

# The “Leave Asia” Strategy of Japan Starting From “De-Sinicization” in Ideology and Culture

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“Leave Asia” is a systematic and comprehensive social movement in modern Japan, involving national spirit, ideology, culture, politics, and diplomacy. In politics and diplomacy, “Leave Asia” is an aggression and a harm to Asia. It is not a self-estrangement from Asia in terms of culture and diplomacy. It is an attempt to get rid of the equal status with Asian compatriots and strive to override other Asian countries. “De-Sinicization” in ideology and culture is the advocacy serving Europeanization and Westernization. The foothold of “Leave Asia” is the strategic choice of diplomacy, the deconstruction of the “tribute system” centered on the Qing Dynasty, and the construction of a new Asian order led by Japan.

*Keywords:* Japan, De-Sinicization, Leave Asia and Enter Europe, Fukuzawa Yukichi

Japan’s issue of “Leave Asia” (including “De-Sinicization”) is a cliché, and there are many related research results as this is an important belief and concept influencing the modern Sino-Japanese relations.<sup>1</sup> To understand this concept and consciousness of the Japanese society since the Meiji period, we should not only combine the domestic and foreign environment and the historical context of Japan, but also analyze the changes of Japan’s self-consciousness, Asian consciousness, and world consciousness.

Since the middle of the 19th century, China and Japan have shared the same sufferings under the eastward advance of Western forces, subject to the global treaty system. According to common senses, the two countries in the same misfortune should have joined hands to “revitalize Asia”. However, misunderstanding, prejudice, and alienation in economic and cultural personnel exchanges and other relations between the two countries have led China and Japan from competitions to wars. The differences in Chinese and Japanese cultural traditions and modes of thinking, as well as the differences in how broad and profound the two countries’ elites see the world, determine the differences in each other’s cognitive realm and ideological and cultural patterns, and the differences in “cognition” affect the differences in “action”.

## “Leave Asia” and “Enter Europe” Have Become the Topic of the Times

“Datsu-A Nyuo (Leave Asia and Enter Europe)” is a concept that cannot be avoided or ignored in the study of the modern history of Japan and the history of modern Sino-Japanese relations. The connotation and extension

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<sup>1</sup> There are hundreds of articles on the topic of “leaving Asia and entering Europe” in the leading journals, and thousands of articles in relation to “leaving Asia” and “leaving Asia and entering Europe”, which are too numerous to list here.

of this concept need to be redefined and analyzed herein. In the “sakoku” (meaning closed country) era of Edo Shogunate, it was a crime and a betrayal of the suzerain for Japanese samurais to “escape the vassal state” and go abroad. “Leave Asia” is not an easy mission; thus Yoshida Shōin lost his life and Nitobe Inazō led a wandering life in the United States for that. From the perspective of etymology, Fukuzawa Yukichi emphasized the word “Leave Asia” which is derived from the commonly used Japanese phrases like “leaving the vassal state” and “leaving the country”, indicating an attempt to get rid of the shackles and pursue freedom and autonomy; A in Datsu-A is the initial of Asia; “Asia” marks a new perspective from which to look at the whole world.

Under the ups and downs of social ideology, various slogans and banners were put forward in Japan from 1850 to 1860, and the topics and themes of the times were changed constantly, reflecting the different demands and choices of different classes of the Japanese society. “Datsu-A (Leave Asia)” emerged later than “Joi (Expel the barbarians)” and then gained its popularity for decades in the phrase “Leave Asia and Enter Europe”. As a matter of fact, “Leave Asia” is independent from “Enter Europe”, or another expression of “opening the country”, “enlightenment”, and “westernization” borrowed by the commentators. According to the research of the famous Japanese scholar Maruyama Makio, Fukuzawa Yukichi never combined “Leave Asia” with “Enter Europe”, or used the term “Enter Europe” (Xu, 2018).

From the late 1850s to the early 1860s, “Expel the barbarians” and “Revitalizing Asia” were the themes of the times and diplomatic difficulties in Japan as well as the keywords back then. The change and publicity of issues and topics from “Revitalizing Asia” and “Expel the barbarians” to “Leave Asia” and “Enter Europe” reflect the choice and confusion of the Japanese government and people. After the Japanese samurais suffered setbacks in fighting against the barbarians, they had a certain understanding of and later developed conflicts with China and Korea. It was then the theories of “Opening the Country” and “Restoration” were established and then the Meiji government was founded.

