

FOR AN ASIAN HISTORY OF  
MODERN ASIA

The history of modern Asia, at least in western countries, for a long time has been conceived only in function of European history. The question was to meditate on the “problem of the Far East,” which is to say on the conditions and objects of the intervention of great Powers in Asia. It consisted in granting privileges to European activities in Asia: missions and trading, military expeditions and diplomatic negotiations. Such a tendency is, for example, very clear in the otherwise notable works of authors such as H. B. Morse or H. Cordier; while the first had been in China for many years as officer of the Imperial Chinese Maritime Customs Service, the second was the son of an agent of the Paris National Bank in Shanghai. Nevertheless neither of them knew any Chinese and they did not consider the use of that language any more necessary for an historian of modern China than it had been for a businessman residing in Shanghai concessions during the *belle époque*

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of the unequal treaties. The works they published<sup>1</sup> are dedicated to the history of relations between China and the great Powers (Open Door, concessions and extraterritoriality, functioning of treaties), and are only marginally and occasionally interested in the deep movements of Chinese society and Chinese politics: Tai-ping, reformatory movements, social struggle.

Indeed, these historians wrote more than half a century ago and their works concern mostly the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries. But up to World War II, the contemporary history of China was studied from the same point of view. What counted were the "foreign rights and interests in China," according to the title of a learned juridical treatise that every European agent in China had at the time on his work table.<sup>2</sup> The criterion for judging the importance of an event depended on the part played by the great Powers. The Washington Conference of 1921-1922 which marked, for some time at least, the Anglo-Saxon halt to Japanese ambitions in the Far East was considered much more important than the May 4th Movement of 1919. This great national awakening of Chinese opinion that we consider today the departing point of all intellectual and political renewal which leads to the Communist triumph in 1949, passed nearly unobserved.<sup>3</sup> Also the Long March whose importance everybody recognises today, for the internal conflicts within the Chinese Communist Party as well as for its general strategy (the national struggle being given primary importance over the social revolution), was nearly ignored up to 1950 except by some specialists; it was the general belief that the essential problem of the 30's was the Manchurian crisis and the interminable debates dedicated in vain to that issue by the League of Nations.

<sup>1</sup> H. B. Morse, *The International Relations of the Chinese Empire* (Shanghai, 1910-1918), 3 vols.; H. Cordier, *Histoire générale de Chine* (Paris, 1920), vols. III and IV; by the same author, *Histoire des relations de la Chine avec les Puissances occidentales* (Paris, 1901-1903), 3 vols.; more general, our *Introduction aux études d'histoire contemporaine de Chine* (Paris, 1965), in collaboration with John Lust.

<sup>2</sup> W. W. Willoughby, *Foreign Rights and Interests in China* (Baltimore, 1927), 2 vols.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. the respective place given to both events in a very well documented publication, *China Yearbook*, published at the time in Tientsin by a group of English journalists.

## *Notes and Discussion*

China, *vis-à-vis* the great Powers, was at the time only in a state of indirect dependence. In the case of western colonies in Asia (India and South East Asia) the “Euro-centric” perspective was even more clearly apparent. The history of India, Indochina, Indonesia and Burma was only conceived in terms of the history of colonial expansion, the functioning of colonial administration and colonial economic activities. Social history was limited to the study of the direct social consequences of colonization (for example in the rural world) and neglected totally the intelligentsia or the modern bourgeoisie. The history of ideas or of political tendencies was limited to the influence of the colonial regime and just a few individuals appeared in second plane, in periods of crisis: mostly “agitators” whose identity was well known to the police, while their ideological motivation did not attract any attention. This “colonial history” (chairs for this discipline existed in the principal universities of the Low Countries, France and Great Britain) was limited to the study of contemporary Asian history from an entirely exterior point of view. There was also a tendency to conceal the synchronism and interaction existing among different countries at the time, for instance in the field of political movements or in that of ideological tendencies; the history of every colony was examined only in relation to the mother country from which it depended.

