

Pan-Asianism and the post-war Japanese radical Left: Some movements and tendencies

Sunday 28 June 2020, by [ANDREWS William](#) (Date first published: 10 December 2019).

What kinds of Asianist tendencies, or attitudes towards Asia, are visible in the post-war Japanese radical left? Is Pan-Asianism a useful framework for thinking about aspects of post-war left-wing activism in Japan? Drawing on a range of case studies, including a mass movement and several fringe movements, this essay will examine aspirations for Asian (and Asianist) solidarity among the left in Japan, with a particular focus on the 1960s and 1970s.

I will begin with an overview of some post-war discourse related to Asia and Asianism before proceeding to examine the Vietnam War and Beheiren. It will then survey examples of an “Asian turn” in left-wing movements during the 1960s, ushering in a rise in interest in Asian solidarity and ethnic minorities. Within this, I will consider internationalist aspirations among the New Left as well as the ideas of Ōta Ryū and others that looked towards an Asian *Lumpenproletariat* both in Japan and beyond. The final section will deal with more concrete realisations of these ambitions in the form of cine-activism and the Japanese Red Army’s activities.

Running throughout these examples is a common thread: they all sought to engage with Asia or the need for Asian solidarity in their respective ways. They were different kinds of movements (mass movement, student movements, radical cells, militants, journals) and adopted varying practices (mass protests and rallies, textual discourse, exchange, non-violent direct action, violence). Moreover, they possessed different concepts and visions of “Asia” and Japan’s relationship with it (Japan as a victim, Japan as fellow victim alongside other Asian nations, Japan as a victimiser of Asia, Japan as complicit in Vietnam, neo-colonialist expansion in Asia by Japanese industry, contemporary Japanese sex tourism, liberating an Asian *Lumpenproletariat* or dispossessed peoples), which then affected what they proposed to do.

I believe this investigation is necessary because there has been little examination of post-war leftist Asianism, especially in English. An exception in German is the work of Till Knaut (2016), who has discussed several of the same movements, though within the framework of a transnational struggle against imperialism. Indeed, transnationalism is a growing research field, notably as part of the “Global Sixties” discourse. It is my hope that this modest intervention can contribute to an expanding body of scholarship. [\[1\]](#)

Pan-Asianism remains arguably associated first and foremost with wartime militarism and imperialism. In post-war Japan, activists and thinkers were torn by the need to express solidarity with events in Asia, most notably in Vietnam, and also deal with the guilt and legacy of Japanese colonialism. The anti-war movement was one major manifestation of this, while more radical activities were relegated only to smaller circles and marginal publications. For some, their ideological urges took them beyond conventional boundaries of Asia to the Pacific and Middle East.

Thinking about the influence or presence of Asianist ideas among left-wing movements allows us to transcend the simplistic framing of Pan-Asianism as solely “fascist” or “imperialist”, while also intersecting with a range of other concepts.

Pan-Asianism as a “Bridge”

To begin with something more basic: what was Pan-Asianism? While we may well readily associate it foremost with Japanese imperialism on the Asian mainland, perhaps most emblematically Manchukoku and its motto of “Five Races Under One Union”, Pan-Asianism is actually a slippery concept, a chameleon that has meant different things for different proponents over the decades, and was only aligned with actual Japanese official policies in Asia at a relatively late stage.

Saaler and Szpilman (2011: 14) note that widespread use of the term “Pan-Asianism” dates back to the 1910s, though it had emerged after several decades of discourse by thinkers calling for Asian solidarity in the name of various agendas. These sought to bestow Asian nations with a common identity based on geography, cultural unity, historical interconnectedness, racial kinship, perceived shared values and spirituality, and a mutual destiny. The discourse engendered by these ideals attempted to define Asia and its global contribution; urged Asians to join together in solidarity; and debated Asia’s place within international relations (ibid.: 4, 34). Eri Hotta (2007: 7–8) has outlined three typologies of Pan-Asianism: a “Teaist” branch that was peace-loving and searched for commonalities; a Sinic or “yellow-race” strand that wanted to create Asian alliances, especially in East Asia; and the more destructive *meishu* variety, which asserted Japan’s role as the “leader” in Asia.

Pan-Asianism was always a broad church, and this encompassed people we would likely categorise on the left. The original proponents of Pan-Asianism from the Meiji period on were quite diverse, including many of the pioneers of liberalism in Japan. [2] Contrary to its reputation, it is not originally the preserve of the far right as it became during the militarist era during the 1930s and 1940s. In fact, Pan-Asianism would almost seem to function at times like a flexible “bridge” between thinkers on different sides of the political spectrum, even allowing them to cross it as their affiliations switched from left to right, or vice versa. We can find several prominent examples of *tenkō* (ideological reversion), facilitated by Pan-Asianism, from the Marquis Tokugawa Yoshichika’s post-war career as a Socialist Party sponsor after a pre-war life as a rightist, or Hayashi Fusao’s path from pre-war Communist to post-war ardent Pan-Asianist seeking to “affirm” Japan’s wartime record. The ideologue Ōkawa Shūmei had sympathies with Lenin and the Bolsheviks (Szpilman 1998), while various other Pan-Asianists dabbled in Marxism and socialism at some point in their lives. [3] Miyazaki Masayoshi could be a critic of capitalism yet also a Pan-Asianist. Likewise a figure such as Ozaki Hotsumi juggled the designations of communist, internationalist, nationalist and Pan-Asianist. From Marxists to ultra-nationalists, liberals and anarchists, Pan-Asianism seemed to offer something for people of almost any ideological shade. All this serves to demonstrate that hybridity is part of the essence of Asianism.