“Leave Asia” and “Enter Europe” are tied together into one concept, which reflects the transition process of Japan’s diplomatic strategy from “Revitalizing Asia” to “Leave Asia” and from upholding “Eastern Ethics” to learning “Western art” (namely, Westernization). On March 16, 1885, Fukuzawa Yukichi published the “great work” of “Datsu-A Ron (Theory of Leaving Asia)” on *The Japan Times*, marking the formation of the Japanese consciousness of “Leaving Asia” and the transition of its diplomatic strategy. This article is a suggestion on the important event of signing the treaty between China and Japan in Tianjin after the Jiashen Incident (Fukuzawa, 1934, pp. 40-42) in 1884, advising the Japanese government led by Ito Hirobumi to use the Korean coup to fight against the Qing Dynasty. In 1885, Japan fought against Korea and the Qing Dynasty vigorously. Many Japanese believed that the Qing Dynasty undergoing the “Resurgence in Tongzhi and Guangxu’s Reign” was quite powerful, and it was not suitable to immediately engage in a war with China, the cultural mother of Korea and Japan.

For Japan, “Leave Asia” was not only a spatio-temporal isolation from its Asian neighbors and Confucianism and Buddhism, but also a break with its own traditions and a revolution. In the end, Japan went to the extreme and invaded Asia by invading its “compatriots” and neighbors in East Asia. Ideologically and culturally, Japan “leaves Asia” by criticizing Confucianism, destroying Buddhism, and abolishing Chinese characters; diplomatically, Japan “leaves Asia” by giving up “Revitalizing Asia” and seeing China and Korea as enemies. As can be seen from “Theory of Leaving Asia”, Fukuzawa Yukichi used the concept of “Asia” as political geographic concept by referring it to China and Korea in East Asia.

“Enter Europe” is the process of Japanese people trying to enter the world of Europe and North America, and showing their expectation of being accepted by Europe, which involves cultural and political aspects. However, it also went to the extreme of worshipping the foreign countries, as in the early Meiji period many Japanese fell into national nihilism and advocated “Europeanization” which was a popular concept at that time.

The Perry Expedition to Japan took place in 1853. For a few Japanese samurais with a sense of crisis, there must be exchanges, or they should at least know themselves and their enemies. It’s dangerous to know themselves but not the enemies. Hence, Yoshida Shōin wanted to sneak into the United States. However, most of the Japanese samurais in the 1850s were extremely confident. Because of self-esteem and self-confidence, they vigorously advocated “expel the barbarians” which represented respect for the emperor and patriotism, and was also the important reason why “revere the emperor and expel the barbarians” became the keyword of the times. In the 1860s, the samurais continued to encounter setbacks in “expelling the barbarians”, which shattered their self-esteem, and inspired more and more Japanese samurais to reflect, examine, and review themselves. They started to feel that they needed to “know themselves and their enemies” and “open their eyes to the West” and searched for the cause why the others and the Westerners were strong. Hence, the samurais were increasingly realistic and utilitarian. Accepting the materialism and spirit of the victors, the Japanese elites called for “Opening the Country” and “Restoration”. “Opening the Country” was to seek for self-liberation and facilitate the Japanese people going abroad or even “soaring abroad” on the one hand. Yoshida Shōin was arrested and sent to jail and executed for even planning sneaking into the United States. Nitobe Inazō successfully sneaked into the United States, but dared not return to Japan. On the other hand, “Opening the Country” was allowing the entry of Europeans and other Westerners to Japan, marking Japan’s waiver of “expelling the barbarians”. Since Japan’s conclusion of the “Friendship Treaty” with Europe and North America, an increasing number of Europeans and North Americans navigated to Asia and entered Japan. Naturally, the Japanese people should “navigate to Europe” and make mutual exchange of needed goods.

When the topic of “Leave Asia and Enter Europe” in Japan was discussed, it is necessary to associate with the topic of “What’s lost to Russia and the United States should be taken from Asia” in the Bakumatsu Period.

In Japan, when “Leave Asia” was heatedly discussed, “Revitalizing Asia” became an increasingly empty slogan.

