

What is modernity



Takeuchi formed a highly successful Chinese literature study group with Taijun Takeda in 1934 when he was a university student. This was regarded as the beginning of modern Sinology in Japan. It was in 1931 that Takeuchi first met his long-lasting friend, Taijun Takeda at Tokyo Imperial University. They then went on to forming the Chinese Literature Research Society. In 1935, they published an official organ for the group, namely, Chugoku Bungaku Geppo in order to open up the study of contemporary Chinese literature as opposed to the "old-style" Japanese Sinology.

However in January 1943, he disbanded the Chinese Literature Research Society, despite the group becoming quite successful. While he was in China, he saw the real state of living in China that impressed him deeply, it was completely different from what he had thought of, or studied of before. It is how he threw himself into a study of the modern colloquial language and his maiden work, the book-length study Lu Xun. One of his essays, 'What is modernity?' became popular, as a result, gained great public attention in 1948 during the Japanese occupation.

It is from such an essay that his status as an important postwar critic was gradually acknowledged. After 1949, he was greatly moved by the foundation of the People's Republic of China (PRC). He continued to refer to the PRC in his articles and books. In 1953, he became a fulltime professor at Tokyo Metropolitan University. A post he eventually resigned from in protest at the abuses of parliamentary voting procedures, during the period of civil unrest and protest. Which had arisen while the ratification of the

revised Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan in May of 1960.

During the struggle, he led the movement as one of the foremost thinkers in post-war Japan under the slogan, " democracy or dictatorship". From 1963, he argued in favor of Mao Zedong and the Chinese Cultural Revolution until the diplomatic normalization between Japan and the PRC in 1972. He was particularly interested in Mao's " Philosophy of base/ground" which involves the principle of making one's enemy one's own. For Takeuchi, this was similar to Lu Xun's notion of endurance and resistance.

In his later years, Takeuchi devoted himself to doing a new translation of Lu Xun's works. In short, the life and achievement he had been through his entire life left his name to be a famous and distinguished critic of Sino-Japanese issues and his complete works were published during 1980-82 to the public. In 1948, after returning from China and publishing the influential book on the Chinese leftist writer Lu Xun, Takeuchi Yoshimi developed a provocative account of modern Japanese culture in his influential essay called ' What is Modernity?.' ' What is Modernity? presents six different essays dealing with the matters of qualifying and comparing forms of Asian resistance and or capitulation to modernization. The intriguing content about the book, What is modernity? , is that Takeuchi drew a profound comparison between Japan and China by examining the period of Post-World War II in Japan. He appraised the value of Japanese Modernity contrasting with Chinese Modernity. He sharply criticized Japanese modernity describing its modernity as merely the unconditional conformity to Western imperialism. In ' What is modernity? Takeuchi stated: "

Ultrationalism and Japanism were once fashionable. These were to have banished Europe; they were not to have banished the slave structure that accommodates Europe. Now modernism is fashionable as a reaction against these ideologies, but the structure that accommodates modernity is still not problematized. Japan, in other words, attempts to replace the master; it does not seek independence. This is equivalent to treating Tojo Hideki as a backward student, so that other honor students remain in power in order to preserve the honor student culture itself. ...] It is impossible to negate Tojo by opposing him: one must go beyond him. To accomplish this, however, one must even utilize him. " For him, it is meaningless to declare 'Japanism' to oppose with the West. Likewise, it is meaningless to declare Western modernism to oppose with 'Japanism'. What problem of Japanese modernity Takeuchi mainly thought is that it lacks of independence. This lack of independence made Japan abjure what Japan is to itself. Specifically, he argued that Japan gave up the development and succession of Japanese culture, which he thought is outstanding. In other words, he pointed out the fact that Japan abandoned its own strengths only to unconditionally accommodate the West. He believed that Japan should have embraced the superiority of Western on the basis of Japanese superiority, not accepting Western superiority unquestioningly. Moreover, Takeuchi disapproved of Japanese modernists and modernization theorists who adopted a stopgap measure only to acknowledge the imitation of Western imperialism. He explained that the problem of Japanese modernity started from this fact.

He cited an old story of an elderly slave who believed he can become a master if he is free from his slave status. Takeuchi viewed Japan as in same

situation. He harshly criticized that Japan only tried to free from the status of 'one of inferior Asian countries' just by imitating the West. In contrast, He rather preferred Chinese modernity. Takeuchi showed his preference to China explaining Chinese modernity as, "modernity which grew out of fundamental resistance to European invasion".