Post-War Discourse

As Orr (2001) has argued, Japanese post-war identity hinged on a self-image as peace-loving. The nation had now renounced war and, though terrible things were done in the past, the ordinary people had been innocent victims of a corrupt system. This Japan-as-victim paradigm (*higaisha ishiki*) became dominant in popular consciousness. On the other hand, the Japan Socialist Party and Japanese Communist Party (JCP), along with progressives, attacked the conservative establishment for its links to the recent past and for reviving militarism by rearming Japan. They demanded that Japan, including the emperor, accept its war responsibility. This dichotomy of war guilt and Japan-as-victim remains unresolved to this day, but in the short term succeeded in engendering a strong

pacifist and Ban-the-Bomb movement.

For the left, Pan-Asianism was “practically synonymous with Japanese colonialism and aggression” (Saaler, Szilman 2011: 29). It was condemned as an ideology used to legitimise war and empire. Of course, this made it a very loaded concept, if not outright taboo, which accounts for the relevant absence of “Pan-Asianism” or even “Asia” from early post-war discourse. An exception that proves the rule, so to speak, would be Maruyama Masao’s assertion that Pan-Asianism was one of three central tenets of Japanese ultra-nationalism and fascism (Saaler & Szpilman 2011: 28). Nonetheless, in the post-war period, the progressive intellectuals were developing a critique of the JCP and the domestic left, partly due to Asian perspectives. The Chinese Revolution of 1949 demonstrated the superiority of mainland Asia to Japan as a place where a socialist revolution could be realised (Oguma 2006). Likewise the independence movements springing up in places like India were inspiring to the intellectuals, some of whom saw the post-war era as a restoration of Japan’s status as “Asian”. Gradually we see Pan-Asianism being reclaimed, most famously by Takeuchi Yoshimi (1963), who, following his writings in the 1950s that stressed the connections and cultural interaction between China and Japan, promoted a new, untainted concept of “Asianism”. Around the same time, Hayashi Fusao (1963) was advocating an affirmation of the Greater East Asian War, whereby Pan-Asianism could link Asian independence movements. He contrasted Japan’s “defensive” attitude with the aggression of the West over the past 100 years. In this way, Japan and other Asian nations could enjoy solidarity as fellow victims of Western expansion. This was nothing short of a corrective in the face of mass criticism of Japanese imperialism. Hayashi rather wanted to reclaim the “co-operative” stance of certain Japanese Pan-Asianists so as to initiate a spiritual recovery of post-war Japan.

On the left, Eguchi Bokurō (1953) also proposed a new version of Pan-Asianism not based on the pre-war version. Eguchi was interested in the relationship between Marxism, Asia and modern world history, and hoped for a new international system that could stop the victimisation of Asia, yet avoid a colonial empire (be it capitalist or socialist). Writing in the 1950s, Eguchi was quite advanced in presenting *minzoku* (ethnicity or race) as positive if progressive cultural nationalism could work in partnership with a new model of Asian co-operation that avoided domination by one power.

At the state level, the Bandung Conference of 1955 was a landmark event in the efforts to build a non-aligned movement in Asia. The newly independent nations of Asia and those still struggling for independence looked for alternative paths to allying with the global superpowers. This transnational movement was a revival, of sorts, of aspects of Pan-Asianism in that it tied the anti-colonial struggles of Asian peoples to solidarity across the arbitrary borders of nation-states. It emphasised the participants’ commonalities as people of the same race (and one superior to, for example, Africa) and as having suffered from Western subjection (Dennehy 2011).

Protests Against Anpo and the Korea Treaty

Japan’s participation in Bandung belied the realities: Japan was categorically not part of the non-aligned movement but anchored firmly to the United States’ side in the Cold War, as the mutual security treaty (Anpo) amply demonstrated. A wave of protests in the 1950s against the US military bases in Japan culminated in the mass movement opposed to the renewal of Anpo in 1960. While this ostensibly concerned Japan and America, it in fact called into question Japan’s geopolitical status in the region. The Anpo movement involved many intellectuals, including Takeuchi, who was inspired by the Chinese writer Lu Xun’s style of “Asian” protest (Olson 1981). Even the students, who made up a large and at times sensational part of the Anpo protests, were stirred by the success of South Korean students, who had helped to overthrow their government in April 1960.

The solidarity with Japan’s neighbour was more overt in the next major protest movement after

Anpo: the opposition to the Treaty on Basic Relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea, which normalised relations between the two nations when it was signed in 1965. Though it failed to gain anything like the momentum of the Anpo protests, which attracted hundreds of thousands at its peak in 1960, mass demonstrations criticised the treaty as a dishonest attempt to tidy up the wartime legacy by paying off Korea with economic aid, and this in spite of the fact that the South Korean leadership was a dictatorship and that Japan had been involved in the Korean War in defiance of its supposedly pacifist Constitution.

The protests also inspired a very early example of the radical left in Tokyo Action Front (Tōkyō Kōdō Sensen), a small anarchist cell whose cache of weapons was found by police in a raid before it could be put to use. Already at this stage, we can discern inklings of an explosive mix of anti-establishment, militant movements and Asian concerns.

