

The Tribute Trade System and Modern Asia*

By Takeshi HAMASHITA

Introduction

It has long been the practice to analyze modern Asia from the viewpoint of nations and international relationships. Through this bipartite framework, much historiographical labor has been expended examining the degree of so-called "nation-building" and the acceptance of "international" law (萬國公法) in the respective Asian countries. This approach has also been understood to reveal the degree of "modernization" of Asian countries.

After much controversy concerning the adaptability of this Western-oriented modernization model to Asia, however, it has also been argued that "areas" or "regions"—an intermediate category between the nation and the world generally—should be analyzed in their full historical meaning. In fact, the region is an historical reality which encompasses a variety of social ties not adequately dealt with under the nation-international framework.

In studies of economic history, the regional economies which mediate national and international economies should indeed be given much more weight. At the same time, those carrying out regional studies should avoid limiting themselves to local matters which constitute only a part of the overall picture.¹⁾

Using the regional studies approach, it is necessary to reconstruct the whole historical process of modern Asia. That is, the history of modern Asia needs to be clarified, not in terms of the "stages of development" of the Western modernization model, but in terms of the complex of interrelationships within the region itself, in the light of Asian self-conceptions.

Generally speaking, Asian history is the history of a unified system characterized by internal tribute/tribute-trade relations, with China at the center. This tribute system is the premise of the "modern" Asia which has emerged in the Asia region and is reflected in several aspects of contemporary Asian history.²⁾

This framework of analysis of modern Asia requires a reinterpretation of the following four issues:

- 1 Chinese ideals of control and their institutional manifestations;
- 2 The historical role of the tribute system and the relationships within it;
- 3 The relationship between "East" and "West;"
- 4 The modern history of Japan and China.

Among the conclusions likely to be drawn from such a reinterpretation,

several are of particular interest:

Firstly, the prevalent understanding has been that China has been a centralized despotism with a huge bureaucratic institution. The reinterpretation will delineate a center-local relationship involving a division of powers, with the center itself as an economic subject alongside other local ones.³⁾

As for the tribute system, it has been understood that the recognition and investiture of a king in each tribute country (册封) was central to the maintenance of the Sinocentric system. But, in fact, the system was an external expression of basic domestic relations of control which saw a hierarchical division of power—from the provinces downward and outward. Thus, the tribute system was an organic entity with center-periphery relations extending from the central government to the provinces and dependencies of the Empire, including the native tribes and administrators of native districts, tribute countries and even trading partners. As a part of this continuum, areas of southeast, northeast, central and northwest Asia functioned as a tribute trade area with east Asia as its center, the whole being connected with the adjacent Indian trade area.⁴⁾

Next, this new systemic understanding of tribute trade relations bears major implications for the history of East-West relations.

Westerners newly arrived in Asia, particularly the Portuguese and Spanish, had to participate in an intra-Asian trade network that already existed in order to obtain what they wanted. This also means that there was little direct exchange of commodities between East and West. Eastern countries could obtain necessities either by payment in silver or through exchange within the intra-Asian trade system. Nor did things change much when Holland and England entered the picture. They, too, had to come to terms with the existing Asian tribute trade system, adapt to it, and learn to utilize it. Consequently, the nature of Western "expansion" in and "impact" on Asia was conditioned by the existence of this Asian trade zone based on the tribute trade system, even after the advent of the "modern" period. China and the Asian tribute trade system responded to Western countries and the imposed treaties from within the system. Hence it is difficult to define modern Asia clearly according to the change from the tribute system to the treaty system.⁵⁾

Finally, on the basis of the foregoing, it might again be asked what "modern" Asia is and how it may be interpreted within the framework of the tribute system and tribute trade area.

In examining post-19th-century Asian economic history, the capitalism-industrialization framework has generally been used, with the degree of "modernization" being determined according to the degree of industrialization. Moreover, the modernization process is examined in terms of two sets of stimuli:—internal and external. Judged from the viewpoint of the tribute system, however, Asian modernization cannot be grasped by merely presenting

stages in the formation of national economies in each country, but must be defined on the basis of the relationships between Asian countries and the tribute trade system, and the transformation of those relationships. The Asian modernization process will then be examined, not in terms of the degree of impact of the West, but of the degree of change in the relationship between each country and area of Asia towards the regional tribute trade system. In such a perspective, the new relations with the West only offered a certain motivation for changes in the system, and did not replace it. The case of Japan, however, is exceptional. Japan did consciously undertake to industrialize and Westernize itself, so the process may usefully be viewed as one of "modernization." But if we look into the historical motivation for Japanese industrialization, we will find that Japan, too, chose its particular course in order to cope with the tribute trade system. Thus, it may still be said that even Japan was strongly affected by this system that bound the various countries of the region into a single entity or zone.

I. Universal Ideals and Forms of Tribute Relations

The central ideal of Sinocentrism was that of the unitary benevolence (仁) and dignity of the imperial institution and its ultimate extension to "all under Heaven" (天下). Domestic control of China was concentrated in the Emperor, under whom was a Grand Secretariat (內閣) [or Council of State (軍機處) in the Ch'ing period] which acted as a "cabinet" supervising the Six Boards (六部). Locally, "government" was represented by Governors-General (總督) and provincial Governors (巡撫), of which there were eight and sixteen, respectively, during the Ch'ing period, and under them Treasurers (布政使), Provincial Judges (按察使) and Intendants (道員), in charge of financial, judicial and administrative affairs, respectively. "Lower" levels included Prefectural Magistrates (知府), Department Magistrates (知州), District Magistrates (知縣), Sub-Prefects (同知) and Assistant Sub-Prefects (通判), governing Prefectures (府), Departments (州), Districts or "Counties" (縣), and Independent Sub-Prefectures (廳).

