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Reconsidering Arnold J. Toynbee's World History in Mid-Twentieth-Century Japan

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Abstract

Arnold J. Toynbee is considered one of the most crucial figures in the historiography of twentieth-century world history. Although Toynbee's reputation has significantly waned since the 1950s among many professional historians in the English-speaking world, especially in Britain, some renowned world historians, such as William H. McNeill and Jürgen Osterhammel, have reassessed Toynbee as a pioneering European historian who envisaged world history beyond Eurocentrism since the emergence of the field of global and world history in the 1980s. This article reconsiders the global meaning of Toynbee's world history beyond this historiographical narrative on Toynbee in the anglophone context by revealing that influential Japanese historians had already found significant potential in his world history in the mid-twentieth century, almost three decades before his reassessment in English-speaking academia. In particular, the article demonstrates how Japanese historians, such as Suzuki Shigetaka, Eguchi Bokurō, and Uehara Senroku, received Toynbee's idea of world history with various motivations and historical contexts. The research also argues that, despite the differences in their receptive intentions and backgrounds, they interpreted Toynbee as a significant European intellectual who made a self-critique of conventional historical studies in Europe and demonstrated the possibility of rewriting world history beyond Eurocentric assumptions.

For a large part of the twentieth century, Arnold J. Toynbee (1899–1975) would be one of the most read British historians and intellectuals in the world; his *tour de force*, the twelve-volume *A study of history* (1934–61) delivered a unique philosophy of history on the concepts of civilization and history. His works were prodigious and amounted to hundreds of books, pamphlets, and articles. Some of these works have been translated into more than ten languages. His significance can be seen from the fact that, in March 1947, he appeared on

the front cover of *Time* magazine, which set his works on a par with Karl Marx.¹

In recent decades, professional historians have considered Toynbee one of the most crucial figures in the historiography of twentieth-century world history, especially in English-speaking academia. Since the emergence of the fields of world and global history in the 1980s, renowned world historians such as William H. McNeill and Jürgen Osterhammel have assessed him as a pioneering European historian seeking to overcome the Eurocentric perspective in world history.² In 1987, the Toynbee Prize Foundation was established in his honour; it works to promote scholarly engagements with global history by holding various activities.³

However, until this reassessment in recent decades, Toynbee's reputation had significantly waned since the 1950s among professional historians in the English-speaking world, especially in Britain. This was partly due to the opprobrium directed toward him by various contemporary influential historians, who denounced his historical works because of the dearth of historical empiricism within them and their over-reliance on spiritual elements.⁴ Pieter Geyl, for instance, critically reviewed *A study of history* and contended that it was not a work based on historical facts but a mystical argument disguised as an empirical investigation.⁵ In the spirit of the professionalization of post-war historical scholarship in Britain, which was marked by empirical rigour and disdain for overarching metahistorical narrative,⁶ Hugh Trevor-Roper, the Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford, similarly castigated Toynbee for the lack of empiricism in *A study of history*, claiming that 'Not only are Professor Toynbee's basic assumptions often questionable, and his application of them often arbitrary, but his technical method turns out to be not "empirical" at all.'⁷ He acknowledged that Toynbee's historical works were hailed by 'the unprofessional public' and yet he himself disapproved of them as inappropriately illogical and mystical by the standards of professional historical scholarship.⁸

In contrast to the eclipse of his reputation in English-speaking historiography, Toynbee's historical works drew remarkable attention from Japanese

¹ Micheal Lang, 'Globalization and global history in Toynbee', *Journal of World History*, 22 (2011), pp. 747–83, at p. 747.

² William H. McNeill, 'The changing shape of world history', *History and Theory*, 34 (1995), pp. 8–26, at p. 12; Jürgen Osterhammel, 'Arnold Toynbee and the problems of today: Toynbee lecture delivered at the annual meeting of the American Historical Association, Denver, January 6, 2017', *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute*, 60 (2017), pp. 69–87, at p. 76.

³ Toynbee Prize Foundation, <https://toynbeeprize.org/about/>.

⁴ Alexander Hutton, "'A belated return for Christ?' The reception of Arnold J. Toynbee's *A study of history* in a British context, 1934–1961', *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire*, 21 (2014), pp. 405–24, at pp. 410–11.

⁵ Pieter Geyl, 'Prophets of woe', *Virginia Quarterly Review*, 26 (1950), pp. 587–602, at p. 602; Pieter Geyl, 'Toynbee the prophet', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 16 (1955), pp. 260–74, at p. 269.

⁶ Michael Bentley, *Modernizing England's past: English historiography in the age of modernism, 1870–1970* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 1–4.

⁷ Hugh Trevor-Roper, 'Testing the Toynbee system', *Sunday Times*, 17 Oct. 1954, p. 5.

⁸ Hugh Trevor-Roper, 'Arnold Toynbee's millennium', *Encounter*, June 1957, pp. 14–15.

scholars. Indeed, in the 1960s and the early 1970s, his fame peaked in Japan, where he was primarily read as an intellectual who had claimed the end of the supremacy of the West and who had acknowledged the resurgence of non-Western regions.⁹ This assessment originated from his earlier Japanese reception in the 1950s. He began to gain popularity in Japan in the aftermath of the Second World War, visiting the country from 1 October to 30 November 1956, the most extended of Toynbee's three trips to Japan.¹⁰ One of the most critical reasons for his popularity in Japan during this period was Japanese interest in his concept of world history in light of the decline of Europe and the rise of anti-colonialism in Asia and Africa. This article explores this point by focusing on how influential Japanese historians of the 1950s received Toynbee's world history beyond the right-left ideological binary. It demonstrates that they were stimulated by the potential in his world history almost thirty years before its revival in English-speaking academia.

There have been a number of investigations in both English and Japanese literature concerning the connections between Toynbee and the Japanese. These studies have revealed a range of facts about his three visits to Japan, about his popularity in Japanese society, and about the Japanese appropriation of his work either to conquer their own sense of national inferiority to the West or to fuel their belief in Japanese nationalism.¹¹ However, none of these scholarly contributions have scrutinized how Japanese historians responded to Toynbee's concept of world history in the mid-twentieth century. Accordingly, I examine the reception of his works on world history by drawing on untapped Japanese and English primary sources, including books, articles, newspapers, and unpublished archival materials.

The article unpacks how Japanese historians received Toynbee's world history in various historical and ideological contexts, relating it to their historiographical concerns or harnessing it for their future visions. It relies on methodological insights from a current scholarly trend in global intellectual history. Samuel Moyn has argued that historians engaging in global intellectual history should consider how non-European actors appropriated European concepts such as human rights or self-determination in specific cultural or historical situations, underscoring the agency of historically conditioned local actors when investigating transmissions of concepts beyond

⁹ Kasuga Jun'ichi, 'Daiichiji sekai taisen shoki ni okeru A. J. Toinbī no kokka kan' ('On the understandings of A. J. Toynbee's view of national state-focused on the early First World War, 1914-1915'), *Sōka daigakuin kiyō* (Bulletin of the Graduate School, Soka University), 27 (2005), pp. 277-96, at pp. 280-1. Another important aspect of Toynbee's popularity in Japan, especially since the early 1970s, was a conversation between Toynbee and Ikeda Daisaku, a leader of a Japanese Buddhist organization, Sōka Gakkai; see Arnold J. Toynbee and Daisaku Ikeda, *Choose life: a dialogue* (London, 1976).

¹⁰ He also visited Japan in 1929 and 1967.

¹¹ William H. McNeill, *Arnold J. Toynbee: a life* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 236, 239-41, 262-3, 268-73; Louis Turner, 'Arnold Toynbee (1889-1975) and Japan: from historian to guru', in Hugh Cortazzi, ed., *Britain and Japan: biographical portraits*, VII (Folkestone, 2010), pp. 283-95; Kasuga, 'Daiichiji sekai taisen shoki ni okeru A. J. Toinbī no kokka kan', pp. 278-82.

national or regional boundaries.¹² Moreover, Leigh K. Jenco and Jonathan Chappell have championed the importance of exploring how intellectuals in one region absorb knowledge of the past from a different one, relate that knowledge to their own practices of historiography, and exploit it for their own future perspectives.¹³

The article consists of four sections, examining how Japanese historians with various ideological standpoints appropriated Toynbee's world history. It begins by providing an overview of Toynbee's critique of the Eurocentric view of history and his concept of world history, primarily in those published works which Japanese historians read. From the interwar period onwards, Toynbee had pointed to Europe's relative decline and the problem of the Eurocentric viewpoint on conventional historical studies, more clearly insisting on rethinking world history beyond the Eurocentric bias in the aftermath of the Second World War. However, it should be noted that his visit to Japan in 1956 carried anti-communist implications in the context of the Cold War. The second section elaborates on this issue, showing that his visit to Japan was organized by anti-communist Japanese and American intermediaries, who intended to appropriate Toynbee's world history as a counter-narrative against Marxist historiography. Nevertheless, reducing the reception of Toynbee's work to anti-communism disregards the fact that, beyond this context of the Cold War, Japanese historians approached his world history with their own individual motivations and from their own backgrounds.