The Vietnam War and Beheiren

Japan was implicated in the Vietnam War by its position as an ally of the United States, which in concrete terms meant that American bases played a vital role in the conflict, especially the ones in Okinawa. The numbers of servicemen in Japan greatly increased, as did the economic benefits to Japan in terms of supplying munitions parts, food, and so on. The anti-war movement picked up pace during the later half of the 1960s, intersecting with the protests against the 1970 renewal of Anpo, the opposition to the continued American occupation of Okinawa, and the construction of Narita Airport, which the left presumed would be used in the transport infrastructure of the United States (as Haneda Airport was during this time).

The opposition in Japan to the Vietnam War attracted a wide range of participants, though the leading force in the movement was arguably Beheiren, a federation of citizens' groups up and down the country that was founded in 1965 and continued activities until the mid-1970s. [4] The loose nature of Beheiren's organisation makes it hard to define exact membership and size, though it succeeded in attracting tens of thousands to the rallies it directly organised, while its jointly organised actions might involve hundreds of thousands. Over the course of its history, it mobilised regular demonstrations alongside publishing copiously, holding teach-ins and tours of guest speakers from abroad, and also operating a clandestine network that helped American deserters. It was a transnational and transpacific movement, inviting visitors from across the globe and placing advertisements in newspapers in America. But this was not just a natural result of its practices; its transnationalism was also conceptual in that it was campaigning on the behalf of and in solidarity with Asia against American imperialism. Its leading figure, the novelist Oda Makoto, was a charismatic spokesman with anti-American and pro-Asian views. Beheiren's central organisers actually comprised many of the leading intellectuals of the time, including those who had taken part in the Anpo campaign. [5] In this context, we should particularly highlight the involvement of Tsurumi Yoshiyuki, who wrote extensively and perceptively about Asia and the movement's relationship with it. [6]

The idea of the "inner Vietnam" or "Vietnam within" (*uchi-naru betonamu*) was a common refrain – a reflection of the general existentialism of the period, in which individuals (most symbolically student activists) sought out a sense of responsibility beyond the nation. [7] To try to understand Beheiren, Tsurumi once said, entails confronting the question of "What is Vietnam to us?", though Tsurumi is tellingly unable to provide an answer (Oda 1969: 69). He notes the decline in the frequency of "Vietnam" in the Beheiren newspaper; the movement was changing into a general anti-war one. As such, for all its achievements, Beheiren's engagement with Vietnam itself was only partly fulfilled, as will be assessed in the conclusion.

Beheiren's anti-imperialism, Koda has argued (2017: 185), "was grounded on unresolved feelings

about the Japanese imperial past, rather than theoretical analyses of wars and imperialism". Indeed, it was the legacy of the war and past Japanese aggression in Asia that prompted soul-searching and the emotional fuel for the anti-war movement. The journalist Honda Katsuichi famously reported on American atrocities in Vietnam in the late 1960s. In the following decade, inspired by what had taken place in Vietnam, his writing helped make his own nation's wartime atrocities in China more widely known (Oguma 2006: 210). As such, the Vietnam War period led the Japanese to rediscover and re-remember their nation's presence in Asia, including the negative aspects in the past and present. The movement deliberately countered the dominant Japan-as-victim paradigm. Indeed, Oda was one of the most prominent figures championing the counter-narrative on the left that argued for a Japan-as-perpetrator consciousness (*kagaisha ishiki*). Far from Japan being the one that has suffered, the Vietnamese and other Asians were the true victims. And unless the Japanese accepted and understood the neglected legacy of aggression, activists would not be able to challenge Japan and America's current complicity in Vietnam (Tanaka 2007; Orr 2001: 3-4). It should be stressed, though, that this solidarity with and sympathy for the Vietnamese was not an urging for "union". Tsurumi, for instance, wrote that South-east Asia and Japan were heterogeneous spheres; the linkage here was a universal one (Tsurumi 2002: 58; Oda 1969: 80).

One of Beheiren's most intriguing activities came almost at the end of the movement, when it organised the Asian People's Conference in 1974 and 1975. (If we are consciously searching for Asianist echoes, perhaps even the event name has an uncanny 1940s ring to it, like the Assembly of Greater East Asiatic Nations.) With the conflict in Vietnam winding down, the focus for this conference was on fighting the encroachment of Japanese capitalism in South-east Asia: by this point, the Japanese left's concerns for Asia were closely intertwined with not only anti-war sentiments but also environmentalism and opposition to neo-colonialism (the economic investment and aid often meant, in reality, an exploitative cycle of "exporting" pollution and importing cheap materials). [8] In August 1974, some 40 guests were invited from South Korea, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines and Vietnam, joined by local Japanese participants and observers from Europe and America, where they spent several days together touring factories and the protests against Narita Airport. A final rally in Tokyo was attended by around 1,000, where joint actions were proposed. This was reciprocated with a follow-up conference in 1975 in Thailand. [9]

Apart from its covert operations to help deserters, Beheiren's activities were legal and strictly non-violent. The radical student sects, however, were anything but, and directly engaged with riot police in street clashes on a grand scale on "International Anti-War Day" in October of both 1968 and 1969, where hundreds were arrested and whole areas of Tokyo trashed. These were just two of the most dramatic riots and clashes during an extraordinary cycle of large-scale protests from around 1967 to 1971. The New Left groups were becoming more militant. One of the first instances was the Vietnam Anti-War Direct Action Committee (Betonamu Hansen Chokusetsu Kōdō Inkaï, or Behani), which developed out of the abortive Tokyo Action Front and carried out a brief campaign of sabotage against factories. In its 1966 statement, it directly linked the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere with Japanese capitalism and the oppression of the Vietnamese (Betonamu Hansen Chokusetsu Kōdō Inkaï 2014: 27-28).