### **The Action of “Entering Europe” of the Japanese Elites After Correcting the “Chinese-Barbarian View”**

The “Entering Europe” and “Europeanization”<sup>2</sup> concepts corresponding to “Leaving Asia” in Japan involve both the physical and mental entry into Europe—“Acquiring knowledge” in Europe and diplomatic and political entry into Europe—“Seeking to ally with Europe”.

This is a process from “Opening the Country”, which is to accept the previous barbarians in the eyes of the Japanese-Europe and North America, to “Entering Europe”, which is to be accepted by Europe and North America.

The first cause of the confrontation and even war between the East and the West in modern times was ideology. In the “self-seclusion” era, both China and Japan upheld the dual opposition concept of international relations—“Hua-Yi distinction (Chinese-Barbarian View)”. It was a confrontation between Hua and Yi, in which

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<sup>2</sup> The concept in Chinese comes from the Japanese translation.

the Europeans and Northern Americans were seen as “barbarians”. This is the fundamental ideological factor or ideology leading to the antagonism between the East and the West.

The Japanese intellectuals and reformers good at drawing lessons represented by Sakuma Shōzan and Fukuzawa Yukichi started to correct their “Barbarian View” against the European and Northern American powers and arrogance after witnessing the failure of the Qing’s Opium War and experiencing themselves the failure of “expelling the barbarians”. They no longer fought against the European and North American ideology and criticized the “Chinese-Barbarian View” after the repeated defeats of the Qing Dynasty, which helped an increasing number of Japanese samurais shake off the distress, baggage, and bondage of “expelling the barbarians”.

“Eastern Ethics, Western Technical Learning” proposed by Sakuma Shozan is a reconciliation of the East and the West. Having experienced the culture of Europe and the United States, Fukuzawa Yukichi gradually took a favorable view of European and the North American civilization. As early as 1860, in light of Japan’s “urgent need to manage trade affairs”, Fukuzawa Yukichi translated and published the dictionary *Chinese and English Phrase Book* written by Zi Qing in the Qing Dynasty to help the Japanese with English learning and “meet the national urgent need” (Fukuzawa, 1926a, p. 83); to help the Japanese learn about Europe and North America, he wrote *Conditions in the West* in 1866, and in which he claimed “Four Seas and Five Brothers in One Family” by providing a diagram (Fukuzawa, 1926a, p. 292); in February 1872, he wrote *An Encouragement of Learning* to inspire the Japanese to reflect themselves, learn from the world, and criticize Japanese advocates of “self-seclusion” and “expel the barbarians” as “persons of narrow view” and inadvisability of their view (Fukuzawa, 2016, p. 104).

The Japanese intellectual elites began to form a new view of Western culture, which lies in their ability to boldly go to Europe and North America to see for themselves instead of imagining the European and North American world at home.

Going to Europe and North America and “going global” allowed the Japanese intellectual elites to experience the differences in technology and culture among the countries in the world, and understand the reality of the law of the jungle in the world.

They began to look at different countries and nations in the world with the view of civilization and barbarism of Western culture, and started to re-evaluate themselves and criticize Japan. Gradually, the Japanese people began to change their contempt for the West and regarded the West as a civilized world superior to them. In face of the West, the Japanese people even fell into extreme inferiority. The relatively short Japanese people felt inferior to the tall European and North American people, and considered the Japanese nation an inferior race (Majima, 2021, pp. 62-64).

With the deepening of the exchanges between Japan and Europe and North America, especially in 1871, when the Iwakura delegation paid a global visit to Europe and North America to amend the treaty, more and more Japanese people felt dwarfed and inferior by their experiences and frustrations. As persuaded by Arinori Mori in January 1872, the confident Japanese ambassador plenipotentiary to North America and Europe Iwakura Tomomi took off his kimono—symbol of kuge (a court noble) culture restoration, cut his bun—symbol of samurais, and wore the Western clothes instead. He tried to, by doing so, display the “civilization”, “modernization”, and “enlightenment” of Japan, and it marked Japan’s “entry into Europe” and “leaving Asia” culturally.

After “Opening the Country” and “Signing the Friendship Treaty”, the Japanese intellectuals, including Fukuzawa Yukichi, Nishi Amane, and Nishimura Shigeki, took overseas study as their greatest pursuit. This was

what the Chinese scholars and scholar-officials in that times could not do or even think of. What Guo Songtao had been through is enough to illustrate the problem.