We react today against such a “Euro-centric” point of view. At the time of the Bandung Conference and the Tricontinental Conference in Havana, Asia so clearly became an autonomous force (or a group of autonomous forces) that it becomes necessary to consider its history in the last century retrospectively and from an internal point of view. To give just one example, the prestige of national parties and national leaders in power today compels the historian to study their origins and their ideological evolution, define the social milieux they influenced or from which they come and trace through small events their career and historic role. Primary importance is being given to the study of the Congress Party, Gandhi and Nehru rather than to the study of British viceroys of the Indian Empire; the Chinese Communist Party and Mao Tse-tung eclipse the official Chinese governors of Peking and Nanking, the only ones however, that were recognised and known by westerners in the period between World War I and World War

II; the rhythm of history in Indonesia and in Indochina in the 19th and 20th centuries is not given by the succession of general governors in Batavia and in Hanoi, but by the succession of revolutionary parties (nationalistic and communist) and their leaders: Sukarno and Ho Chi-minh. The perspective is bound to be reversed completely, passing from a colonial history to a national history of the Asian people.

But the situation is not always so simple. Necessary as it may be, the "refusal of a history centered on the West,"<sup>4</sup> presents many difficult problems of method.

In the first place to react against Euro-centrism does not mean to ignore in modern and contemporary periods the relations between Asia and the West, nor to relegate them to the background. To the contrary, it is fundamental to study the links of dependence that since the middle of the 19th century subordinated Asian countries to the Powers. Moreover those interested were clearly aware of this. It is to be remembered that the word "imperialism" belongs to the vocabulary of nationalists like Sun Yat-sen,<sup>5</sup> Sukarno, Gandhi and U Aung San and to Leninists as well.

A thorough investigation of these relations of dependence between Asian countries and the West could not consist in a simple extension of classic "diplomatic history," as it was taught up to the middle of the 20th century. The conventional rules of diplomatic *Kriegspiel* that governed in modern and contemporary epochs the relations between western countries had been scarcely observed by the Powers in Asia; military operations started without the traditional declaration of war, as in China in 1842 and 1858, or in Tonkin in 1873 and 1883. The sack of Peking in 1860 or that of Hue in 1885 were irrelevant for the "Law of Nations." The negotiations held under military menace were merely diplomatic instruments which were not discussed on equal terms; these treaties were only a fictitious legal expression of a position of force and constantly questioned by the West (cf. the chronology of the

<sup>4</sup> Liu Ta-nien, "Pour une histoire objective de l'histoire de l'Asie," *Peking-Information*, 7 March 1966, No. 10.

<sup>5</sup> Sun Yat-sen dedicates long paragraphs to imperialism in his lessons on the "Three Principles of the People" (*san-min zhu-yi*), particularly in lesson IV, "White Imperialism and Yellow Imperialism," (Edition d'Elia), pp. 81-101.

treaties signed in succession by France and the Vietnamese monarchy between 1862 and 1885).

On the other hand traditional diplomatic history was usually limited to the relations between states. It was general belief that since the colonies had formally alienated their independence as sovereign states, they did not take any part in international life. Today's specialists are bound to reconsider that exclusion<sup>6</sup> and to propose a wider conception of "international relations." But there is still need for serious study of all relations, besides State relations, which Asian countries have maintained in the 19th and 20th centuries with other Asian countries as well as with the West, although submitted to the colonial regime: knowledge of foreign languages apart from that of the colonial Power, intellectual connections, trips of important personages and migrations of workers, knowledge of foreign political systems and ideologies.

Even if Asia did not have any official part in diplomatic relations it did take part in international life, but in a different way. The spreading of French revolutionary ideas, that of the Japanese movement of modernization (Meiji), that of the Chinese reformist and revolutionary group, to give just three examples, has been considerable not only in French colonial territories but also in the countries under British, Dutch and Spanish rule.

The links of dependence were nevertheless fundamental not only for the colonies but also for the countries that nominally had preserved their independence (China, Siam, Iran, Turkey). But it is really impossible to understand their historic meaning without seeing them in their Asian context. There are many works on the various stages of French intervention in Indochina, on the phases of the British conquest of India, on the progress of military and diplomatic penetration of the great Powers in China; but they are all approached from an external point of view. It is much more important in order to achieve a global knowledge of historic processes to look at problems in perspective, from the "inside." Attention will be given not only to military interventions but also to the social and economic disturbances they cause locally (requisition of workers and provisions, instability of prices, formation

<sup>6</sup> Cf. for example P. Renouvin and J. B. Duroselle, *Introduction à l'étude des relations internationales* (Paris, 1964).