An Asian Turn

During this period, the left was engaging with issues related to Asians and ethnicity, though with mixed results. Immigrants on hunger strike could be found at the iconic Shinjuku Station West Gate "folk guerrilla" rallies in spring and summer 1969, which were started by Beheiren activist-musicians. Similarly, Beheiren helped South Korean army deserters as well as supported South Vietnamese exchange students in Japan who were refusing to go home. Other migrants, such as the visa woes of Taiwan-born Liu Caipin (劉才品), became *cause célèbre*. Individual Asians seeking wartime reparations were also assisted in Japan by leftist activists.

More sustained was the *zainichi* ethnic Korean question during the 1960s and 1970s, which attracted a broad spectrum of cultural figures, intellectuals, progressives and ethnic Koreans campaigning against discrimination. [10] The period witnessed several effective movements in support of the democratisation of South Korea in 1970s and 1980s, with ethnic Koreans in the lead (Lee 2014). One notable intersection was with the Women's Lib movement. The Asian Women's Association was formed to protest exploitation and economic invasion against a backdrop of sex tourism by Japanese men, particularly to South Korea. In another example of how contemporary issues related to Japan and Asia reflected the wartime legacy, the association's bulletin later focused on historical war crimes against women, such as the comfort women. [11]

However, *minzoku* was still largely a taboo for the left, which wanted to move away from such "racialist" ideas, and the New Left's interventions were sometimes clumsy in this regard. In 1970, one Chinese migrant group had a notorious clash with one of the main New Left factions, greatly damaging the reputation of the radicals, who were accused of harbouring nationalism underneath a veneer of revolutionary slogans (Andrews 2016: 192). This conflict has been framed as a major turning point in the New Left, whereby the movement began to shift towards embracing and encompassing the causes of minorities (Suga 2006: 157 *passim*). Parts of the New Left began increasingly concerned with minorities as further instances of the "inner" (*uchi-naru*) revolutionary subject, be it other Asians, Okinawans, slum workers, resident Koreans, Buraku or Ainu. [12] Ignoring Eguchi's warning (1953: 8) that it is "reckless" for Japan to claim to speak on behalf of Asians, some of the activists, as we shall see, subsequently presumed their role in these movements was one of *meishu*-style leadership.

The campus strikes and occupations having mostly petered out by 1970, radical groups turned to more ambitious visions and tactics, and this often entailed greater internationalism (and greater violence). Founded in 1969, the Red Army Faction (Sekigun-ha) agitated for an armed uprising that would see Japan join a series of revolutions around the world. Though its early efforts in attacking police stations failed and a crackdown by the authorities soon forced it underground, the group's faltering endeavours nonetheless achieved striking levels of transnationalism: Japan's first airline hijacking in 1970, intended to reach Cuba, but eventually finishing in North Korea; interchange with Cuba, Students for a Democratic Society and the Black Panther Party; and publications disseminating information about the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and other global movements.

However, any such pioneering aspirations were derailed by a highly traumatic event, when the RAF's paramilitary division merged with another New Left group to form the United Red Army (Rengō Sekigun), resulting in a horrific internal purge that came to light in 1972. This marked a major shift for the entire left but particularly led to intense debate within the surviving remnants of the RAF. One of the fruits of this was an extraordinary intervention by RAF member Umenai Tsuneo, published in 1972 shortly after the purge was exposed, proposing a radical departure for the group and the entire New Left. Rather than the conventional Marxist dialectic tracing the class struggle, Umenai examines history through the framework of colonialism and highlights oppressed groups neglected by traditional leftist thought as the worthy conveyors of revolution. As opposed to *minzoku*, he stresses the importance of politicising the *kyūmin* (the wretched, the destitute): namely, the Ainu (an indigenous people in northern Japan), slum workers, Buraku (a type of historical lower caste), Okinawans, developing world and so on. As Umenai asserts, the imperialist seizure of assets and enslavement of people continues today in the form of neo-colonialism, including Japan's, which must be the target of the struggle. [13]

Umenai's tract did not come out of nowhere and he explicitly references his influence: Ōta Ryū's *kyūmin kakumei*, or revolution of the dispossessed. Ōta was rejecting the Western radicalism of Leninism and Marxism, and even the internationalism of Trotsky (with which Ōta had started his

political career in the early post-war period). Instead, he proposed a *Lumpenproletariat* revolution led by the lower orders of society, typically scorned by the Marxist left as disorganised and apolitical. [14] This sprawling *kyūmin kakumei* discourse engendered, from around 1967 to the mid-1970s, a long paper trail of writings by Ōta as well as Takenaka Rō/Tsutomu (who also wrote under the name Yumeno Kyōtarō), Hiraoka Masaaki, Funamoto Shūji, Ōta Masakuni (no relation) and Wakamiya Masanori. With clear Fanonist influences, the *kyūmin kakumei* is a postcolonial theory in that it frames capitalism and the struggle against it around colonies (Ōta 1971: 7). [15] Ōta advocated a concept of the “world revolution *rōnin*” (*sekai kakumei rōnin*) or nomadic “Guevarista”. Travel and migration was central to his vision, though, like many pan-nationalist movements, this encompassed a contradiction: *minzoku* is no longer a taboo in this decolonialist movement and its promotion of peoples, races and ethnicities could well lead to chauvinism. As opposed to Leninist approaches, Ōta wrote of the need to build a nation first, before a party and army.