The third section investigates the response of a conservative historian, Suzuki Shigetaka, to Toynbee's world history. It demonstrates that Suzuki appreciated that Toynbee envisaged a comprehensive world history that subsumed both European and Eastern histories. I also show that Suzuki's reception of Toynbee was linked to his intellectual development since the end of the 1930s, as one of the Kyoto School intellectuals who advanced their own conception of world history, while simultaneously emphasizing the decline of European-oriented world order and seeking to legitimize Japanese imperial expansion during the Pacific War. Next, I explore how Japanese historians on the left, such as Eguchi Bokurō and Uehara Senroku, reacted to Toynbee's work. These historians saw potential in the anti-colonial nationalism that accompanied the process of decolonization. From this ideological standpoint, they interpreted Toynbee's world history as providing a significant historical perspective from which to decipher the contemporary stage of world history. In conclusion, I argue that the outcome of this investigation, combined with current research on Toynbee's history in relation to the Chinese literary scholar and philosopher, Hu Shi, enables us to transcend the Anglocentric historiographical narrative of Toynbee and to reconsider the meaning of his world history from the perspective of global circulations of historical knowledge.

¹² Samuel Moyn, 'On the nonglobalization of ideas', in Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori, eds., *Global intellectual history* (New York, NY, 2013), pp. 187–204.

¹³ Leigh K. Jenco and Jonathan Chappell, 'Introduction: history from between and the global circulations of the past in Asia and Europe, 1600–1950', *Historical Journal*, 64 (2021), pp. 1–16, at pp. 2–3.

It has been argued that, in the Western intellectual world, the term 'Eurocentrism' as a concept began to be more extensively used following the Egyptian-French Marxist economist Samir Amin assessing the concept in the 1970s. In general, Amin employed 'Eurocentrism' to castigate the continued exploitation of newly emerging economies by European powers, and to oppose the view that the world economy should develop in accordance with the European capitalist model, denying the significance of non-European regions. Although there have been alternative interpretations of the term, a primary shared position in much recent scholarship has been that 'Eurocentrism' consists of arguments or assumptions, whether implicit or explicit, that stress European supremacy and cultural uniqueness compared to the rest of the world, and that regard European historical development as the universal standard for those in other regions.¹⁴

In the first volumes of *A study of history*, published in 1934, Toynbee started to denounce this form of 'Eurocentrism' in conventional European historical investigations. In these works, he stressed the positionality of historians, arguing that historical investigations in any society or period were affected by predominant trends in a specific time and place. He defined this concept as 'historical thought', and used it to criticize the parochial nature of European views of history.¹⁵

Toynbee argued that the sense of European supremacy derived from European imperial domination in the modern era had led many European historians to ignore the histories of other civilizations. These histories were not seen as significant in terms of their intellectual values, and they were dismissed as 'decadent', and therefore of no significance in 'the History of Civilization'.¹⁶ As an example of this narrow-minded standpoint, Toynbee critically examined the thesis of 'the Unity of Civilization', the concept that different civilizations could not be mutually compatible. This concept was based on the belief that homogeneity only arose among civilizations after the pre-eminent civilization – namely Western civilization – spread and was established in non-Western regions in the modern age. Once the specific character of Western civilization was seen to amount to a universal standard, it was thought to be meaningless to compare Western civilization with other civilizations.

Toynbee cast doubt on this thesis and contended that it was 'a misconception into which our modern European historians have been led by the influence of their social environment on their thought': a consequence of the

¹⁴ Regarding 'Eurocentrism', see Samir Amin, *Eurocentrism*, trans. Russell Moore and James Membrez (London, 1989); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: postcolonial thought and historical difference* (Princeton, NJ, 2000), pp. 3–23; Marjet Brolsma, Robin de Bruin, and Matthijs Lok, 'Introduction', in Marjet Brolsma, Robin de Bruin, and Matthijs Lok, eds., *Eurocentrism in European history and memory* (Amsterdam, 2019), pp. 11–16.

¹⁵ For Toynbee's presentation of what he meant by 'historical thought', see Arnold J. Toynbee, *A study of history, I: Introduction; the genesis of civilizations* (Oxford, 1934), pp. 1–16.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 154–5.

world domination which European society had succeeded in establishing in modern times, both economically and politically.¹⁷ Contrary to this position, Toynbee thought that all the different civilizations were representatives of one single humanity. By his reckoning, the thesis of ‘the Unity of Civilization’ was misleading and he asserted that ‘This thesis that the present unification of the World based on a Western base is the consummation of a single continuous process which accounts for the whole human history requires a violent distortion of historical facts and a drastic limitation of the historian’s field of visions.’¹⁸

Toynbee further critically argued that the catchphrase ‘the Unchanged East’ was prevalent in contemporary Europe, fortifying ‘the ego-centric illusion’ in European minds. By his reckoning, the term inaccurately lumped together three different autonomous civilizations – namely, the Islamic, Hindu, and Far Eastern civilizations – under the epithet ‘Oriental’. This carried the presumption that they could all in equal measure be compared to Western civilization and that they were indistinguishable from each other. In Toynbee’s account, this view lacked any understanding of the significance of each different non-Western civilization, bolstering Europeans’ hubristic sense of supremacy.¹⁹

It has been argued that this Eurocentric view of world history began to emerge during the eighteenth-century European Enlightenment. At this time, world historical inquiries, especially when they related to cultural or civilizational comparisons, became popular among Enlightenment intellectuals. For instance, Voltaire addressed the history of China to reflect on the question of political order. In his *The spirit of the laws*, Charles-Louis de Montesquieu remarked on non-European cultures and histories, demonstrating that climate strongly influenced the character of social, political, and legal order in different countries. However, most of these Enlightenment works were simultaneously predicated on a belief in the unique quality of European culture.

World historical narratives that described Europe as the exceptional, self-enveloping culture of rationality became more clearly articulated and broadly shared in the nineteenth century. Indeed, many of the significant European thinkers of the period envisioned world history as a progressive force toward civilizational achievements in a Eurocentric manner. In his progressivist account of history, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel believed that the self-developing process of individual and collective freedom would materialize at the end of human progress. However, by his reckoning, only European societies, notably Prussia, had come close to establishing such conditions of human freedom, while backward or stagnant communities, including Africa and China, had not.²⁰ Hegel also thought that only peoples who formed a

¹⁷ In the first volumes of *A study of history*, Toynbee usually used the term ‘Western’ interchangeably with ‘European’: see, e.g., *ibid.*, pp. 149, 157.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

²⁰ Dominic Sachsenmaier, ‘The evolution of world histories’, in David Christian, ed., *The Cambridge world history, I: Introducing world history, to 10,000 BCE* (Cambridge, 2015), pp. 63–6.

state or had reached a certain level of spiritual development had a history, and that the history of the world shifted from East to West, for Europe was the end point of history and Asia was the beginning.²¹

Toynbee's reflections on world history made a significant departure from these traditional narratives. Indeed, his biographer and friend William N. McNeill assessed that Toynbee generated a 'Copernican revolution' in historical study, especially in the English-speaking world, by contending that Europe should no longer be treated as unique but as just one of a group of multiple civilizations. In McNeill's account, 'This simple recognition that Europe is an important, but not totally dominant, entity in the world is, in my view, Toynbee's greatest intellectual achievement.'²²

Furthermore, Toynbee emphasized that, at least since the First World War, Europe had begun to decline with respect to other civilizations. In a lecture delivered in 1931, he asserted that Europe was in retreat compared to the rest of the world, especially regarding material power.²³ This sense of the decline of Europe was amplified in his thought after the Second World War. Following the surge of anti-colonial movements in the non-Western world in the aftermath of the war, he further developed his idea of world history and demonstrated his criticism of Western imperial domination more vigorously in various works, including *Civilization on trial* (1948) and *The world and the West* (1953).