of a class of traffickers and go-betweens). The reaction of public opinion will be investigated (among the traditional elites as well as among the popular class). An excellent example of this reversal of perspective is the work of the great sinologist, A. Waley, dedicated to the opium war seen from the Chinese point of view.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, the study of colonial or semi-colonial politics and administration, Indian Civil Service, the financial administration of Doumer in Indochina, Chinese extraterritoriality and consular courts etc. should not be limited, as it often is,<sup>8</sup> to an external description of these institutions. It should be more important to examine the physiology of these organs not only their anatomy, hence their insertion into the Indian, Vietnamese and Chinese societies. What was the social origin of the Indian members of the I.C.S.? Which were the economic and social consequences of the monopolies of salt, alcohol and opium in Vietnam? What was the concrete functioning of consular courts? Western investments in Asia (mines, plantations, factories and banks) should not only be the object of statements and inventories,<sup>9</sup> useful though these preliminary works may be. What counts above all is their investment value, which is to say the problem of profit, *terra incognita* in the history of western economic activities in modern Asia. It is at the same time the insertion of these activities in the traditional economy with all the repercussions involved.

The social and economic consequences of western penetration and rule cannot however be isolated from the global movement of economy and society in Asian countries. The formation, for instance, of a modern proletariat in the mines, harbors and plantations, of an industrial and trading capitalistic bourgeoisie, of a new intelligentsia of teachers, small functionaries, journalists, doctors, lawyers, military men is only one aspect of a more general problem, the problem of social typology and dynamics. The rapport between classes in Asian countries can be defined only in its entirety, which is to say from the inside. It is necessary in fact to take into account the rapport between new and traditional clas-

<sup>7</sup> A. Waley, *The Opium War through Chinese Eyes* (London, 1958).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. for example E. A. Blunt, *The Indian Civil Service* (London, 1937); G. W. Keeton, *The Development of Extraterritoriality in China* (London, 1928), 2 vols.

<sup>9</sup> Like that by F. C. Remer, *Foreign Investment in China* (New York, 1933).

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ses: civil and religious elites, land owners, peasants and city workers. The modern bourgeoisie in Asia, among other peculiarities, is characterized by the fact that it still retains land interests, just as the industrial proletariat preserves its contacts with the village; the modern intelligentsia often comes from the old leading classes whose decline therefore is not absolute.

In the same way Asian political reactions to western domination assume a new dimension, when examined from the inside and no longer from the outside. The movements opposing that domination are not casual and isolated episodes. They do not consist in a kind of contingent counterpart to French, British or Dutch colonial rule in India and South East Asia or to the system of unequal treaties in China. Even if these oppositions are different in their social roots (traditional elites, bourgeoisie, intelligentsia, common people), in their organization (archaic sects, intellectual groups, modern political parties), in their action (uprisings and insurrections, street manifestations, public opinion campaigns, strikes and modern armed struggle), they are uninterrupted evidence of deep strength; they express the will to live of these people and integrate themselves in a unique process, the *national movement* in its broadest sense.

The word nation and beyond any doubt the clear conscience of its meaning, perhaps appeared in Asia only recently, at first among intellectuals with a western education who had studied the history of European national movements. But nevertheless it is not possible to limit the history of national movements in Asia to this last stage, to interpret it as the fruit of an historical course of exteriority. The Euro-centric perspective, in this respect, once again disfigures the historic reality. From the mutiny of the Sepoys to the modern liberals who founded the Congress Party in 1885, from the popular uprisings in 1905-1910 to Gandhi's non-violent campaigns, from the success of the Congress Party in 1937 to the mass movements and strikes in 1945-1946, the Indian national movement has had an internal continuity which precedes and surpasses the limits of direct western influence and of the European nationalist pattern. The same conclusion is valid for the national Vietnamese movement of which the rising of Confucian scholars in 1885-1895 are part as well as the Viet Minh, or for the national Chinese movement of which the popular uprisings near Canton

in 1840-1850 or that of the Boxers are an integral part as well as Sun Yat-sen or the anti-Japanese guerrillas aroused by the Communists in 1937-1945.

But the national movement tries at the same time to strengthen national cohesion and national unity. Some liberation movements are directed against foreign rule but they aim at the same time at political, social and cultural integration. The problems of the pariah and those of the princes played an important role in the Indian national movement, as well as the direct struggle against the British colonial regime. The great unification congress of Indonesian nationalist movements in 1938 not only determined a platform of political action against the Low Countries, but also a national language, the *bahasa indonesia* and a national flag. The May 4th Movement (1919) in China lays the blame equally on the preponderance of foreign Powers and on the deficiencies of the old China, boycotts Japanese merchandise and at the same time impeaches Confucius. This organic unity between movements of integration and liberation is perfectly natural when examined in terms of Asian interiority, while it risks passing unperceived if national movements are considered only in regard to western domination.