Concretely, this movement manifested as discourse (especially in the journals *Eiga Hihyō*, or Film Criticism, and *Sekai Kakumei Undō Jōhō*, World Revolution Movements News) and some limited activism, such as the efforts of Funamoto and Wakamiya in urban slums. The prolific Takenaka wrote a series of “Asia is One” articles (a title, of course, consciously referencing Okakura Tenshin) in *Eiga Hihyō* from August 1972 onwards, before departing on a trip around Asia to seek out solidarity with local activists. It seems significant that he now felt able to use the term “Pan-Asia” freely.

But is this actually Asianist? Ōta, Umenai and the others in the movement place a large focus on the “inner colony” of minority groups within Japan, which includes both non-Japanese and Japanese. These are linked by their Asian identity as much as their *kyūmin* status. The movement’s associates were linked to independence movements (Micronesia, Taiwan, Okinawa), recalling the support for Asian independence movements by various Pan-Asianists in the pre-war period. Likewise, the slums Kamagasaki and Sanya were a multi-ethnic melting pot of Asians from the Japanese archipelago and its former colonies. While Ōta certainly used Asian examples in his writing, the discourse did not, however, limit itself to the region but looked further afield, too (Ōta Masakuni, in particular, to Latin America).

Mobilising and liberating the Ainu in Hokkaidō was a key cause for Ōta Ryū, who was born on Sakhalin, but it also attracted a host of other figures as locals began to organise themselves more assertively. During the 1970s, the Ainu rights movement developed into a series of terrorist and extremist incidents, almost entirely carried out by *wajin* (Yamato Japanese) on behalf of the Ainu. The Japanese had effectively hijacked the movement to liberate the Ainu, seizing the *meishu* leadership role in the name of the actual victims. [16] This was most destructively manifest in the East Asia Anti-Japan Armed Front (Higashi Ajia Hannichi Busō Sensen), which, notwithstanding its name, comprised only *wajin*. It launched several bombings against targets related to the colonisation of Hokkaidō as well as wartime imperialism. This culminated in a deadly campaign of bombings between 1974 and 1975 against corporations that had been complicit in forced labour during the period of Japanese colonialism in Asia, and continued their iniquity through neo-colonial industrial investment. This was *kagaisha ishiki*, and the ideas of Ōta, taken to an extreme. [17] In its provocative tract *Hara Hara Tokei* (The Ticking Clock), the group specifically cites Taiwan, China, South-east Asia, South Korea and the inner colonies (*zainichi*, Ainu, Okinawans), as well as such causes as sex tourism in South Korea and solidarity with Thai boycotts of Japanese products. It repudiates the historicisation of Japan’s wartime aggression and imperialism; its “urban guerrilla” campaign was an attempt to exact retribution. But the group (and the subsequent copycat terrorism later in the 1970s) reveals the problems of an Asianist interpretation, since it was simultaneously domestic – targets included the emperor and Shintō – while looking outward at Japan’s Asian neighbours. Perhaps unsurprisingly for such a problematic “anti-Japanese” movement, its undertakings proved explosive yet short-lived. [18]

Going Beyond Asia

The Asianist tendencies of the left in Japan were not limited to activists; artists also engaged in these ideas through their practices, and perhaps none more representatively than film-makers. During the 1960s and 1970s, cine-activism (or ciné-activism) forged a significant presence in Japanese underground and independent cinema, seeking political solidarity through the process of making and screening films. [19] Much of this took place in Japan but several notable examples went beyond its shores to explore Asia and even further afield.

Asia is One is the title of a 1973 documentary made by the collective Nihon Documentarist Union (NDU). Despite the parallel with Okakura Tenshin's classic Asianist text from 1903, the group claimed not to have been aware of the original when it was making the documentary, which investigates the legacy of Japanese colonialism by asking Asian migrants to recount their experiences of coming to Okinawa to work in coal mines. While the ignorance of Okakura might seem surprising now, it reveals much about the distance of NDU's generation from the pre-war Pan-Asianism; in a sense, NDU reclaims and echoes Okakura's discredited vision in its reflection on migration and colonialism that builds a portrait of Okinawa as an unstable and fluid place pooling various peoples and cultures. As the film scholar Alexander Zahlten (2018: 115) has argued, NDU's practice embodies "archipelagic" approaches "emphasising flows, interactions, and hybridity over fixed personal and national boundaries". *Asia is One* traces the migrants back to Taiwan, closing with a sequence showing Japanese-speaking Atayal villagers whose relationship to the Japanese "civilisation" that the empire bestowed upon them is highly ambivalent. [20]

Like other activists outlined above, NDU was engaging with *minzoku* and proposing a new variation that prioritises regionalism and liminality. In this, NDU was influenced by the novelist Shimao Toshio's concept of "Yaponesia", which reframed Japan not as connected to Asia but to the Pacific. And yet, this was not the promotion of another homogenous bloc in the same monolithic mode of the nation-state, but a web of interconnected cultural differences extending across the region. The main NDU film-maker would later expand his "region" out to Micronesia and then west to the fringes of Asia in Lebanon, Iran and Palestine.