Toynbee insisted that human history had undergone a revolutionary change in character from the beginning of the sixteenth century. Before that time, humans in different regions and countries were isolated.²⁴ The European technological revolution changed the landscape by driving together all the other civilizations, which were connected as a single society through the ocean. In his account, the use of the ocean, first by sailing ships and then by steamships, enabled European powers to unify the whole inhabited and habitable world. Through this process of world unification, the centre of the world shifted from Central Asia, and European empires, such as those of the Portuguese, Spanish, and British, gained dominant power in the world.²⁵ However, Toynbee argued that the European predominance of the modern age was finally beginning to crumble in the face of decolonization in Asia and Africa, and he even contended that these regions would shortly become the centre of the world.²⁶ In his view, one crucial cause of their resurgence was that the non-European peoples had successfully adopted modern European technology. The temporary European monopoly on technology was

²¹ Patrick O'Brien, 'Historiographical traditions and modern imperatives for the restoration of global history', *Journal of Global History*, 1 (2006), pp. 3–39, at p. 11.

²² William McNeill, 'Toynbee revisited', *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, 41 (1988), pp. 13–27, at p. 19.

²³ Arnold J. Toynbee, 'Historical parallels to current international problems', *International Affairs*, 10 (1931), pp. 477–92, at p. 482.

²⁴ Arnold J. Toynbee, *Civilization on trial* (Oxford, 1948), p. 64.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

²⁶ Arnold Toynbee, 'The resurrection of Asia and the role of the Commonwealth', *Political Science*, 8 (1956), pp. 93–103, at pp. 97–8.

therefore bound to end, and the imbalance of power between Europe and the rest of the world had begun to change.²⁷

What made Toynbee apprehensive was that, despite the relative decline of Europe, European people still adhered to their 'old parochial self-centred standpoint' on history. He thought that the paradox of the contemporary generation was that, while the rest of the world had now acquired European-oriented knowledge and had begun to catch up with Europe, European people clung to their egocentric viewpoint on history and European pre-eminence.²⁸ Opposing this viewpoint, Toynbee stated that 'the West has never been all of the world that matters. The West has not been the only actor on the stage of modern history even at the peak of the West's power',²⁹ and he envisioned world history acknowledging co-constitutive historical contributions of both Western and non-Western worlds.

Our non-Western contemporaries have grasped the fact that, in consequence of the recent unification of the world, *our* past history has become a vital part of *theirs*. Reciprocally, we mentally still-slumbering Westerners have now to realize, on our part, that in virtue of the same revolution – a revolution, after all, that has been brought about by ourselves – our neighbours' past is going to become a vital part of our own Western future.³⁰

Toynbee here develops a critique of the European self-centred perspective on history that he had begun in the interwar period. Under the changing circumstances of the contemporary world, he engaged in a sharper critique of European imperial domination in modern ages and propounded a world history that stressed the historical contributions of both Western and non-Western civilizations – one which could be construed as a significant European intellectual effort to transcend the tradition of Eurocentric world history that was widely prevalent in modern Europe.

II

The significant factors that amplified Toynbee's reputation in Japan were the translation of his historical works and his physical visit to Japan. The Japanese translation of Somervell's abridged version of *A study of history* was published in 1949. It was followed by translations of *Civilization on trial* in 1952, and *The world and the West* in 1953. According to the translators of *A study of history*, it was when the abridged version was originally published in

²⁷ Arnold J. Toynbee, 'The United States and Russia: coexistence in a shrinking world', *Harvard Alumni Bulletin*, 5 Nov. 1954, Oxford, Bodleian Library, Archive of Arnold Joseph Toynbee, MS 13967/2/2, p. 212.

²⁸ Toynbee, *Civilization on trial*, p. 83.

²⁹ Arnold J. Toynbee, *The world and the West* (Oxford, 1953), p. 1. In this statement, Toynbee used the term 'the West' to mean 'Europe'.

³⁰ Toynbee, *Civilization on trial*, p. 89, emphasis in original. In this passage, Toynbee used the terms 'Western' and 'Westerners' synonymously with 'European' and 'Europeans'.

1947 that Toynbee's name became well known among many Japanese intellectuals.³¹ One of the remarkable points in this reception was that, as we will see further below, Japanese historians took Toynbee's critique of 'Eurocentrism' in historical studies seriously, and engaged closely with his works. Although they were aware of the critiques of Toynbee that had been presented by anglophone historians, they responded positively themselves. Indeed, alongside reading various criticisms of Toynbee's history, including Geyl's, Hayashi Kentarō, a historian of modern Germany at the University of Tokyo, appreciated Toynbee's critique of the Eurocentric view in world history. In his view, Toynbee demonstrated a broader historical perspective, which enabled people to grasp the meaning of the present-day Asian anti-colonial nationalist movement.³² In a review article on *The world and the West* in 1954, Hayashi contended that the book would be highly controversial for many Europeans because Toynbee attempted to overcome the presumption of European supremacy and argued that Russians and Asians were now reacting to past Western imperial expansionism.³³

Japanese historians' interest in Toynbee was also augmented by his visit to Japan in the autumn of 1956. His visit drew the broad attention of Japanese people from the beginning, and was reported by some of the country's major newspapers.³⁴ Toynbee delivered multiple public lectures and had dialogues with Japanese historians and scholars in other relevant fields.³⁵ This further increase of his popularity in Japan resulted in the publication of *Toynbee: his personality and historical view* in March 1957, in which Japanese historians, including Suzuki and Eguchi, assessed Toynbee's history in various ways.³⁶ However, it should be noted that there was a political component to Toynbee's visit. It had been organized by Matsumoto Shigeharu, an influential journalist and the managing director of the International House of Japan, a Japanese non-profit organization established in 1952 to promote international cultural exchange. Matsumoto had met Toynbee at the third biennial conference of the Institute of Pacific Relations in Kyoto in 1929, where they had discussed the issues in the Manchurian region. In December 1954, Matsumoto visited London to meet Toynbee again, and invited him to Japan to accelerate international cultural exchange.³⁷ But he also hoped to harness Toynbee's history as a tool against Marxist historiography in Japan.

³¹ Ānorudo J. Toinbī, *Rekishi no kenkyū daiikkan*, trans. Rōyama Masamichi and Abe Kōzō, published by Shakai shisō kenkyū kai shuppan bu, Tokyo, 10 Nov. 1949, p. 13.

³² Hayashi Kentarō, 'Toinbī: sekai to seiō heno ichi hanron' ('Toynbee: a critique of *The world and the West*'), *Gakutō*, 51 (1954), pp. 52–4, at p. 54.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

³⁴ 'Toinbī hakase rainichi' ('Dr Toynbee visits Japan'), *Mainichi Shimbun*, evening edition (Tokyo), 1 Oct. 1956; 'Rainichi suru Toinbī kyōju' ('Professor Toynbee will visit Japan'), *Asahi Shimbun*, morning edition (Tokyo), 29 Sept. 1956.

³⁵ A. J. Toinbī, *Rekishi no kyōkun*, trans. Matsumoto Shigeharu, published by Iwanami shoten, Tokyo, 23 May 1957.

³⁶ Rōyama Masamichi, 'Jo' ('Introduction'), in Shakai shisō kenkyū kai, ed., *Toinbī: hito to shikan* (*Toynbee: his personality and historical view*) (Tokyo, 1957), pp. 1–2.

³⁷ Matsumoto Shigeharu, 'Maegaki' ('Preface'), in Toinbī, *Rekishi no kyōkun*, trans. Matsumoto, pp. i–ii, iv.