The correction of “Barbarian View” and “Chinese-Barbarian Opposition View” and the establishment of “Civilization View” of the Japanese intellectuals have affected their correction of View on China. The Japanese people started to deny themselves and Japan, and were willing to fall to the “barbarians”. Or they positioned Japan as a “barbarian country” to remind themselves of progress, as pointed out in the phrase of being aware of shame and then going forward. They subsequently denied the traditional Asian cultures and countries. Such argument can be seen in *An Overview of the Theory of Civilization* published by Fukuzawa Yukichi in 1875 (Fukuzawa, 1926b). China’s repeated attempts and failures of expelling the barbarians made the Japanese realize for the first time that neither the Greater China or the Little China is the center of the world culture, and Confucianism no longer leads the world or ranks first in the world, and thus is unable to “bring peace to the world” or “rule the country”. Cultural confidence and moral confidence as in the Qing Dynasty cannot resolve the problems. Asian countries have to psychologically accept the reality that “all nations in the world are equal”. With the change of the times, arrogance and regarding others as barbarians cannot work. It is precisely opposite that the Western powers regard the Eastern countries as barbaric, conservative, and shabby ethnic groups, and cannot treat such Eastern countries on an equal footing.

Japanese scholar Majima Yasuo pointed out that the early Japanese elites began their Western voyages while seeing a large number of Chinese laborers cramped on the bottom of ships. On the ships bound for the United States, there seemed to be an immeasurably vast difference between the first class and the second class cabins. The Japanese elites saw the Chinese coolies living in cramped, enclosed cabins with “dim light and a stench” and “sleeping like silkworms on the shelves”. After arriving in the United States, they witnessed the “underclass white” Irish labor immigrants strongly rejecting the Chinese labor immigrants. Under the influence of the Chinese exclusion in the United States, the Japanese were often mistaken by the Westerners as the Chinese for similar physical features and thus discriminated. This experience undoubtedly left a worse impression of China on the modern Japanese and developed a more urgent desire to break away from Asia and form an equal relationship with the West. (Song, 2020)

Therefore, *An Overview of the Theory of Civilization*, *Contacts With the Tang People*, and other books and articles mostly started to introduce the argument from criticizing the Qing Dynasty. The Japanese literati headed by Fukuzawa Yukichi strove to desinicize culturally ever since by drawing a line from the “barbarian” China, criticizing China from the standpoint of the European and North American powers to demonize and barbarize China, so as to make excuses for the invasion of European colonists in China and seek international support and sympathy for invading China later on.

In *Tojin Orai (Contacts With the Tang People)* published in 1897, Fukuzawa Yukichi reviewed the Bakumatsu Period, criticized China’s “Barbarian View” and “Chinese-Barbarian View” formed in the Song Dynasty, and passed down to the Xianfeng’s Reign in the Qing Dynasty as well as Japan’s “sakoku” and “joi (expel the barbarians)”. He advocated that Japan should develop a correct concept of trade, trade with foreign countries, exchange needed goods, and conduct friendly diplomatic exchanges with Britain and the United States. “The common truth of the world” and equality of the Eastern and Western countries and other concepts (Fukuzawa, 1926a, pp. 12-29) publicized by him were quite influential to Japan. It can be seen from the extensively published and circulated works of *An Encouragement of Learning* and *An Overview of the Theory of Civilization* that the thoughts and theories of Fukuzawa Yukichi exerted a huge impact on the Japanese public opinions and policy orientations.

### **Japan’s Strategic Choice From “Revitalize Asia” to “Leave Asia”**

Japan put forward the slogan of “Revitalize Asia” before talking about “Leave Asia”, and intended to maintain its relationships with China and establish diplomatic relations with Korea, which also exerted a certain impact on the relations between the Qing court and Korea. In 1870 and 1871, Japan induced Li Hongzhang to persuade the Qing court to start diplomatic negotiation with it and signed the Sino-Japanese Friendship Treaty.