Another presence in the Middle East was the director and screenwriter Adachi Masao, who was a central figure in *Eiga Hihyō*, where NDU published many texts. With one foot in pink cinema sexploitation and another in underground cinema, Adachi, like NDU, saw the screening and accompanying discussions as central to a vision of revolutionary cinema, one where the distinction between art and politics was erased (Adachi 2003). In 1971, he travelled to the Middle East with the intention of making a film about the Palestinian liberation struggle. This resulted in *The Red Army/PFLP: Declaration of World War*, which was ostensibly a co-production between the RAF and the PFLP for propaganda purposes that juxtaposed the Red Army's efforts in Japan against the Palestinian frontline guerrilla camps, though was actually an experiment in applying the creator's concept of "landscape theory" to the everyday life of the guerrillas. It was screened around Japan from October 1971 at university campuses and other locations, led by Adachi himself driving a red bus filled with young volunteers. He continued his screening movement in the following year and also launched a gazette disseminating information about the Palestinian struggle for Japanese activists.

Repeating the leitmotifs of archipelagic, migratory or rōnin practices, a covert pipeline had by now opened up between Japan and Asia and the Arab world. [21] Adachi returned to the Middle East several times in the following years, hoping to make a follow-up film in which he would document the guerrilla movements everywhere from Palestine to the North African desert and Guinea-Bissau. During this time, various Japanese activists were arriving in the Middle East, in particular an overlapping network of young men and women from the RAF, a Kyoto University radical group and

Adachi's screening movement team. During the 1970s, the Middle East, especially the Palestinian cause, was a kind of melting pot of global revolutionaries, drawing far-left activists from across the world. The Japanese, who organised into the Arab Red Army (Arabu Sekigun), later known as the Japanese Red Army (Nihon Sekigun), swiftly became an important member of this international brigade, carrying out various missions and hijackings on behalf of or in partnership with the PFLP, before eventually becoming an independent entity while remaining based in the Lebanon. The JRA was the most ambitious iteration of the Japanese left's internationalism, though one that, I argue, can also be framed in an Asianist context, since its early solidarity actions focused on the Palestinians and Vietnam. It would participate in incidents in Europe and the Middle East but also Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Dhaka, though the airliner and embassy hijackings that have made it notorious were always carried out to secure the release of imprisoned peers. (In this way, three members of the East Asia Anti-Japan Armed Front were released and joined up with the JRA.) While it is far beyond the scope of this essay to examine the full extent of JRA's complex ideological shifts over its roughly two-and-half-decade existence, a guerrilla-based solidarity lay at the core of its practices, rooted in Neo-Marxist beliefs in a struggle against imperialism and colonialism. The JRA's leading figure, Shigenobu Fusako, wanted to build a network of "stations" around the world linking up revolutionary movements. [22] Adachi claimed the group even once planned to build a broadcasting station that would spread information on revolutions in Asia (Adachi 2017: 121).

It serves to highlight one example here, the attack on a Shell oil facility in Singapore carried out by Japanese and Palestinian activists in 1974. The official statement explicitly links the Palestinian struggle to the Vietnam War and a raid on oil tanks in South Vietnam in 1973, almost as if these were co-ordinated missions. "It is an action of solidarity with [the] people who fight [the] revolutionary war in Vietnam. It is an organically united action with [the] Vietnamese people. [. . .] It is a struggle of justice to destroy [the] common visible enemy of [the] Palestinian and Vietnamese revolutionary forces." [23]

The JRA later spread out further around the world, joining up with groups in such places as the Philippines but also in South America, Europe, and, ultimately, back in Japan as its internationalism returned to a domestic strategy after the Cold War was over. The arrest of almost all the main members overseas or back in Japan from the late 1980s to the early 2000s, however, meant that its new efforts on the home front largely came to naught.

Tentative Conclusions

This essay has attempted to trace a path through various instances of Asian solidarity among Japanese radical left movements in 1960s and 1970s. It is evident that there were indeed Asianist tendencies in the form of an engagement with Asia and a turning away from the West, despite the obvious popularity of radical ideas that originated in Europe. Among the New Left and post-war intellectuals, we can discern urges for "Asian" solidarity, whether that meant a revolution led by Asians or assisting fellow Asians in their struggle against capitalist imperialism. These urges were often driven by more general anti-colonial ideologies, which developed into an original, albeit esoteric, concept of the *Lumpenproletariat* and dispossessed as the progenitors of revolution. This was broad enough to encompass Japan's "inner colonies" and ethnic minorities as well as people around Asia – and beyond. In fact, it was perhaps ultimately a spin-off from wider ideas of transnational solidarity, Trotskyist ambitions for an international Marxist revolution and the Maoism-Third Worldism that saw activists gathering in many hot spots across the globe during this period.