Post-war Marxist historiography in Japan emerged after the decline of the pre-war nationalistic historiography known as *Kōkoku Shikan*. In the 1930s and during the Pacific War, *Kōkoku Shikan*, which was mainly propagated by Hiraizumi Kiyoshi, a historian of medieval Japan at the Imperial University of Tokyo, had a broad influence on Japanese society. Hiraizumi regarded Marxism as a pernicious ideology that menaced the authority of the emperor in Japan. He was apprehensive that young Japanese scholars and students, who were disgruntled with the semi-feudalistic and oppressive political regime and economic inequality in Japan, would be affected by the Marxist approach to studying history. Hiraizumi therefore advocated the importance of 'Japanese spirit' and firmly endorsed the role of national history in buttressing the nature of the Japanese state as centred on the emperor.³⁸

This nationalistic historiography lost its legitimacy and influence after the defeat of imperial Japan in 1945. At the same time, Marxist historiography quickly gained dominance in post-war Japanese academia, drastically transforming the landscape of the discipline, as Sebastian Conrad has pointed out. Because the Marxists were among the few who were seen as not having collaborated with Japanese fascism, the American occupation authorities initially showed a favourable attitude to them and even supported their return to universities. Although this euphonious relationship ended abruptly in 1948, when the US took the anti-communist policy orientation known as the 'reverse course', under the emerging pressure of the Cold War, Marxist historiography survived and was institutionalized in post-war Japanese academia.³⁹

The international cultural exchange that centred on the International House of Japan was designed to counteract the Marxist approach and to ideologically reinforce the bilateral relationship with the US. John Foster Dulles, a staunch anti-communist American politician, visited Japan in February 1951 to discuss with the Japanese government issues relating to the peace treaty and security policy, against the backdrop of the Cold War. He took the philanthropist John D. Rockefeller III with him. Like Toynbee, Rockefeller had met Matsumoto at the Institute of Pacific Relations conference in 1929 and he exploited this connection to mediate a new international cultural exchange programme in post-war Japan. It was against this background that the International House of Japan was established in 1952, with the financial support of the Rockefeller Foundation, to facilitate mutual understanding between the US and Japan and Japan's return to the international community in the West.⁴⁰ In this institutional enterprise, Rockefeller had an ulterior motive

³⁸ Konno Nobuyuki, 'Rekishi gaku kenkyū kai to futatsu no kōkoku shikan: Hiraizumi Kiyoshi, Yoshida Saburō o chūshin ni' ('The Historical Science Society of Japan and two kōkoku shikan: focusing on Hiraizumi Kiyoshi and Yoshida Saburō'), in *Rekishi gaku kenkyū kai*, ed., *Senzen rekishi gaku no arina: rekishika tachi no sen kyūhyaku sanjū nendai* (*The arena of pre-war historiographies: historians in the 1930s*) (Tokyo, 2023), pp. 142–4.

³⁹ Sebastian Conrad, 'Japanese historical writing', in Axel Schneider and Daniel Woolf, eds., *The Oxford history of historical writing, V: Historical writing since 1945* (Oxford, 2011), p. 638.

⁴⁰ 'Kokusai bunka kaikan shikin iin kai setsuritsu shui sho' ('Prospectus of Funding Committee of International House of Japan'), n.d., Tokyo, Center for Pacific and American Studies Library, Archive of Takagi Yasaka, folder 543, reel 51.

for preventing Japan from taking the side of the Soviet Union and for sustaining American–Japanese co-operation. Meanwhile, Japanese liberal supporters of American–Japanese co-operation hoped that the cultural exchange programme would also impede the expansion of Marxist influence in Japanese society.⁴¹

Matsumoto was a representative figure on the Japanese side of this collaboration. He was an anti-communist liberal who espoused individual liberty and felt concerned that communist ideology prevailed in Japanese academia and among young university students.⁴² By playing an intermediary role in inviting Toynbee to Japan, in collaboration with the Rockefeller Foundation, he aimed to capitalize on Toynbee's concept of world history as a counter-narrative to Marxist historiography. Indeed, after Toynbee visited Japan, Matsumoto wrote to Rockefeller,

I believed his visit here was quite a success in the sense that he helped our historians broaden their thinking and also that a large segment of our students were given a well-balanced approach to the study of that field of learning which has long been a victim to the strong influence of Marxism.⁴³

In his letter to Toynbee on 5 August 1955, Matsumoto similarly revealed his misgivings about the popularity of the Marxist approach among Japanese historians, by describing it as 'the plight of historical studies in Japan', and he solicited Toynbee's guidance through arranging meetings with Japanese scholars of the humanities and social sciences.⁴⁴

While Toynbee himself had a long-standing antipathy to communism, he was also opposed to such fanatical forms of anti-communism as McCarthyism. As recent studies have revealed, his writing on contemporary world affairs continued to show an apprehensive approach to communism, and he had developed his theory of history since the Bolshevik revolution of 1917.⁴⁵ Indeed, Toynbee clarified his concerns about Soviet communism as the tension of the Cold War loomed,⁴⁶ and he demonstrated an anti-communist position during his stay in Japan. According to Matsumoto, Toynbee said that

⁴¹ Fujita Fumiko, *Amerika bunka gaikō to nihon: reisen ki no bunka to hito no kōryū (American cultural diplomacy and Japan: cultural and human exchange during the Cold War)* (Tokyo, 2015), p. 233.

⁴² Kaimai Jun, *Matsumoto shigeharu den: saigo no riberarisuto (Biography of Matsumoto Shigeharu: the last liberalist)* (Tokyo, 2009), pp. 406–8.

⁴³ Matsumoto Shigeharu to John D. Rockefeller III, 30 Dec. 1956, Sleepy Hollow, NY, Rockefeller Archive Center, Rockefeller Family Archives, John D. Rockefeller III papers, ser. 1, box 53, folder 477.

⁴⁴ Matsumoto to Toynbee, 5 Aug. 1955, Bodleian Library, Archive of Arnold Joseph Toynbee, MS 13967/97/1.

⁴⁵ Georgios Giannakopoulos, 'A world safe for empires? A. J. Toynbee and the internationalization of self-determination in the East (1912–1922)', *Global Intellectual History*, 6 (2021), pp. 484–505, at p. 491; Gabriel B. Paquette, 'The impact of the 1917 Russian revolutions on Arnold J. Toynbee's historical thought, 1917–34', *Revolutionary Russia*, 13 (2000), pp. 55–80.

⁴⁶ Arnold J. Toynbee, 'The study of history in the light of current developments', 8 June 1948, Chatham House Online Archive, RIIA/8/1550, pp. 17–18.

communism was a religion and that one needed to envisage an alternative social vision.⁴⁷

Nevertheless, the reception of Toynbee's world history by Japanese historians was not confined to the context of the Cold War. Beyond the ideological constraints of anti-communism, they responded with their own agencies and in accordance with their own ideological backgrounds.

III

Various studies have pointed to the anti-communist background to the Japanese reception of Toynbee. These studies have argued that Toynbee's historical study attracted Japanese intellectual elites willing to discuss his ideas from an anti-Marxist perspective.⁴⁸ However, this scholarly account needs some qualification. Beyond the contests of the Cold War in the mid-twentieth century, Japanese historians on both the right and the left positively received Toynbee's world history, albeit with some reservations, in contrast to the steady decline of his reputation in contemporary English-speaking historiography.

Suzuki Shigetaka, a conservative historian, is crucial in comprehending how Japanese historians on the right welcomed Toynbee's concept of world history as a serious self-critique of Eurocentric historical studies by a 'European' intellectual. Suzuki, a specialist in medieval European history and Leopold von Ranke, had been a member of the Kyoto School during the Pacific War. He esteemed Toynbee's works, stating in 1950 that, through his reading of the English editions of *Civilization on trial* and parts of *A study of history*, he had found 'a new model for historians'.⁴⁹ By his reckoning, Toynbee's history was idiosyncratic and yet provided a revolutionary perspective on historical study that would continue to have significant resonance in later generations.⁵⁰ He recognized that it had drawn many criticisms from professional historians, and he described Toynbee's history as an 'amateur' account.⁵¹ Nevertheless, he thought it crucial that Toynbee's historical works stemmed from practical problems that had arisen since the First World War.⁵²

According to Suzuki, Toynbee's world history was underpinned by a contemporary sense of 'the decline of Europe' and was therefore an intellectual effort to understand what the world was like, now that Europeans could not self-identify themselves as the world itself.⁵³ He articulated this point by comparing Toynbee with Ranke: whereas Ranke sought to write a systematic world history, and yet rested on the assumption that 'Europe is the World', Toynbee intended to systematically rewrite world history based on the assumption that

⁴⁷ Matsumoto Shigeharu, 'Ichi rekishika no sugao' ('The real face of a historian'), *Bungei shunjū*, 34 (1956), pp. 52–4, at p. 53.

⁴⁸ McNeill, *Arnold J. Toynbee*, p. 268; Turner, 'Arnold Toynbee (1889–1975) and Japan', p. 291.