Despite an opening on the “Theory of Civilization”, the “Theory of Leaving Asia” written by Fukuzawa Yukichi is based on the response mode of Eastern introduction of Western civilization (Fukuzawa, 1934, p. 40). Its stance lies in the East-West diplomacy and the principles of handling the Sino-Japanese-Korean triangular relations. To put it in other words, Japan was going to “defriend” China and Korea. As early as 1874, Japan made an excuse to invade Taiwan as other countries encroached on Taiwan. Taking advantage of the rising border crisis of China in 1879 when Britain invaded Yunnan Province and France coveted Guangxi... Russia captured Yili, Japan worked with Russia to threaten the Qing court, and merged with Ryukyu Islands. That was Japan’s move of “Leaving Asia”.

In the 1880s, Japan put Korea and China into its next targets to invade. The “Seikanron (Advocacy of a punitive expedition to Korea)” and “Theory of Conquering Qing” were heatedly discussed in Japan and included into the agenda of Meiji officials, which led to a coup in Japan and a change of senate. It can be seen that whether to leave Asia had become an important political issue.

At the mention of Japan’s diplomatic strategy “Revitalizing Asia”, it is impossible not to mention Japan’s “enlightenment” publicity and interference in Korea which was always on the excuse of “Revitalizing Asia”.

The Sino-Korean relationships and Japanese-Korean relationships in Fukuzawa’s eyes made Korea shake off the influence of the Qing Dynasty and follow Japan’s “enlightenment” instead of keeping to China’s conservative policy. Kim Ok-kyun and others therefore set up the Korean Enlightenment Party.

As Japan’s success in invading Taiwan and then annexing Ryukyu Islands was not strongly interfered by the European and American powers, it went through the tense period smoothly. Since the 1880s, Japan was confidently convinced that it had been accepted by Europe and North America as a “civilized country” and an “enlightened country” and thus intended to act as a “leader” and an “ally” in the East of Asia to direct the “culture” and “enlightenment” of the Asian world (Fukuzawa, 1926c, p. 414). Its first attempt was to guide the “unenlightened” Korea and reject all possible interference from the Qing court.

In 1882, Kim Ok-kyun visited Japan under the agitation of the Japanese. He boarded in the Keio Gijutsu (Academy), befriended Fukuzawa Yukichi, and surveyed the modernization results of Japan. Under the agitation and support of Fukuzawa Yukichi, Kim Ok-kyun founded the Korean Enlightenment Party centered on visitors to Japan and unfolded reforms according to the Japanese model. In 1883, the Keio Gijutsu of Fukuzawa Yukichi accepted 61 Korean students in Japan, including Seo Jae-pil. Fukuzawa Yukichi supported the Korean Enlightenment Movement led by Kim Ok-kyun so vigorously that the Coup of Jiashen happened in 1884. When the movement was frustrated, it went the other way of advocating “leave Asia” and expressly calling for “enter Europe” to take on its “Asian neighbors” as enemies.

Japan’s “Leaving Asia” is a transformation of the center of East Asia, where Japan replaces China as the center of Asia and leads other Asian countries such as Korea and China. In reality, the Korean government followed China as a “vassal state” in the 1880s, which curbed the expansion of Japan. Japan’s conspiracy of

“enlightening Korea” and overbearing actions in Korea aroused the resentment of the Korean people centered on soldiers. On July 23, 1882, Korean soldiers revolted in Seoul. They encircled the Japanese Embassy in Korea, set it on fire, and killed one Japanese. The Japanese Ambassador Hanabusa Yoshimoto and other officials fought and retreated, and eventually fled back to Japan on a fishing vessel from Incheon. Japan attempted to invade Korea through this incident. Upon receipt of relevant intelligence, the Qing court dispatched a governor and soldiers to Korea to stabilize its situation. Because of the preemptive move of the Qing court, Japan dared not act rashly, and thus hated China more.

Since the Renwu Incident in 1882, the Japan public opinions started to shift from “conquering Korea” to “conquering Qing”, making China an imaginary enemy of Japan in replacement of Russia. Meanwhile, the “theory of people’s rights” quickly transformed to the “theory of national rights” in Japan. Zealous militarists and adventurers were waiting for their chance to attack China. On the other hand, the Japanese government intensified their efforts in cultivating and inciting the pro-Japanese faction in Korea, and incited Korea to be hostile to the Chinese government and the Qing troops stationed in Korea.