The same criterion of interiority allows us to criticize a word very much in fashion today, which is “decolonization.” It is maybe the last avatar, the last refuge of the Euro-centric interpretation of Asian history. This does not mean a denial of the great importance that is to be attached to the radical change in the relations between western mother countries and their ancient colonies, change that was enticed since the period in between the two wars and that essentially ended around 1950. But to qualify this process as “decolonization” means to place ourselves in the point of view of the former mother country, to give more importance to its initiatives and decisions, to suggest a symmetry between “colonization” and “decolonization” which does not correspond with the profound movement of history. The deep spring of colonization was in Europe, the deep spring of decolonization is outside of Europe. It is easy to demonstrate that the liberal initiatives of the mother countries were the expression of a need, not of a choice. Whether the situation was unsustainable for them in one colony or because of a chain reaction, their defeats elsewhere bring them to leave



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another territory earlier. In this last case their initiative is only apparent; it is India's independence that led to the concession of the statute of dominion to Ceylon in 1948; without the war in Vietnam, France would not have granted in the same period such large concessions to Laos and Cambodia. The transformation of the relations between colonies and the mother country is a result for which the credit goes to the national movement, it must be defined in Asio-centric and not in Euro-centric terms.

The reversal of perspective that we suggest here has another consequence; it puts in new terms the historical rapport between the colonial, the "pre-colonial"<sup>10</sup> and the post-colonial periods. Colonial domination, peremptory as it might have been, appears only as a short episode, an "interlude,"<sup>11</sup> beyond which there is a deep continuity, rather a trans-continuity that connects traditional Asia and contemporary Asia that has reached independence or is approaching it. This trans-continuity is expressed for instance in the historic nomenclature. In the colonial period Vietnamese history was seen in an "Indochinese" framework; from the perspective of the Indochinese Federation, a political and administrative structure that had been built from the outside and that included the three Vietnamese countries (Tonkin, Annam and Cochin China) and two other historical entities, Laos and Cambodia. For Vietnamese historians, on the contrary, Vietnamese history is an uninterrupted category which extends over the ancient, colonial and contemporary periods; the colonial period integrated in this continuous evolution is looked upon in terms of Vietnamese and no longer Indochinese history.<sup>12</sup> The same observation is possible for Indonesia, whose continuity implies giving up the notion of "Netherlands Indies" for the colonial period; this tendency is underlined by the return to a national geographic vocabulary which substitutes the terms used by the Dutch administration and more

<sup>10</sup> This term is soiled by Euro-centrism... even if customarily used; "traditional Asia" would be better.

<sup>11</sup> Term proposed by P. Worsley, *The Third World* (London, 1964).

<sup>12</sup> An author deeply imbued with colonial traditions, A. Masson, former civil servant in Indochina, published in 1950 in the collection "Que sais-je?" the *Histoire de l'Indochine*. This book has been re-edited in 1960 under another title *Histoire du Vietnam*, by simply removing all the paragraphs about Laos and Cambodia. The change in historical perspective that we suggest implies a somewhat deeper effort on the part of western historians...

generally by westerners: Djakarta instead of Batavia, Sulawesi instead of Celebes, Irian instead of New Guinea, Kalimantan instead of Borneo.

Beyond the colonial interregnum—such being the meaning of that period from the point of view of Asian continuity—contemporary Asia is connected in this way to traditional Asia; we suggested elsewhere the interest of this working hypothesis for the study of the phenomena of trans-continuity or re-animation;<sup>13</sup> return to the inland of the centers of development that in the colonial period had been based on the coast, renewal of industrial activities destined to internal markets that were in decline in the period of colonial economy based on exportation, etc. The example of the revival of traditional medicine (acupuncture, moxibustion) in popular China, a medicine that in the former period was disdained by doctors educated in Europe who were only interested in their westernized clients in Shanghai and Canton, is equally significant. J. Needham suggests the same continuous interpretation of Asian history when he underlines the important role that the Chinese traditional past still plays in the social and intellectual life in popular China, beyond the period of subordination to the West.<sup>14</sup> The monumental work dedicated by this author to classical Chinese science is also a very important contribution to the fight against a certain European vision of world history, rendering conspicuous the advanced character of Chinese science in comparison to western science up to the 16th century.<sup>15</sup>