⁴⁹ Suzuki Shigetaka, 'Toinbi sonota' ('Toynbee and others'), *Tembō (Perspective)*, 56 (1950), p. 74.

⁵⁰ Suzuki Shigetaka, 'Rekishika Toinbi' ('Toynbee, a historian'), in *Shakai shisō kenkyū kai*, ed., *Toinbi*, pp. 14–15.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 15–17.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 20–2.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

'Europe is not the World.'⁵⁴ Thus, Toynbee's world history could be regarded as the new world history, which went beyond the attitude of studying history only from 'Yōroppa teki shikaku' ('a European perspective').⁵⁵ Suzuki argued that, in his as yet unfinished project, Toynbee reconsidered the parochial view that European modernity is universal and sought to demonstrate a world history that acknowledged mutual historical contributions by different regions of the world.⁵⁶ Suzuki highly appreciated this non-Eurocentric intellectual project and commented in 1954 'In short, it takes the form of an effort by Toynbee, as a European, to transcend his European position. In other words, it takes the form of an effort to transcend his own past.'⁵⁷ In Suzuki's view, although Europe was no longer the master of the world, as the European continent had been torn apart in the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, most Europeans adhered to their parochial view of the world: they attempted to grasp history only from the European perspective. Toynbee, however, was not preoccupied with such parochialism and had made a breakthrough in historical perspective.⁵⁸

Suzuki also valued Toynbee's historical works compared to the 'historicism' prevalent in existing professional historical studies. In his opinion, 'historicism' was the belief that today's concerns should not be a guiding principle when implementing historical investigations. This creed had been very influential across the world since the establishment of historical study as an academic discipline in the modern age, its proponents believing that the study of history should retain academic purity and rigour. However, Suzuki argued that such intellectual attitudes precluded people from considering history in connection with the practical matters of contemporary society.⁵⁹ In this sense, 'historicism' materialized by cleaving the past from the present. Toynbee, in contrast, investigated past histories in relation to contemporary matters.⁶⁰

Referring to Toynbee's account of world unification based on European technology, Suzuki argued that world unification was attained not through long-term reciprocal contacts but through unilateral European expansion in the modern age. Thus, scholars in the humanities were entering into a unified world without sufficient psychological preparation.⁶¹ According to Suzuki, the primacy of Europe hinged on the ability of its science and technology to produce enormous wealth. Yet this advantage could not be permanently monopolized as it had been shared with non-European societies. The United States and

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 20, 22–4.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 29.

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 29–31; Suzuki Shigetaka, 'Toinbi no hito to gakufū' ('Toynbee's personality and academic style'), in Kusanagi Masao and Yamamoto Shin, eds., *Sekai kiki to gendai shisō* (World crisis and contemporary thought) (Tokyo, 1954), pp. 177–8.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 178.

⁵⁸ Suzuki, 'Rekishika Toinbi', pp. 28–9.

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 33–4.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 34.

⁶¹ Suzuki Shigetaka, 'Sekaiishi ni okeru gendai' ('Contemporary era in world history'), *Chūō kōron*, 68 (1953), pp. 33–41, at pp. 33–4, 39–40.

the Soviet Union had already exceeded Europe, and Asia would follow the same course in the foreseeable future. This was a paradoxical process: European modernity turned into world modernity, thereby precipitating Europe's relative decline in the world.⁶²

Suzuki also viewed modern European nationalism as having shaped the foundation of the contemporary Asian anti-colonial independence movement against European empires. In his account, this was another significant manifestation of the irony that 'Europe declined by Europeanizing the world.'⁶³ He discussed Asian anti-colonial nationalism at a roundtable meeting with Toynbee and other Japanese intellectuals in the autumn of 1956. He considered that the common problem that Asia was facing was liberation from European colonial subjugation and that Asian nationalism was the representation of this independence movement, whereas Toynbee claimed that many Asian countries had been under subjugation by European powers and that contemporary Asian nationalism was a reaction to that subjugation. However, Suzuki argued that Asian nationalisms, such as Indian nationalism or Chinese nationalism, did not share a common cultural ground, in contrast to European nationalism, which was based on the same Christian tradition, and he was therefore sceptical about the future of nationalism in Asia.⁶⁴

What is worth noting here is that Suzuki's assessment of Toynbee's world history derived from his earlier intellectual engagements on world history as one of the Kyoto School intellectuals, along with Kōsaka Masaaki, Nishitani Keiji, and Kōyama Iwao, who together were known as 'the big four' of the Imperial University of Kyoto. These scholars developed an interest in world history shortly before and during the Pacific War, as manifested in their roundtable discussion 'The standpoint of world history and Japan' on 26 November 1941. In this discussion, despite differences of opinion in their respective approaches, they all castigated the European sense of supremacy embedded in world history and the contemporary world order.⁶⁵ They also paid particular attention to Ranke's world history rather than his empiricist approach to historical study, while rejecting the Eurocentric world history that was so central in his works. In their account, Ranke construed world history as a place of struggles and of the rise and fall of moral energy among nations or states.⁶⁶ Building on this reading, they appropriated the German historian's concept of world history to justify the establishment of Japanese

⁶² Ibid., p. 40; Suzuki Shigetaka, 'Seiō no botsuraku' ('The decline of the West'), in *Gendai rinri daijikkān (Contemporary ethics)*, X (Tokyo, 1958), p. 141.

⁶³ Suzuki, 'Seiō no botsuraku', pp. 149–50.

⁶⁴ 'Nihon to ajia no shōrai: Toinbī hakase o kakomu zadan kai (jo)' ('The future of Japan and Asia: roundtable discussion with Dr Toynbee (first)'), *Yomiuri Shimbun*, morning edition (Tokyo), 24 Nov. 1956.

⁶⁵ Kōsaka Masaaki et al., *Sekaishi teki tachiba to nihon (The standpoint of world history and Japan)* (Tokyo, 1943), pp. 19–22.

⁶⁶ Koyama Satoshi, 'Jisshō shugi teki "sekaishi"' ('Positivist "world history"'), in Akita Shigeru, Nagahara Yōko et al., eds., *Sekaishi no sekaishi (World history of 'world history')* (Tokyo, 2016), pp. 284–7.

hegemony in East Asia, with significant moral energy to counteract Western imperialism and reconfigure the structure of world history.⁶⁷

Suzuki, the only professional historian at the roundtable discussion, expressed his view on Ranke's world history in his book *Ranke and the study of world history*, published in 1939. He contended that, although Ranke had presented a systematic world history rather than the mere coverage of past events, his approach was predicated on the assumption of viewing European history as world history. Suzuki countered this by arguing that 'Europe is not equivalent to the world any more', given that the US and Asia (especially Japan) had now emerged as significant powers, which indicated the end of 'Yōroppa teki sekai zō' ('the European vision of the world') in the contemporary age and the need to rethink *conventional* world history.⁶⁸ He was also not content with Ranke's historical empiricism. By his reckoning, current world history needed not only to explore the facts but also to be grounded in the will to reshape the existing world order.⁶⁹ By employing the concept of moral energy present in Ranke's world history, Suzuki contended that Japanese imperial expansion should be linked with an active reimagining of world history.⁷⁰ In this regard, his argument epitomized the attempt by the Kyoto School intellectuals to transcend Eurocentric world history and provide intellectual legitimization for Japanese imperialism.

Even in the post-war period, Suzuki adhered to his world history project before and during the Pacific War and insisted that contemporary world history should be a systematic world history that subsumed both European and Eastern history,⁷¹ although he warned against anti-European parochialism that would establish Asiancentric world history as the antithesis of Eurocentric world history.⁷² It was on this point that his concept of world history found an echo in Toynbee's. His reception of Toynbee's approach grew out of the development of his own concept of world history from the time of his earlier intellectual engagement as a member of the Kyoto School in the previous period. The shadow of the school's argument on world history in the age of imperial Japan was the critical background behind this intellectual resonance between Suzuki and Toynbee in the post-war period.

IV

Toynbee's concept of world history attracted other Japanese historians with different ideological backgrounds from Suzuki's. These historians considered world history from an anti-imperialist standpoint under the process of

⁶⁷ Kōsaka et al., *Sekaishi teki tachiba to nihon*, pp. 124–8.

⁶⁸ Suzuki Shigetaka, *Ranke to sekaishi gaku (Ranke and the study of world history)* (Tokyo, 1939), pp. 5, 134–5, 138–9.