In late 1884 (the Ten’s Year of Guangxu’s Reign), China had to withdraw three battalions of troops from Korea as its war with France became increasingly tense. The Japanese saw it a good opportunity to take control of Korea, and encouraged the Korean Enlightenment Party to seize power. With the support of Takezoe Shinichiro and Japanese troops in Korea, the Korean Enlightened Party launched the Jiashen Coup on December 4 (the 17th day of the tenth lunar month).

Since the outbreak of the Jiashen Incident, the Japanese masses demanded an alliance with France which was invading Vietnam and China to send troops to Korea to make a decisive war with China and annex Korea. Fukuzawa Yukichi is a representative of war hawks. He warmly received the delegation of Kim Ok-kyun who launched the Jiashen Incident in collusion with Japanese ambassador in Korean Takezoe Shinichiro and was thus forced into exile in Japan after defeat. In October 1884, Fukuzawa Yukichi published the article *Poland in East Asia* and compared China to the previously fallen Poland. He further enclosed a Map of Division of the Chinese Empire in which Fujian and Taiwan were given to Japan to incite the Japanese people and government to wars. He further published such articles as “Once a War Is Started, There Should Be a Conviction of Victory” and “How Is the Royal Procession Prepared” to urge the Japanese government to have a decisive war with China at an early date. Unable to make a decision, then Prime Minister Ito Hirobumi, representative of the Japanese moderates, headed to Tianjin to negotiate with Li Hongzhang to play it by ear. In March 1885, Fukuzawa Yukichi further published the article “Goodbye Asia” to continuously call for Japan’s invasion of China and express his disappointment and discontent of Korea and the Korean Enlightenment Party.

In “Goodbye Asia”, Fukuzawa Yukichi expressed his sorrow and resentment of China and Korea or even “anger at their failure to put up a fight”. Soon he wrote “How to Deal With Korea Is Worrisome” and expressed his resentment of Korea’s “no idea of self-improvement” (Liu, 2012, p. 279).

As many Japanese were dissatisfied with the response to the Jiashen Incident and the spies of the Japanese General Staff believed that the Chinese army was not adept in foreign wars despite their expertise in civil wars, the Japanese public opinions (newspapers and periodicals) demanded a decisive war with China under the influence of “Theory of Soaring Overseas” of the Japanese militarists. Therefore, the Japanese government showed the attitude of launching a decisive war in 1885.

Diplomatically, the “De-Sinicization” of Japan is reflected in deconstructing the Asian “tribute system” dominated by the Qing Dynasty based on the Western “treaty system” and that Japan replaces China as the center

and leader of Asia. Fukuzawa Yukichi and others whipped up the public opinions by “demonizing” and “stigmatizing” China culturally to mobilize the Japanese militarist and colonial aggression.

### **“Leave Asia and Enter Europe” and “Westernization” of Japan in an All-Round Way**

The competition of modernization or “civilization” between China and Japan in East Asia is manifested as the Westernization Movement of the Qing Dynasty, the Meiji Restoration of Japan, and the degree of learning from and imitating the West.

Japan’s “Leave Asia” or “Leave Asia and Enter Europe” culturally, namely, “Westernization” (or “Europeanization”) is based on the crisis consciousness, national consciousness, and national destiny consciousness amid the great changes in East Asia.

Japan’s “Westernization” or “Europeanization” is “De-Sinicization” in ideology and culture. In face with the cultural competition and diplomatic struggle of the European and North American powers and China, Japan, with the slogan of “seeking knowledge in the world”, chose to “re-select”, “re-classify”, and “re-recognize” its culture. After the Meiji Restoration, therefore, the traditional Confucian and Buddhist Eastern thought and culture were ostracized. Its conservation of Eastern culture is reflected in the emphasis of Shintoism which is an emphasis of Japanese characteristics and self-identity; its emphasis on Western learning is an attempt of “restoration”.

Two or three hundred years before the Meiji Restoration, the relationship between China and Japan can be said to be a one-way transmission from the perspective of ideological and cultural exchanges and communication. That’s to say, the Chinese thought and culture influenced Japan in the Tokugawa period, but it was difficult for Japan to come into sight of contemporary Chinese people. The trade relationship and personnel exchange was basically a one-way transmission. That’s the Chinese merchants carrying goods to Japan for trade, but no Japanese merchants conducting trade and exchanges in China and those from Japan coming to China were drifters.