We have already noted that one of the consequences of Eurocentrism was to fragment Asian history; to give importance to its relations with the West, was to give importance to the relations with the West of every Asian country separately considered. It

<sup>13</sup> We utilised the term re-animation (proposed initially by G. Marcel in a message addressed to the Congress of negro writers and artists of Paris in 1958), in a short outline, *La réanimation du passé traditionnel chez les jeunes nations d'Asie et d'Afrique*, appeared in the book edited by J. Berque and J. P. Charnay, *De l'impérialisme à la décolonisation* (Paris, 1965), pp. 301-312. Today we prefer the term trans-continuity.

<sup>14</sup> J. Needham, "Du passé culturel, social et philosophique chinois et de ses rapports avec la Chine contemporaine," *Comprendre* (Venice), Nos. 21-22 and 23.

<sup>15</sup> J. Needham, *Science and Civilization in China* (Cambridge University Press), 5 volumes have appeared since 1954.

was therefore impossible to examine the historic processes and the rhythms of evolution that were common to the whole of Asia.

Asia in the 19th and 20th centuries, aside from the peculiarities of each country, has nevertheless a remarkable unity which is expressed by a series of synchronisms of growing precision.

The period 1835-1860 is that of the Open Door (China, Japan, Vietnam, Malaya, Siam), while the British conquest of India is completed and the coastal implantation of the Netherlands in Indonesia is transformed into deep territorial penetration. All the Asian countries suffered in this way the conterblow of the sudden push of western expansionism, eager for openings and tropical products and disengaged by the Napoleonic wars.

Between 1850-1865 another synchronism appears whose unity is more difficult to grasp: the Sepoys mutiny, the Tai-ping insurrection in China and the other anti-dynastic and popular movements (Moslems, Nian in Northern China), the social and intellectual ebullition of urban and rural Japan that will lead to the Meiji restoration.

At the end of the century western economy has made new progress; hereafter its target will be to export capital and not only merchandise and therefore implant itself more solidly than in the past. The apparatus of unequal treaties is reinforced in China after the break-up in 1896-1898 (areas of influence, naval bases, foreign control of State finances through "custom surplus"). Curzon and Doumer give to the Indochinese and Indian Empires a much more solid administrative structure.

But starting in the first decade of the 20th century, Asia shakes herself, stimulated by the Japanese victory over Russia (first European defeat in Asia) and by the Russian Revolution in 1905. The action of the Congress Party is strengthened by Tilak; the national movements in South East Asia gain a new strength, the modern bourgeoisie and intelligentsia take the place of traditional elites. Sun Yat-sen founds in Tokio his *Tong-men-bui*, forerunner of the Kuomintang, and the Chinese republican revolution in 1911 echoes the revolutions of Young Turks and Young Persians.

World War I, this "deglorification of the West,"<sup>16</sup> with its opposed extentions, Bolshevism and Wilsonism, gives again new

<sup>16</sup> Expression used by J. Romein, *The Asian Century* (London, 1962).

impulse to the political movements of modernization and social and political liberation; the March 1st Movement of 1919 in Korea, the May 4th Movement of 1919 in China, Gandhi's non-cooperation campaign in 1921, the Mongolian Revolution, the formation of Communist parties in the majority of Asian countries.

Ten years later the world economic crisis gives vent again to the popular and political struggles in those countries whose weak exporting economies are hit in a very hard way: uprisings in Low Burma, Soviets in North Annam, agitations in Indonesia, Gandhi's second non-cooperation campaign. The crisis accelerates at the same time the Japanese evolution towards aggressive militarism that as of 1931 invades Manchuria and does not hide its much wider projects.

World War II at last is a common bond for contemporary Asia. In the countries invaded by Japan popular movements of armed resistance are formed of which Communists are leaders or in which they play an important role (Northern China, Hukbalahaps in the Philippines, Viet Minh, A.F.P.F.L. in Burma etc.) while free China and India are severely hit by the war economy and public opinion becomes more and more exigent as the war aims of the Allied Nations against the Axis are defined.