⁶⁹ Suzuki Shigetaka, 'Sekaishi kan no rekishi' ('History of the concept of world history'), 1944, in Nishida Kitarō et al., *Sekaishi no riron: Kyōto gakuha no rekishi tetsugaku kō (Theories of world history: thinking of the Kyoto School's philosophy of history)* (Kyoto, 2000), pp. 112–13.

⁷⁰ Suzuki Shigetaka, *Rekishi kokka no rinen (Principles of the historical state)* (Tokyo, 1941), pp. 206–7.

⁷¹ Suzuki Shigetaka, *Yōroppa no seiritsu (Establishment of Europe)* (Tokyo, 1947), pp. 1–2, 286.

⁷² Suzuki, 'Rekishika Toinbi', p. 38.

decolonization. European powers had shaped an imperial order in the world – encompassing geopolitical, legal, economic, cultural, and demographic aspects – especially in the mid- and late nineteenth century. However, anti-colonial movements had developed before the Second World War, and the European imperial order had begun to stagger in the 1940s and 1950s, although many legacies from the colonial period endured, and conflicts remained between local minorities and between newly independent states and the European colonial powers.⁷³

One of the historians who valued Toynbee's historical works for reconsidering world history under the international context was Eguchi Bokurō, who was an influential self-describing Marxist historian and the first post-war committee representative of a major academic association of Japanese historians, the Historical Science Society of Japan (*Rekishi gaku kenkyū kai*) which was founded in 1932. In the 1930s and the early 1940s, Eguchi expressed opposition to *Kōkoku Shikan* as propagated by Hiraizumi,⁷⁴ and he implemented research on diplomatic history under the influence of the contemporary trend of Japanese Marxist historiography that lambasted imperial expansionism and the economic inequality in Japan.⁷⁵

Early members of the Historical Science Society of Japan sympathized with or had an interest in Marxism and thus saw Hiraizumi's argument as 'ultra-nationalistic' propaganda, while still accepting the value of his academic works on medieval Japanese history. Under the decline of *Kōkoku Shikan* and the rise of Marxist historiography in the post-war period, the society expanded its membership and became a pivotal association within Japanese historical scholarship.⁷⁶ Moreover, the major players in the society alleged that post-war historical study in Japan must be remodelled, by criticizing the past nationalistic historiography that had endorsed Japanese imperialism.⁷⁷ Eguchi shared this leftist political conviction and served as the committee representative of the society from 1950 to 1962.

However, unlike mainstream Japanese Marxist historiography, which focused on socio-economic substructures, in the post-war period Eguchi developed his unique concept of imperialism, foregrounding the significance of the political dimension and attempting to examine imperialism beyond the framework of national history.⁷⁸ Building on this methodology, he asserted that

⁷³ C. A. Bayly, *Remaking the modern world, 1900–2015: global connections and comparisons* (Hoboken, NJ, 2018), pp. 118–19; John Darwin, *After Tamerlane: the global history of empire* (London, 2007), pp. 450, 468.

⁷⁴ Saitō Takashi, ed., *Shisaku suru rekishika: Eguchi Bokurō* (*Pondering historians: Eguchi Bokurō*) (Tokyo, 1991), pp. 91, 107.

⁷⁵ Maeda Ryōsuke, 'Saha gaikō shigaku no shōkō: sen kyūhyaku sanjū nendai no marukusu shugi shika tachi' ('The dawn of "leftist diplomatic historiography": Marxist historians in Japan in the 1930s'), in *Rekishi gaku kenkyū kai*, ed., *Senzen rekishi gaku no arina*, pp. 187–8.

⁷⁶ Katō Yōko, 'Sen kyūhyaku sanzyū nendai no rekishi gaku no "sasshin" to reimeiki no "Rekishi gaku kenkyū"' ('The "renovation" of historical studies in the 1930s and the early days of the *Journal of Historical Studies*'), in *Rekishi gaku kenkyū kai*, ed., *Senzen rekishi gaku no arina*, p. 7.

⁷⁷ Konno, 'Rekishi gaku kenkyū kai to futatsu no kōkoku shikan', pp. 154–5.

⁷⁸ Eguchi Bokurō, *Teikoku shugi to minzoku* (*Imperialism and nations*) (Tokyo, 1954), pp. 62, 68–9.

modern reactionary great powers, such as the western European and Japanese empires, had shaped the worldwide imperial order in the modern age, dominating many nationalities in Asia and Africa.⁷⁹ However, this situation had begun to be fundamentally challenged in the post-war period, because, in opposition to the worldwide imperial order, anti-colonial nationalism in the subjugated regions had emerged as a critical revolutionary force. Eguchi hoped that this national consciousness would lead eventually to peaceful and progressive internationalism instead of violent and reactionary nationalism.⁸⁰

In 'Toynbee's view of history and Marxism', published in 1957, Eguchi critically assessed some of Toynbee's historical inquiries. He was cognizant of critiques of Toynbee by professional historians abroad and aligned with them in condemning the lack of empiricism in Toynbee's historical works. He also cast doubt on Toynbee's view that communism was a serious challenge to European civilization.⁸¹ Nonetheless, Eguchi thought that Toynbee demonstrated a remarkable ability to reflect on conventional historical scholarship. In this regard, he considered it crucial that Toynbee had developed his thought in relation to the reality of the contemporary world, in which understanding thoughts and actions in Asia and Africa became one of the most crucial issues.⁸²

Although he mentioned that Toynbee's world history remained an interpretation of the world, rather than being an active attempt to transform it (as Karl Marx had once criticized conventional philosophy in his own age).⁸³ Eguchi believed that it offered a profound insight into historical study and the contemporary world because it attempted to understand the significance of Asian and other civilizations, which would therefore inspire a large number of people in the world.⁸⁴ He remarked, 'I acknowledge the positive significance of Toynbee's thought regarding the issues of world peace and the process of the growth of Asian, African, and other nations with maintaining peace in good order, and in accordance with this, I anticipate the development of Toynbee's thought.'⁸⁵

Indeed, Eguchi echoed Toynbee's critique of the Eurocentric view of the world. According to his notes for a lecture on 'diplomatic history' at the University of Tokyo in late 1958, he pointed to a world historical change in contemporary international relations. He argued that the orthodox view of international relations was predicated on the Eurocentric modern world, and that Eastern societies had been treated merely as objects without their own agency. He declared, however, that this Eurocentric world was being

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 179.

⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 173–4, 181–2.

⁸¹ Eguchi Bokurō, 'Toinbī no rekishi kan to marukusu shugi' ('Toynbee's view of history and Marxism'), in Shakai shisō kenkyū kai, ed., *Toinbī*, p. 166.

⁸² Eguchi Bokurō, 'Toinbī fusai hen sensō no zen'ya: sono kankō ni tsuite' ('Mr and Mrs Toynbee, eds., *Eve of war: on the publication*'), *Asahi Shimbun*, morning edition (Tokyo), 1 Aug. 1958.

⁸³ Eguchi, 'Toinbī no rekishi kan to marukusu shugi', pp. 173–4.

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 180–1.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 179.

transformed due to the emergence of the United States and the Soviet Union, and, most importantly, because of the increasing significance of non-European regions such as Asia and Africa in contemporary world affairs.⁸⁶ At the same time, Eguchi sought to write a world history beyond ‘*Yōroppa nomi o chūshin to shita kangaekata*’ (‘an exclusively Eurocentric approach’), which he thought had begun to be challenged even in the European intellectual world since the early twentieth century.⁸⁷ Indeed, in his *Sekaishi gaisetsu* (*The outline of world history*) published in 1956, he argued that world history should be written according to how different nations and civilizations influenced each other and shaped the modern world.⁸⁸ In conjunction with this approach, he underlined the importance of positively assessing the unique cultural values of nations subjugated by imperial powers, incorporating their perspectives on history and re-examining the cultural diversity in world history.⁸⁹

To comprehend Eguchi’s view of anti-colonial nationalism and world history, it is important to note the historiographical background in post-war Japan. As mentioned above, Marxist historiography was the dominant influence in post-war Japanese academia. At least in the early post-war period, an influential trend within this historiography was the Soviet Marxist ‘five-stage developmental theory’. In ‘Dialectical and historical materialism’, published in the late 1930s, Joseph Stalin was said to define the law of historical development from a national historical perspective, propounding the five stages of modes of production as beginning with primitive communism, progressing through slavery, feudalism, and capitalism, to culminate in socialism.⁹⁰ This law of historical development was seen to be universally applicable to any national society in the world. This Stalinist account of world history and nations was positively received by many post-war Japanese historians, particularly in the context of the desire for liberation of Japan from the American occupation after the Pacific War.⁹¹ Indeed, the preface of the report of the 1949 conference of the Historical Science Society of Japan acknowledged the ‘five-stage developmental theory’ as the fundamental law of world history and stated that major members of the association attempted to examine ‘laws of development of world history and its specific forms in histories of nations’.⁹²

⁸⁶ ‘Eguchi sensei gaikōshi (ichi)’ (‘Professor Eguchi: Diplomatic history, volume 1’), Feb. 1959, Kanagawa, Shōnan Ōba Public Library, Archive of Eguchi Bokurō, 3 Manuscripts, 3-2 Oral Manuscript (40), pp. 2-3.

