’s inception, the works by 132 authors represent various viewpoints and interests presented in a candid manner. There is no particular style or visible theme. The image of Asia “conceived” here cannot be judged by one value system.

If there is some characteristic common to the works, I would propose that it is goodwill toward neighbors. Here there is no vestige of conflict or tensions that are present when discussing border problems, political interests, or international relations; nor is there any sign of contestation over “nations” arising from nationalism. Perhaps it is reflection on the past, future peace, or multi-perspectives on life, culture, history, human interaction, and economics from the perspective of neighbors that has given rise to this goodwill.

However, Asia in the present reality cannot be delineated simply with words of goodwill. When international relations, political gains and losses, and historical consciousness are included in the discussion, there is no resolution. Further, since the early modern term “Asia” is laden with the burden of negative legacy that accompanied political formation, there are many who react against and disagree with the term “Asia” itself. It is true that “Asia” is a geopolitical term, a reflection of how the West views the East. This is not the gaze of good-willed neighbors but a view of a region from the perspective of early modern greedy nations. Because of a history of partition and covetous politics, the hypocrisy and ugliness latent in the word “Asia” increased.

From the above logic, two opposing principles of views of Asia arise:



although the region is the same Asia, there are good neighbors and greedy countries. This book is the result of goodwill from a neighbor's perspective, but when discussing politics from the standpoint of "nations," it is difficult to imagine what kind of transformation arises in people's images of Asia. The problem is that most people are not aware of this principle, and are subconsciously seeing Asia from both the perspective of neighbor and as a greedy country. In a word, this is a phenomenon of conflating people and nation states.

What is of importance here is that humans are born with intrinsic goodwill, but self-awareness as citizens of nation states does not necessarily arise automatically. Just as historical hatred of other countries and peoples does not survive generations if not deeply inculcated, if feelings of loyalty are not fostered toward one's own country's political party, system, or leaders, people will not naturally protect them. This is the purpose of educational management by the state today; patriotism and a consciousness of "nationhood" are being indoctrinated through education. A primitive love of home that approximates humanness—love of one's hometown, of nature, peace, neighbors, and pride in one's ethnic culture is replaced by support for and defense of national policy, protection of territory, national interests, political parties, and loyalty to political leaders. Such two-dimensional education by state administrators causes mass production of "citizens" instilled with nationalism and a historical hatred for other peoples and nations.

I think that the increasing complexity of the view of Asia stems from this. The confusion of national avariciousness and human goodwill, or examples of the deliberate mixing of the two, are also found in Japan's "Asian-ism" and is not acknowledged by Asians. The keyword here is "solidarity," but it is confounded by the avarice of nation states regarding territorial and political interests and history, culture and economics, mixed in with the human feelings of neighborly goodwill. The fact that the objectives of the former are achieved by means of the latter is a mechanism of this "ism."

From the aspect of national sovereignty, territory, and interests, was there ever a possibility of solidarity? In the final analysis, there was never any genuine cultural, historical, ethnic, or karmic solidarity as expounded under "Asian-ism" in the prewar political reality. It is evident by looking at history that these lofty principles were merely tools to achieve political goals—nothing other than Japan's annexation of Korea in 1910, a united East Asia, and the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.

The same trends can even be seen in the Asian-ism of Takeuchi Yoshimi (1910–1977) in the post-war period. Of course, the thorough self-reflection on the war, aspiration for peace, and starting point of goodwill as a neighbor are completely different from prewar Asian-ism. Trans-border artistic

elements (Okakura Tenshin), human feelings (Miyazaki Tōten), and other things appealed to human goodwill. Contradictory objectives and means are obfuscated as types of “human feeling” and “tendencies,” but in terms of being used as a philosophical tool for leaving the Cold War, the Asian-ism is probably the same.

The wisdom of Takeuchi Yoshimi lies in the fact that such a contrived philosophy was forced to stop at the stage of sentiment and ideals. What he indicated to us was an ideal image of what should be, not an interpretation of history or political objectives. As a Japanese who had gone along with the ideology of the Cold War, it was a way for thought reconstruction. For him, Asian-ism was nothing more than a kind of human feeling that could not become independent and therefore “couldn’t unfold as a historical development.” On the other hand, people who have followed after Takeuchi have employed the same methods but have crossed the line he established and are attempting to reduce them to a new political objective: a re-interpretation of history and realization of an East Asian communal sphere.

Asian-ism is artificial politics and contrived philosophy. The motivation for it is nationalism. I think it uses for specific objectives culture, history, and human connection, which can cross borders, to serve national and political interests that cannot. This is the merging of national greed and human goodwill, and the inversion of objectives and means. Isn’t this what blights narratives of Asia as an “ism”?

In the case of neighborly relations of goodwill, it is fine to be natural and to have human emotions. There is no need to speak of Asia as an “ism.” It is most important to become aware of the principle of national greed and human goodwill, and to recover the former self, the natural self from a “citizen” overflowing with enmity.

What is Asia to the nation? Listen to the true intentions of Prime Minister Abe who has made his feelings known publically some seventy years after the end of the war. He says that the Russo-Japanese War gave courage to many Asians and Africans who were under the yoke of colonialism. I hope people who are interested in Asia will think once again about the implications for historical awareness inherent in these words.

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