In the Bakumatsu Period and Early Meiji Period, what were the observations and impressions of the Japanese social elites on China? These would affect whether Japan is to continuously follow China and unite with China or “get rid of” China and replace China with others. According to the customs books and their personal observations in China, the Japanese elites believed that the Qing officials had empty talk, no practical learning, and were corrupted, proud, and arrogant in politics. Hence, they developed the confidence that Japan could replace China as the center of Asian culture, the authentic inheritor and promoter of Confucianism, thus denying China’s legitimate status in Confucianism. Some extreme Japanese (or even elites) rejected the Confucian culture and Eastern spirit of the whole East Asia, including Japan, and bowed at the feet of Western civilization.

Noticing that the scholar-officials in the late Qing Dynasty were conservative academically and corrupted politically, the Japanese elites were lost in “homesickness”. They only looked up to a handful of Qing intellectuals like Wei Yuan and Wang Tao, and Qing officials like Zeng Guofan and Li Hongzhang. Hence, the samurais naturally elevated themselves to Asian elites, excited at “the great responsibility” entrusted by Heaven.

Hence, the Japanese elites thought about the future of its country and nation, and even the reason why the Asian nations lagged behind the European and North American world, and sought the fetters that hindered the process of “civilization and enlightenment” of Japan. Eventually, it was attributed to the traditional Chinese ideology and culture, such as the dogmatic and hypocritical Confucian ethics and the difficult and inconvenient Chinese characters which were not so practical as the Western legal system, alphabetic writing, and science.

Since the Bakumatsu Period and Meiji Period, therefore, Japan went to an extreme of “De-Sinicization”, strove to be thorough, and even overcorrect it. By contrast, Fukuzawa Yukichi was not an extremist or



aggressionist in this aspect (Sato & Wang, 2006). “De-Sinicization” in Japan back then was prominently manifested in eliminating Confucianism and Chinese characters. That’s to say, Japan was going to break away from the “Confucian culture” and “Chinese character culture”.

Take the attitude toward Chinese characters for example.

As early as 1866, Maejima Hisoka submitted to General Tokugawa Yoshinobu a proposal entitled “An Imperial Request of Abolishing Sinology”, and advocated the replacement of Chinese characters with alphabetic writing. From then on, there emerged the “Latinization” movement of Japanese characters, and the Chinese characters were gradually marginalized in Japan. In 1872, Nanbu Yoshikazu submitted “A Proposal of Changing the Characters” to the Ministry of Education, calling for the abolition of Chinese characters. Later, even Nishi Amane, a famous Japanese translator and philosopher who had been educated in Confucianism since childhood, followed his advocacy and published *On Writing Japanese in Western Letters* in 1874. He believed that the Chinese characters and Chinese should be treated as Latin was treated by the Westerners (Chia, 1989).

Certainly, quite a number of Japanese elites opposed the abolition of Chinese characters, but they were in a weak position in the early Meiji period.

In 1873, Fukuzawa Yukichi, a Japanese enlightenment thinker starting from a sinologist, published a pamphlet *Teaching of Characters*. He pointed out in the preface that “since ancient times, the use of Chinese characters in books has become a common custom in Japan, thus it would be very inconvenient to abolish it suddenly”. “The abolition of Chinese characters can be an ideal, but it is difficult to implement immediately. It will take some time to implement this idea” (Fukuzawa, 1926d, p. 633). In view of this reality, Fukuzawa Yukichi proposed a compromise proposal to limit the number of Chinese characters, recommended about 1,000 characters that could be used in general, and explored ways to teach related characters in his pamphlet. In 1886, Yano Fumio, the president of *Hochi Shimbun*, and others published articles supporting Fukuzawa Yukichi’s proposal to limit the numbers of rather than abolish the Chinese characters.

It is noteworthy that Japan criticized the Chinese characters, which is related to ideological enlightenment and cultural innovation, including the competition between Chinese characters and Japanese Kana to represent the “national character” of Japan, as well as the competition for the choice of “national language” that involved how to highlight national characteristics.