⁸⁷ Eguchi Bokurō, *Sekaishi gaisetsu* (*The outline of world history*) (Tokyo, 1956), p. 319.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 321-2.

⁹⁰ Commission of the Central Committee of the CPSU(B), ed., *The history of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks): short course* (New York, NY, 1939), pp. 105-31.

⁹¹ Kotani Hiroyuki, ‘Marukusu shugi no sekaishi’ (‘World history of Marxism’), in Akita, Nagahara et al., eds., *‘Sekaishi’ no Sekaishi*, p. 338.

⁹² Rekishi gaku kenkyū kai, ed., *Sekaishi no kihon hōsoku: rekishi gaku kenkyū kai sen kyūhyaku yonjū ku nen do taikai hōkoku* (*Fundamental laws of world history: the report of the 1949 conference of the Historical Science Society of Japan*) (Tokyo, 1949).

In contrast to the dogmatic Marxist discourse, Eguchi approached the questions of nations and world history from a different perspective. He underscored the autonomous desire of subjugated nations to overcome the imperial system in the world and longed that they could exercise their will for progressive causes such as world peace. Building on this positive account of the autonomy of subjugated nations beyond Soviet Marxist historiography, Eguchi appreciated Toynbee's approach to world history that grasped the significance of Asian and African civilizations, despite the two historians' ideological divergence.

Toynbee's world history also echoed the argument made by Uehara Senroku, a renowned left-wing Japanese historian who had specialized in medieval European history but who had gained a remarkable reputation in the study of world history in post-war Japan. Uehara asserted that it was necessary for the Japanese to autonomously establish their own concept of world history, within the current trend of anti-colonial nationalism in Asia. In his view, efforts to shape a view of world history should be related to the long-term and structural trends of contemporary world affairs.⁹³ He argued that, whereas there existed multiple worlds which had peculiar cultures and had developed in distinctive ways, such as East Asian, Indian, Islamic, and European worlds, these worlds had become unified through the European imperial expansion that commenced in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and culminated in the nineteenth century.⁹⁴ Yet, after the First World War, Europe had begun to decline, and the structural change in the political and economic relationship between Europe and Asia had gained momentum, especially after the Second World War.⁹⁵ In this respect, Uehara highlighted the significance of the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence that Jawaharlal Nehru and Zhou Enlai had agreed in 1954 and that the Bandung Conference upheld in 1955.⁹⁶ He argued that these events indicated that Asian and African regions were taking a significant role in the new phase of world history, leading him to urge the Japanese to rethink the traditional Eurocentric framework of world history.⁹⁷

Uehara also critically referred to Ranke in order to reconsider the existing world history framework. Like Suzuki, he argued that Ranke's world history hinged on the assumption of 'Yōroppa chūshin shugi' ('Eurocentrism'). Apart from his brief sketch of ancient Eastern history, Ranke hardly touched on the histories of non-European worlds such as China, India, and Japan. Thus, Ranke's world history was marked by 'Yōroppa chūshin shugi' that regarded world history as tantamount to European history. For Uehara, it was an exemplary case of the nineteenth- or early twentieth-century world history

⁹³ Uehara Senroku, *Sekaishi ni okeru gendai no ajia* (Contemporary Asia in world history) (Tokyo, 1956), pp. 7–9.

⁹⁴ Uehara Senroku, *Sekaishi zō no shin keisei* (The new shaping of the image of world history) (Tokyo, 1955), pp. 58–60, 101–2.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 103–4; Uehara Senroku, 'Gendai ajia no rikai no tameni' ('For understanding contemporary Asia'), in Sakamoto Koretada et al., eds., *Gendai ajia shi: daiikkan* (Contemporary Asian history: volume 1) (Tokyo, 1956), p. 3.

⁹⁶ Uehara, *Sekaishi ni okeru gendai no ajia*, pp. 12–16, 85, 89–90.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 22, 139–42, 144–6.

promoted by Europeans.⁹⁸ He thought that such a historical perspective impeded understanding of the equal status and agency of non-European worlds, and instead led to Europeans regarding these non-European worlds as merely peripheries of Europe, which rejected the notion of the plurality of the world.⁹⁹ Furthermore, Uehara insisted that the contemporary movement of national independence in Asia was rendering this Eurocentric view obsolete, laying the groundwork for a new concept of world history in which the unique values of non-European worlds were recognized.¹⁰⁰

Uehara developed his view on world history against the background of many African countries in the sub-Saharan region having gained independence since the late 1950s. By at least the early 1960s, he came to address 'regional studies' as a way to enrich knowledge of world history, especially in the sense of recognizing the significance of non-European or non-Western cultures. However, in his view, contemporary regional studies needed to be grounded in the criticism of traditional regional studies by Europeans and Americans, which were deeply concerned with their colonial epistemologies and practices. Therefore, Uehara argued that scholars of Asian and African regional studies should immerse themselves in local regions or villages and conduct joint research with local scholars.¹⁰¹

While Uehara made no systematic reference to Toynbee, and constructed his world history within the context of the crisis of European modernity caused by the two world wars and the emergence of nuclear weapons,¹⁰² there is a clear resonance between Uehara's and Toynbee's critiques of the Eurocentric standpoint in world history. Indeed, in 1955 Uehara viewed Toynbee as one of the few European intellectuals who aimed to establish a new world history beyond 'Yōroppa chūshin no furui sekaishi zō' ('a Eurocentric, obsolete vision of world history') in response to the changing character of the world after the two world wars.¹⁰³ Moreover, in his interview on Toynbee shortly before Toynbee's arrival in Japan in 1956, Uehara mentioned that 'Toynbee is the first European to establish a non-Eurocentric concept of world history' with his critique of the dearth of empiricism, and he assessed Toynbee's world history as a remarkable European intellectual effort to write a new world history.¹⁰⁴

Nevertheless, there were ideological divergences between Toynbee and left-wing Japanese historians concerning their views of anti-colonial nationalism and its links with socialism or communism in Asia and Africa under the global Cold War.¹⁰⁵ As mentioned above, Uehara stressed the significance of

⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 24–5.

⁹⁹ Ibid., pp. 25–6.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., pp. 28–9.

¹⁰¹ Uehara Senroku, 'Ajia afurika kenkyū no mondai ten' ('The problem of Asian and African studies'), *Shisō* (Thought), 468 (1963), pp. 31–41, at pp. 34, 36–8.

¹⁰² Uehara Senroku, *Kiki ni tatsu nihon* (Japan in a state of crisis) (Tokyo, 1953), pp. 87–9.

¹⁰³ Uehara, *Sekaishi zō no shin keisei*, pp. 222–3.

¹⁰⁴ 'Rainichi suru Toinbi kyōju'.

¹⁰⁵ Odd Arne Westad, *The global Cold War: Third World interventions and the making of our times* (Cambridge, 2007).