This series of synchronisms cannot be considered a simple connection of casual coincidences, but implies a series of common terms and "operators" in all of Asia. These operators express sometimes the western control of Asia (political and military with the Open Door, economic with the break-up or the crisis in 1929-1930) and sometimes the internal movement of political, social and intellectual forces in Asia (as in 1860, in 1905-1910, in 1919-1921) while the war of 1937-1945 has both these significations at the same time. Such a combination of external and internal operators is typical of all Asian evolution in the 19th and 20th centuries. When we bring forth the Asio-centric formula, as we do here, this does not mean that Asia has developed independently from Europe; on the contrary it means that Asian history including the history of its relations of dependence with the West has to be examined from the inside. which is to say all together in its continuity and in its totality. We have already demonstrated how valid these terms are with many examples. It is possible to extend to the whole of Asia the program of work and method that has been

formulated by Owen Lattimore in establishing the Chinese department of the University of Leeds in 1963: "From China, looking outward."<sup>17</sup>

Even if so defined in its continuity and its totality, is the Asio-centric history of Asia, in the end, basically identical to that of the West or not?

It seems dangerous to search in the internal evolution of Asia for a simple repetition of the European one. What may be called the "Western" current has failed in Asia, as a movement of ideas at the level of history in the making as well as an historiographic current at the level of written history. Thinkers like the Japanese Fukuzawa,<sup>18</sup> the Indian Gokhale,<sup>19</sup> the Vietnamese Phan Chu Trinh,<sup>20</sup> the Chinese Yan Fu,<sup>21</sup> who "searched desperately in the West for the solution to the problems of their country," in the words of Mao Tse-tung, had only a limited influence and history has not confirmed their visions and dreams. In the same way, the history of Chinese political currents in the long ideological interregnum that separates Confucianism and Marxism is only a long series of negative experiences. Anglo-Saxon-inspired parliamentarism and constitutionalism, dreamed of by Nanking republicans in 1911-1912, degenerated rapidly into a caricature of representative institutions under Yuan Shi-kai and his military successors. "Western democracy" has been definitely discredited in China. Anarchism of Tolstoian and Kropotkinian inspiration, which was very influent in China around 1910-1920, was also an experience with no future, almost in the Gidian sense of the word. The "federalist" movement of 1920-1923, whose occidentalist course called for the examples of Switzerland and United States was

<sup>17</sup> Owen Lattimore, *From China, Looking Outward* (Inaugural lecture, Leeds University Press, 1964).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. C. Blacker, *The Japanese Enlightenment, a Study of Fukuzawa Yukichi* (Cambridge University Press, 1964).

<sup>19</sup> Gokhale (1866-1915) was the antagonist of Tilak in the Indian national movement; recommended the negotiation of compromises with Great Britain and insisted on the need for a progressive occidentalization of the Indian society.

<sup>20</sup> Phan Chu Trinh (died in 1925) was an admirer of Rousseau and recommended the study of his works to Vietnamese patriots.

<sup>21</sup> Yan Fu, translator of Huxley, Spencer and Stuart Mill in Chinese, died in 1921; cf. B. Schwartz, *In Search of Wealth and Power, Yan Fu and the West* (Harvard University Press, 1921).

short-lived as well and served only a means of modernization of the medieval centrifugal ambitions of the “war lords.”

The defeat of western parliamentarism and of the system of the plurality of parties is no less evident in Japan; from the Meiji to World War II the party democracy has been nothing more than a façade,<sup>22</sup> a game played by little groups inside of the same authoritarian system. The parliamentary experiences attempted more recently in Cambodia,<sup>23</sup> Indonesia, the Philippines and Burma since they achieved independence have sometimes given way to the “directed democracies” of Sihanouk, Ne Win and Sukarno up until the autumn of 1965 and sometimes have degenerated into sterile games dominated above all by intrigues and corruption.<sup>24</sup> The democratic experience in India is not much more conclusive as demonstrated by the Kerala affair.

Occidentalism has not even been a valid working hypothesis for historical research and the interpretation of facts. It is not possible to utilise all the material assembled by J. Lossing Buck in his industrious investigation of the Chinese farmers<sup>25</sup> so much the author is prisoner of a “grille d’analyse” built on the problems of American farmers; he attributes more importance to the investment value of equipment than to landlordism. A recent study of the role played by the Chinese bourgeoisie in the Revolution of 1911 has demonstrated that even if this role is very important it is not a pure and simple copy of “bourgeois revolutions” in the West;<sup>26</sup> the Chinese bourgeoisie is too weak, other social categories such as the traditional *gentry* and the modern Army played an original role. The attempts of some Dutch historians to assimilate

<sup>22</sup> Cf. R. Scalapino, *Democracy and the Party Movement in Pre-War Japan: The Failure of the First Attempt* (University of California Press, 1953).