He insisted that Chinese have modernized qualitatively better than how Japanese modernized. He cited what John Dewey said during his visit to Japan and China. John Dewey described Japanese modernity, "The root of modernity of Japan is extremely shallow even though the appearance of it is fancy. This makes people think that Japan is well modernized, and if Japan carries on as like this, it will be destroyed in the near future." On the other hand, he described Chinese modernity as, "the appearance of Chinese modernity may look as if it is in chaos through 5. movement or founding of the Republic of China. However, there is a new spirit of Chinese modernity wriggling underneath of those confusions." Consequently, what Takeuchi tried to highlight through 'what is modernity' is that he suggested the qualitative problem in terms of process of Japanese modernity and that he signposted how Japan should get forward to its own modernity by contrasting with different way of Chinese modernizing. There are 3 limitations of Takeuchi's opinion.

First of all, in the cultural aspect, is his acknowledgement of the superiority of Western culture and its values. He claimed that Asia should embrace Western culture with its own strengths. This only means that Takeuchi admitted himself Asia, or especially Japan, is inferior to Western countries. It may seem that the Western countries are superior to Asia because they have

developed faster than Asia. However, jumping to a conclusion that all the Asian countries are inferior is too risky in that they also had spontaneous capacity for the modernization.

It is just because they were affected by Western imperialism which colonized as many countries as they could for their own uses, that they accomplished belated modernity. Therefore, from Takeuchi's point of view of acceptance of West, though he mentioned 'on the basis of Asian superiority', it is quite doubtful that Western culture is superior to that of Asia with only the reason that the West developed faster. The second limitation is lack of specific method. Takeuchi proposed how Japan should cope with its modernity, in the end.

However, he did not suggest specific method for Japanese modernity. He copiously mentioned the direction of Japanese modernity by looking at general angle. Nevertheless, he overlooked the practical aspect of modernity such as education or literature. A human cannot live without a liver and a heart. Likewise, no one could say a country can achieve great modernity, as long as practical aspects of modernity are not firmly founded. The last limitation is lack of in-depth explanation of or comparison with Korea.

Korea went through a severe process of modernity as compared to those of Japanese and Chinese one. The progress of Koreans achieving their modernity was somehow dissimilar to those two countries in that Koreans were affected not by Western imperialism but mainly by Japan and China. This fact caused unbearable violence to Korea, more than any other country because of wishing for modernity. It was not the problem of accepting or accommodating different cultures for modernity. For Koreans, it was the

problem of surviving. Japan and China, especially Japan, endeavored to suppress Korea compulsively.

It is because they wanted to serve Korea as a fountain of development of Capitalism by transiting the social contradiction forced by Western imperialism. The way Japan and China suppress Korea was completely different with that of Western imperialism. The Western civilization had no reason to use military means in order to invade Japan and China. They could easily occupy Japan and China with the means of economical invasion. However, the situations of Japan and China were completely different. They were at the primitive level of accumulating the capital because of the lateness in developing capitalism.

For this reason, they had no choice but to rule over Korea, where a national isolation policy was still dominated, with harsh political and military pressure. These primeval pressures hampered Korean social development even forcing Korea to possess the acute contradiction among the World capitalism countries. Takeuchi, in his book, highly evaluated the way China achieved its modernity, fiercely resisting against Western imperialism, and that Japan should learn from this. He, furthermore, put great emphasis on new way of unionizing Asian countries against the Western cultures.

This unionization is different from Japanese Asianism, that once existed during the World War II, which Takeuchi himself admitted the failure of. Japanese Asianism ended with an empty official slogan of ' Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere'. What Takeuchi tried to emphasize was the achievement of new Asian Union. The needs required for liberation from imperialism, which would cut off the relationship between dominant

and subject. His view may be judged as, non-realistic and progressive. In addition, Takeuchi's opinion has a huge inconsistency.

He once explained that "Asianism" originated from Tokichi Tarui and Yukichi Fukuzawa in the 1880s. Tarui argued for the importance of unionizing Japan and Korea equally to strengthen Greater East Asian security. Takeuchi appreciated Tarui's work as an unprecedented masterpiece. Nevertheless, the fact which Tarui proposed of unionizing Japan and Korea was just the same situation of Western imperialism conquering Japan. In other words, appreciating Tarui's work only means that Takeuchi acknowledges the Japanese imperialistic inclination.

Japan still has the history of compulsory occupation in Korea. Moreover, just like the process of Chinese modernity, there are movements resisting to the repressive forces of Japan who invaded just like Western imperialism. For example, there is a movement called 3. 1 Independence Movement by young lady, Guansoon Yu, at the age of 16. 3. 1 Independence Movement was initiated on March 1, 1919, against the coercion and domination by the Japanese Imperialism which began in 1910, with "Japanese annexation of Korea".