The comparison with Pan-Asianism is only beneficial to a certain extent. Such an analogy is hard to justify since the evidence that the activists and thinkers were referencing pre-war discourse directly is slim, and at times they were even ignorant of it. To claim these tendencies as elements of a project to "reclaim" Asianism for the post-war left requires a leap of logic that is only partially convincing. In

addition, many of the examples I have outlined were minority streams, if not extremist fringes, within the New Left. [24] That is not to say they are unworthy of study, but that we should be cautious of overly assigning significance to their output. While Beheiren led directly to the Pacific Asia Resource Center, founded by Tsurumi Yoshiyuki and others in 1973, and a rise in Japanese volunteers in South-east Asia (Havens 1987: 240), the Asian People's Conference was a relatively minor event within the rich history of the movement. Moreover, Tsurumi Yoshiyuki is much less regarded than his brother, Shunsuke, and his writings on Asia not particularly well known. It would be inaccurate to focus a discussion on Beheiren solely on his Asianist leanings. Ōta, for all his copious discourse, was not involved in actually implementing his clarion calls for revolution, and there was basically little or no reciprocation from Asians in the period to his and his cohorts' ideologies. Only the JRA could achieve genuine transnational results, but largely in the Middle East, and today its legacy is regrettably as a group of terrorists, not Asianists. Finally, NDU was, for all its early impact, practically forgotten about until recently (Zahlten 2018: 115).

Even putting such provisos aside, it would still be disingenuous to ascribe the aforementioned case studies to Asianism without further caveats, foremost being the almost complete absence of "Pan-Asianism" itself from the discourse, though this need not discredit a comparison or surprise us, given the baggage of that term for post-war movements. The examples discussed here do not talk about a "shared race" or racial alliance in the same manner that the pre-war Asianists frequently did, though we can find similar framings of shared enemies (capitalism, imperialism, the United States) in the way that, say, Ōkawa hoped for an Asia united in its opposition to Western values (Szpilman 1998: 56-7).

While Oda Makoto was influenced by the Chinese thinker Wang Yangming, he was more an existentialist in the European mode (Havens 1987: 61). Likewise, for all its gestures of solidarity with Vietnam, Beheiren's guests and visitors were mostly Europeans or Americans, and its connections to overseas anti-war movements were less in Asia than the West, especially America, where several prominent members had experience living and studying. It primarily published in Japanese and English, and its leading members acknowledged their understanding of South-east Asia was initially lacking. Arguably, the anti-war movement in Japan had more to do with Japan and its imperial past as well as its relationship to Okinawa than a concern with Asia on its own terms, which was more like a mirror for self-reflection than sustained exchange. The Asianism that emerged, thus, possibly stemmed from a sense of guilt as much as genuine solidarity. Likewise, the "inner colony" issues (Okinawa, Buraku, resident Korean, Ainu, slums) fit more comfortably into a framing of the Other *within* Japan than of Japanese-Asian interchange. These concerns are arguably emblematic of a broader reflexive turn in the leftist movements than an Asianist turn. The attempt to include the Middle East connections within this discussion is also suspect, even if it technically can qualify as part of Asia. Though the pre-war Asianists were inconsistent in their definitions of "Asia", most limited their scope to East Asia. (Ōkawa, though, did take his as far west as Egypt and the Muslim Balkans.)

Such shortcomings complicate our discussion of "Asia" and Asianism among the radical left in the period. As any straight comparison with pre-war Pan-Asianism is bound to be problematic and unsatisfactory, it is surely more useful to think of these tendencies as a kind of loose "pan" movement with a strong interest in Asia, and as a manifestation of a broader internationalist or transnational project by sections of the New Left (and the left in general) in Japan, and which continued and blossomed later, such as in environment movements (Avenell 2017). Internationalism and Maoism-Third Worldism with a focus on Asia, or "real" Asianism? Either way, Asianism or Pan-Asianism remains a framework we should certainly consider when investigating these post-war left-wing movements, though it is by no means comprehensive or definitive as a label. After all, Takeuchi (1963) said that Asianism is something that arises *in association* with other concepts and that "Asia"

is a method for understanding things.

Notwithstanding its length and own “archipelagic” qualities, this essay leaves behind substantial questions and tasks. It has incorporated a rather indulgent number of examples, albeit many of them interlinked, and while this may serve to convey a sense of the overall tendencies of the radical left during the period, there is not yet enough detail or analytical focus on the individual cases. [25] More thorough study of the discussed leftist discourse is required, drawing from the wealth of texts produced in the 1960s and 1970s by mainstream left-wing thinkers as well as the various radical factions. After undertaking this task, it may be possible to make a more sophisticated comparison with pre-war Pan-Asianist discourse than has been attempted here, including closer textual parallels as necessary. And then the object of inquiry should shift to the post-1970s leftist movements in Japan and their attitudes toward Asia, and the influence, if any, of pre-war and post-war Asianism.

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Footnotes

[1] For examples in Japanese contexts, see Avenell 2017 and 2018 for discussion of the civil society and environmental movement; the special issue of “The Sixties: A Journal of History, Politics and Culture” (2017, Vol. 10, No. 2), especially Naoko Koda’s paper on Beheiren and Kei Takata’s on the Beheiren deserter network; and Oguma 2018. More generally, transnational discourses of “1968” have been pioneered in English by the likes of Jeremy Suri and George Katsiaficas. Japan’s role within this has recently been cemented by the likes of *Voices of 1968: Documents from the Global North*, London: Pluto Press, 2018.