<sup>23</sup> P. Preschez, *Essai sur la démocratie au Cambodge* (Cahiers ronéotypés de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences politiques, Centre d’études des relations internationales, Paris, October, 1961).

<sup>24</sup> The elections of 1949 in the Philippines were “the dirtiest and bloodiest” in the history of the country. Cf. G. Willoquet, *Histoire des Philippines* (Paris, 1961), p. 79.

<sup>25</sup> J. Lossing Buck, *Chinese Farm Economy* (Chicago, 1930); *Land Utilization in China* (Shanghai, 1937).

<sup>26</sup> M. C. Bergère, *La bourgeoisie chinoise et la Révolution de 1911* (Paris, thèse de la Faculté des Lettres, 1966); this work will be soon published by the Editions Mouton (Matériaux pour l’étude de l’Extrême-Orient contemporain).

purely and simply Calvinism and the reform movement of Indonesian Islam (*Mohammadiyah*) at the beginning of the 20th century, and to see this last movement as the sign of the political ascension of the Indonesian bourgeoisie<sup>27</sup> are equally artificial; it is an interesting hypothesis, only if one bears in mind the basic difference represented by the colonial regime. The problem of the relations between cities and country, to give just this example, does not present itself in the same terms in modern Asia and in the industrialized West, the city is not the antithesis of the country and the point of impact of new social forces, it is rather a “condensed and aggravated expression”<sup>28</sup> of the problems of the country and the sharpest expression of the troubles of the entire society.

To underline the originality of the historic evolution of Asia, in relation to that of Europe amounts in other respects to considering Japan as a particular case, to place it in a position that is a little marginal—and this represents a complete inversion of the historic perspective as far as this country is concerned. During the half-century dividing the Meiji restoration and the military push of the 30's, Japan was the country that according to the Eurocentric perspective then prevailing, appeared as the most significant of Asia, with a glorious future, historically the most advanced and whose evolution was a valid example. Such an opinion was shared not only by many Westerners but also by many intellectuals and politicians in Asia. But all the reasons for which Japan held a “leading” position tend today to singularize her, to set her aside from the typical line of development of Far East Asian countries today; less underdevelopment and a less acute demographic problem, the higher level of industrialization, the absence of any problem of national liberation if not from the point of view of the countries invaded by Japan for short or long periods (Korea, South East Asia, China); the importance of social democracy. Japan took part in the Bandung Conference playing only a secondary role, while the place of honor was reserved for Chou En-lai, Sukarno and Nehru; a half-century before she had been the pride and the hope of all the pan-Asiatic movement.

<sup>27</sup> W. F. Wertheim, *East-West Parallels, Sociological Approaches to Modern Asia* (The Hague, 1964) chap. 6, “Religious Reform Movements in South and South East Asia.”

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. 8, “Urban Characteristics in Indonesia.”

An objective and considered study of the contemporary history of Asia must reveal its original traits and its resources. It would be premature to judge here the results of this research and we will limit ourselves to just a few examples: the role of the press as a manifestation of political currents which do not have the same media of expression as in western democracies; the role of the great leaders of the national movement and of the great national leaders, Gandhi and Nehru, Sun Yat-sen and Mao Tse-tung, Ho Chi-minh, Sukarno and U Auang San, who even they do not have the mysterious "charismatic power" that some American sociologists pretend they do crystallize nonetheless the aspirations of all their people in some historic conditions; the original way in which political and military struggles are articulated, above all in China where only the political currents that had an army at their disposal (conservatives like Yan Shi-kai, Kuomintang, Communists) played an effective role, to the detriment of the liberals and reformists in the last fifty years.

These examples show the level of originality of Asiatic evolution: this originality concerns concrete historical conditions and social and political mechanisms. But it is possible to think that this originality is not absolute, that the history of modern Asia may have some common terms with the history of the West at the level of more general concepts and processes.

The evolution of Asia as that of the West, but in different conditions, is marked by the interaction of economic realities and movements of ideas; the reality of classes is known as well as the role of social conflicts in political life; the concepts of "nation" has the same objective value in a different historical context.

To adopt an Asio-centric perspective in studying the contemporary history of Asia, far from imprisoning Asia in an absolute specificity, allows us to establish in a more reliable way than in the past, the universality and the fundamental unity of human history.