Asian anti-colonialism in the contemporary world and emphasized the efforts towards peace which were manifested in the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence.¹⁰⁶ Eguchi similarly hoped that anti-colonial nationalists in Asia and Africa would establish free and equal international co-operation, which he believed was ‘opening up the ultimate path toward internationalism’.¹⁰⁷

Moreover, these left-wing historians envisaged the connections between anti-colonial nationalism and socialism or communism in a positive manner. Uehara thought that, while people in the Asian and Arab regions were pursuing their national independence, they were also dealing with domestic reform of their societies. To achieve these objectives, there was a need for co-existence between nationalism and socialism.¹⁰⁸ When mentioning Arab nationalism in 1958, Eguchi claimed that communists should accelerate co-operation with the Arab nations by embracing their autonomy, rather than forcing their ideological dogmatism upon them.¹⁰⁹ These arguments by Eguchi and Uehara mirrored a broader discourse among many contemporary Japanese intellectuals on the left in the 1950s regarding the anti-colonial nationalist movements. Against the backdrop of national liberation movements in Asia and Africa, they applauded the anti-colonial movements, particularly among Asian countries, for their resistance to Western imperialism and their desire to find a means to overcome the structure of the Cold War.¹¹⁰

Toynbee did not share this view. He expressed apprehension that anti-colonial nationalism would lead to violent nationalist insurgencies in world politics. He believed that this was an unfortunate outcome of the exotic reception of European nationalism in different civilizations.¹¹¹ In 1947, he contended that during the previous century and a half, the European political institutions of nation-states had engendered persecution, eviction, and massacre as they expanded into eastern Europe, south-west Asia, and India.¹¹² During his 1956 stay in Japan, he reiterated this concern and referred to the possibility that the current Asian anti-colonial nationalism would become as parochial as European nationalism.¹¹³

Furthermore, Toynbee was concerned about the connections between anti-colonial nationalism and communism. He believed that communism could be an attractive ideology for the majority of humanity who were not

¹⁰⁶ Uehara, *Sekaishi ni okeru gendai no ajia*, pp. 139–44.

¹⁰⁷ Eguchi, *Teikoku shugi to minzoku*, pp. 173–4.

¹⁰⁸ Uehara, *Sekaishi ni okeru gendai no ajia*, p. 161.

¹⁰⁹ Eguchi Bokurō, “‘Minzoku shugi’ to ‘kyōsan shugi’: Arabu nashonarizumu to seiji teki hōkō’ (‘Nationalism’ and ‘communism’: Arab nationalism and political direction)’, *Keizai ōrai* (*Economic communications*), 10 (1958), pp. 131–7, at p. 137.

¹¹⁰ Oguma Eiji, *‘Minshu’ to ‘aikoku’: sengo nihon no nashonarizumu to kōkyōsei* (*‘Democracy’ and ‘patriotism’: nationalism and publicness in post-war Japan*) (Tokyo, 2002), pp. 473–6.

¹¹¹ Toynbee, *Civilization on trial*, p. 71.

¹¹² Arnold J. Toynbee, ‘The present point in history’, *Foreign Affairs*, 26 (1947), pp. 187–95, at p. 189.

¹¹³ ‘Tōinbī kyōju ni kiku’ (‘Listening to Professor Toynbee’), *Asahi Shimbun*, morning edition (Tokyo), 2 Oct. 1956.

aligned with either of the opposing ideological factions in the Cold War.¹¹⁴ In his view, the Soviet Union could demonstrate its model of economic development as an effective alternative to Western free private enterprise for many people in the non-Western world, given the extreme inequality between those wealthy in the West and those impoverished in the rest of the world. What lay behind this argument was his strategic consideration of the global Cold War. Indeed, Toynbee claimed that ‘the outcome of the struggle to win the allegiances of these neutrals may be decisive for the outcome of the Russo-Western conflict as a whole’, because the non-Western majority of humanities would ‘hold the casting vote in a competition between Russia and the West for world power’.¹¹⁵

As illustrated above, Toynbee and the Japanese historians of the left had distinct views of anti-colonial nationalism and its links with socialism or communism. While Toynbee denounced European imperial domination and acknowledged the significance of non-European cultures, he expressed misgivings about the instability in world politics caused by anti-colonial nationalist insurgencies and the links between anti-colonial nationalism and communism. In contrast, left-wing Japanese historians sympathized with anti-colonial nationalism, especially in Asia, and positively envisioned co-operation between anti-colonial nationalism and socialism or communism. Nevertheless, beyond these ideological divergences in the context of the Cold War, Japanese historians positively responded to Toynbee’s non-Eurocentric idea of world history.

V

As I have argued, Toynbee’s critical examination of the Eurocentric standpoint on history and his championing of a non-Eurocentric world history drew positive attention from influential Japanese historians, whereas the anti-liberal journalist Matsumoto, with the support of the Rockefeller Foundation, sought to exploit Toynbee’s history as an ideological antidote to Marxism in the context of the Cold War. While they were aware of the negative reputation of Toynbee’s historical works in contemporary English-speaking historiography, and, indeed, raised their own criticisms, Japanese historians hailed his attempt to reconsider world history almost three decades before Toynbee began to have been reassessed as a pioneering world historian in English-speaking historiography in the 1980s. This raises the question of why these Japanese historians responded positively to Toynbee’s world history. The answer I have provided is that, despite the differences in their ideological assumptions and motivations for the study of history, they read Toynbee as a significant ‘European’ intellectual who developed a self-critical view of the Eurocentric viewpoint on history and demonstrated the possibility of rewriting world history by considering historical contributions by both Western and non-Western worlds equally.

This reception in the mid-twentieth century preceded Japanese historians’ reception of Toynbee’s world history in the 1960s and the early 1970s, when

¹¹⁴ Toynbee, ‘The present point in history’, p. 191.

¹¹⁵ When using the term ‘the West’ or ‘Western’ in this context, Toynbee included not just Western Europe but also the United States. Toynbee, *The world and the West*, p. 15.

his reputation was at its zenith in Japan. For instance, in 1963, Kōyama Shirō, a scholar of European philosophy of history, admired Toynbee's ability to overcome Eurocentric world histories by Hegel or Ranke and offer a significant perspective of world history beyond national history that ended up endorsing European nationalism or Marxist history that underlined socio-economic structure.¹¹⁶ Similarly, in 1969, Itō Shuntarō, a historian of science and comparative civilizations, positively assessed the non-Eurocentric character of Toynbee's historical studies. He foregrounded the end of modern European supremacy, propounding the revival of the non-European world, which had been estranged from the field of world history due to the Eurocentric bias in historical scholarship.¹¹⁷ From this viewpoint, Itō appreciated Toynbee challenging the conventional presumption that Europe was the centre of world history, although he also criticized both metaphysical and theological elements in Toynbee's works.¹¹⁸ These examples demonstrate that, to a large extent, Japanese historians continued to view Toynbee's history as providing a significant insight into envisaging non-Eurocentric world history.

Finally, beyond the Anglocentric historiographical narrative on Toynbee, this article has contributed to the recent re-examination of his world history from a global perspective. Pablo Ariel Blitstein has revealed that Hu Shi's arguments on the 'Renaissance' were one of the significant intellectual sources of Toynbee's critique of Eurocentric historiography. Informed and motivated by Hu Shi's 1926 lecture in London on 'The Renaissance in China' and his book *The Chinese Renaissance* (1934), Toynbee came to provincialize the European/Italian Renaissance and address not a singular (European) 'Renaissance' but plural (global) 'renaissances', as seen especially in some references in the ninth volume of *A study of history*, published in 1954.¹¹⁹ Although the Japanese historians examined in this article did not seem to recognize Hu Shi's influence on Toynbee's non-Eurocentric world history, the investigation of their reception of Toynbee, combined with Blitstein's analysis, demonstrates how Toynbee's world history, which has been regarded as part of the 'European' canon in the historiography of twentieth-century world history, was influenced by and then appropriated by 'East Asian' intellectuals. This provides a new understanding of the global meaning of Toynbee's world history in light of the 'co-production' through a circulation of historical knowledge that spanned the boundaries of 'East Asia' and 'Europe'.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ Kōyama Shirō, 'Kindai rekishi tetsugaku no hihan' ('A critique of modern philosophy of history'), in Tanaka Michitarō, ed., *Kōza tetsugaku taikei daiyonkan (Lectures on the system of philosophy, volume IV)* (Kyoto, 1963), pp. 354, 363.

¹¹⁷ Itō Shuntarō, 'Atarashii sekaishi zō no keisei: daiichibu, seiō chūshin shugi no kokufuku he' ('The establishment of a new image of world history, part one: overcoming Western centrism'), *Chūō kōron*, 84 (1969), pp. 54–68, at p. 54.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 62–3.

¹¹⁹ Pablo Ariel Blitstein, 'A global history of the "multiple renaissances"', *Historical Journal*, 64 (2021), pp. 162–84, at pp. 166, 173–8.

¹²⁰ On this methodological perspective, see Jenco and Chappell, 'Introduction', p. 2.