[2] For further examples, see Saaler and Szpilman 2011: 13, 40. Another interesting case is the Asiatic Humanitarian Brotherhood, which was founded in Tokyo in 1907 by socialists and anarchists.

[3] For the attraction of Pan-Asianism for Marxists, see Hotta 2007: 66. Hotta also discusses demonstrates affinity between the ideas of Kita Ikki and the anarchist Kōtoku Sūsui, and the interaction of Ōkawa’s ideas and the agrarianism of the anarchist Ishikawa Sanshirō.

[4] Its name in full was Betonamu ni Heiwa o! Shimin Rengō, which translates as the Citizens’ Federation for Peace in Vietnam. The official English name was the Peace in Vietnam Committee. For much more on Beheiren and the anti-war movement, see Havens 1987.

[5] Takeuchi also supported Beheiren, though his vision was criticised by Oda (Olson 1981: 345).

[6] For relevant examples of Tsurumi's writings, see the third volume of his collected works (Tsurumi 2002: not least 49, 50, 54 *passim*, 58, 59, 62 *passim*, 88 *passim*).

[7] This is not unique to Japan. There were similar aspirations in, for example, France, where people identified with the Algerian Revolution and the Other ushered a new political subjectivity for the middle class ("Vietnam is in our factories") (Ross 2002: 80 *passim*). For the students in Japan, an iconic example is the slogan of *uchi-naru tōdai* ("the University of Tokyo within"). For more on the existentialist "self-transformation" of the student movement, see Ando 2014: 68 *passim*.

[8] Ando argues that this is one of several ways the Japanese New Left saw "Asian people as a mirror of personal transformation" (Ando 2014: 125 *passim*). Also see Avenell 2017: 112 *passim*.

[9] For more in English on the conference, see Ando 2014: 127–8.

[10] For a discussion of this in cinema, see Dew 2016.

[11] Also see Shigematsu (2012: 16, 48, 93–4) for the intersection between Japanese Women's Lib and *zainichi* movements, including how Women's Lib articulated a position in relation to colonised Asian women.

[12] Some members of the New Left attempted to connect these "inner" elements to "outer" partners. Koda (2017: 191), for instance, describes a striking intersection between the Black Panther Party and a confluence of such revolutionary elements (including the Chinese immigrants, Buraku and Kamagasaki slum workers).

[13] For more on Umenai (and the transnational efforts of the RAF), see Knaudt 2016 and 2020.

[14] *Runpen* (*Lumpen*) was a common insult among leftists at the time. Coined by *Lumpenproletariat* roughly means "the ragged Proletariat". For an overview of the original Marxist term, see Marxists.org.

[15] *Kyūmin kakumei* has several related terms, including *hiyokuatsu-kakumeiron* ("oppressed peoples revolution theory").

[16] Umenai, however, explicitly rejected the *meishu* model (1972: 142).

[17] The most destructive bombing took place at the Mitsubishi Heavy Industries headquarters in Tokyo in August 1974, which left several dead. It remained the most deadly domestic terrorism incident in Japan until the sarin attack on the Tokyo subway in 1995.

[18] Police arrested all the main members in 1975. There were various links between the bombers and the earlier *kyūmin kakumei* circle of thinkers, which has problematised the legacy of the discourse.

[19] In addition to the examples of NDU and Adachi Masao discussed briefly in this article, another prominent cine-activist collective was Ogawa Pro, whose most famous output dealt with the Sanrizuka farmers' protests against Narita Airport. For more on Ogawa Pro in English, see Mark Nornes Abé, *Forest of Pressure: Ogawa Shinsuke and Postwar Japanese Documentary*,

Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007.

[20] For more on *Asia is One*, see the article by Matteo Boscarlo on [Asia Docs](#).

[21] Echoing Zahlten on NDU, Sabu Kohso has also discussed Adachi in relation to Édouard Glissant's mode of archipelagic thinking. See his essay, "Ciné-activism in an Archipelagic World", available online at [Bordersphere](#).

[22] The nascent JRA had close connections with several Beheiren activists in Europe.

[23] See Japanese Red Army, "Statement 9 Feb. 1974." In his essay, Umenai also called for the Japanese radicals to attack oil assets, though there is no evidence that he influenced the choice of target. Most likely it was the Palestinian side that directed the mission.

[24] Umenai and others like Funamoto were minority presences within the New Left and are now almost ghost-like figures, especially Umenai, who disappeared without trace. This writer finds their personal trajectories and searches for new revolutionary agency continually compelling but is also cautious about ascribing too much influence to them. While others have positioned their interventions as a paradigm shift, or even marking a "farewell to class" (Knaudt 2020), some of the most-parsed texts of late may arguably be just curios or ephemera from the 1970s, albeit extraordinary ones, rather than something truly symptomatic or emblematic of major trends in New Left thought and practice. This essay, for what it is worth, has attempted to set out some of the Asianist and archipelagic (nomadic, wayfaring) tendencies, though without the suggestion that this was a mass sea change in discourse.

[25] One example not discussed here, and one worthy of an essay in its own right, is the link to *The Water Margin* (Outlaws of the Marsh), the classic 14th-century Chinese novel that was immensely popular in Japan – and a common refrain for the thinkers associated with the *kyūmin kakumei* discourse (namely, Ōta, Takenaka and Hiraoka). Dealing as it does with outlaws who form an army at Mount Liang and successfully resist the imperial forces, was an inspiring analogue and trope.