In conclusion, in the eyes of Fukuzawa Yukichi and other Westernized Japanese, China has become “a piece of rotten wood”, desperately ill and incurable. Hence, Japan should draw a lesson and take a warning from this negative example. As a result, they had developed a contempt for China, which is why comments on Chinese culture of Fukuzawa Yukichi and others cannot help but be emotional. For instance, Fukuzawa Yukichi published the article “Things With Chinese Elements Should Be Abandoned” in September 1884, which was in relation to the frustration of “Jiashen Incident” in which the Qing Dynasty took an upper hand in the conflict.

In any case, although Japan showed its consciousness of cultural independence from the Chinese culture through “Leaving Asia”, it failed to have a complete ideological and cultural independence. That’s because the “Westernization” and “Europeanization” of Japan still indicate that it “believed in others”. The difference is that it replaced the ancient China with the modern Europe and North America in its belief.

Japan’s “Leaving Asia” culturally, diplomatically, and economically was manifested in its compromise to European and North American countries and comprehensive absorption of the European and North American technologies and culture since 1885, as well as in its all-round confrontation against China, full denial of the Qing Dynasty and war preparation and military action plan against the Qing Dynasty.

## Conclusion

Japan’s “Leave Asia” or “Enter Europe” was intended to realize “Europeanization” and “Westernization” through “De-Sinicization” culturally, and “De-Sinicization” was prominently manifested in breaking away from “Confucian culture” and “Chinese character culture” and taken as a means of “westernization”; diplomatically, Japan allied with Russia and France to isolate China through “Leaving Asia”, sought to divide China’s territory, and supported Korea’s pursuit of “independence” to end its status as “a vassal state” of the Qing Dynasty, which was prominently manifested in deconstructing the Asian “tribute system” centered on the Qing Dynasty and establishing the new Asian order centered on Japan; “Enter Europe” was based on the Western “treaty system” and supported by theories of *Law of Nations*; emotionally, by distancing itself from its Asian neighbors and getting close to Europe and North America and disdaining the Qing court and Korea, Japan built up its self-esteem and promoted itself with “civilization” and “enlightenment”.

Japan’s “Theory of Leaving Asia” is the trend of thought of an era. It is naturally generated due to the changes of the current situation of that times. The theorists then had complicated and mixed feelings toward it. Fukuzawa Yukichi was concerned with Japan’s neighbors, especially with Korea, the Asian crisis and yellow-skin race crisis, and more importantly, exasperated at the failure of China and Korea living up to his expectations. Hence, he emphasized that modern China was no longer a historical “good neighbor” and could no longer offer “national treasures” from which Japan could learn, but a conservative and fallen “bad friend” that was bullied in the competition of the jungle of nations.

That’s to say, Japan’s advocacy of “Leaving Asia” since 1885 was mainly based on its conception of “social Darwinism”, the judgement that China and Korea would eventually perish and the anxiety that France had annexed Vietnam, and in the meantime Britain and Russia were coveting Korea. Korea may be annexed by Japan, but not by the Qing court or European and North American powers.

For Japan, the principle of leaving one continent and entering another was a “free ride” in diplomacy, sharing the interests equally. The “Theory of Leaving Asia” was Japan’s “taking sides” in the competition of nations and international relations. Whether Japan could achieve “cultural” and diplomatic independence or not, it had indeed influenced the future of Japan ever since. Whenever it needed to position itself and take sides between the East and the West, it would think in this direction. Over time, “Leaving Asia” developed from a noun and a concept to a theory and a doctrine.

Japan’s discourse of “Leaving Asia” was initiated in the temporary choice or contingency of ideology and culture in the 1880s, implemented in the long-term adherence or positioning of political and diplomatic strategy (evidenced by the modern emphasis on “Japan-U.S. alliance”). As advocates grown from sinology, Fukuzawa Yukichi and others could not abandon the Confucian thoughts completely or the Confucian traditions (Sato & Wang, 2006). It could be seen from the subsequent discourse of the Japanese ideological circles regarding Japan’s worship of foreign things, which emphasize the building of national self-confidence and the construction of the “Samurai spirit” to create a new people. To reshape the Japanese spirit, the Japanese elites represented by Motoda Nagazane started to return to Confucianism which originated in China and combined it with Shintoism since the 1880s. In 1890, *The Decree of Education* issued in the name of the Mikado was a symbol of such return.

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