This domestic control structure may be characterized as follows: First, central and local institutions coexisted and their powers overlapped. Governors-General and Governors were in fact on the same level as such central institutions as the Six Boards, with no superior-subordinate relations between them. The Treasurers, too, had the independent right to report directly to the throne (上奏), though they were ostensibly under the control of the Governors-General and Governors. As for financial administration, the Board of Revenue was situated at the institutional "center," but actual management was substantially left in the hands of the provincial Governors.

Second, there was a sharp distinction between civil servants and the local people. At the prefectural and district levels, the avoidance system (迴避) was

implemented, which provided that civil servants not be allowed to hold office in their home areas lest they should become too closely connected with the local people. This system was maintained to keep local officials from being manipulated by civil organizations such as clans (宗族) and "hometown" associations (同鄉會), as well as to assure protection of the basic financial activities of the bureaucracy.⁶⁾

Turning to the external relations of China, besides the Board of Ceremonies (禮部), which managed "foreign" affairs, there was a special bureau, The Mongolian Superintendency (理藩院) which was specially charged with the control or "management" of the tribes of Mongolia, the affairs of Tibet, and the Lamaist hierarchy. In late Ch'ing China, a new department, the Yamen of Foreign Affairs (總理各國事務衙門), was established to manage all official relations with Western countries.

On the southwestern periphery of China, the Ch'ing Government appointed local leaders as officials under the general category of "Administrators of the Natives" (土司) and "Native Officials" (土官)⁷⁾. This approach to peripheral control, in which local leaders were used to control their own areas was initiated in the T'ang period, extended in the Yuan, and fully institutionalized under the Ming. In the Ch'ing period, Administrators of the Natives and Native Officials were in charge of both military and civil affairs.

In Ssu-ch'uan (四川), Yun-nan (雲南), Kuei-chou (貴州) and Ch'ing-hai (青海), they functioned as civil officers such as Native Prefectural Magistrates (土知府), and Native District Magistrates (土知縣); as military officers like Hsüan Wei Shih Ssü (宣慰使司), Hsüan Fu Shih Ssü (宣撫使司), and Ch'ang Kuan Ssü (長官司); and as special officers like Native Sub-District Deputy Magistrates (土巡檢), Native District Police Chiefs and Jail Wardens (土典吏), and Native Postmasters (土驛丞). As for their status within the standard nine-rank hierarchy, the Hsüan Wei Shih Ssü were in the third rank, second class (從三品) and the Hsüan Fu Shih Ssü in the fourth rank, second class (從四品). These were both comparatively high ranks, since the regular Prefect (知府) was also fourth rank, second class, one rank lower than that of Provincial Governor (巡撫), which was second rank, second class (從二品).

As for the idea of native tribute, it was much the same as tax payment, although nominally 'voluntary,' so it too shared features of domestic control. Moreover, the general pattern of overlapping power between central and local institutions prevailed in the peripheral "native" regions as well. Local power had some room for initiative despite the apparent concentration of power with central institutions. Extrapolating from these characteristics of Ch'ing Government, we may suspect that the external policy of China would not be so different from that governing domestic relations. In fact, the continuity of approaches to control from domestic to "external" relations is quite striking.

One way of considering China's geographic environment, of course, is to look at the way the surrounding maritime areas were classified as the

Eastern Seas, Western Seas, and Southern Seas. But China's real priorities lay in Sinocentered, not geographical, relations.⁸⁾ The Chinese structure of control consisted of a center, the domestic local areas which held the most important position in central-local relations, the "minorities" under Administrators of the Natives and Native Officials next to these local areas, then areas paying tribute (朝貢) and subdued groups (羈縻), and finally, beyond them, groups with mutual trade (互市) relations.

Under this structure of control, the basic nature of the tribute relationship may be summarized as follows. The fundamental procedures required to maintain the tribute relation were the investiture of local rulers and the visit to see the Emperor, when recognition of the tribute group itself confirmed recognition of the rulers. The relationship was characterized as one of mastery and obeisance (宗屬關係), and the "loyal" countries, areas and tribes concerned were expected to pay tribute to China regularly.

Tribute countries are described in the Ming institutional code (『萬曆明會典』) as falling under six areas or groups:⁹⁾ A) a first category of southeast barbarians (東南夷): Korea (朝鮮國), Japan (日本國), the Liu-ch'ius or Ryūkyūs (琉球國), Annam (安南國), Cambodia (真臘國), Siam (暹羅國), Champa (占城國), Java (爪哇國) and so forth, with eighteen countries in all; B) a second category of southeast barbarians: Su-lu (蘇祿國) Malacca (滿刺加國), Sri Lanka (錫蘭山國) and so on, with forty-four; C) northern barbarians: Kings and leaders of Da-tan (韃靼), eight altogether; D) northeast barbarians: two Nü-chih (女直); E) a first category of western barbarians: fifty-eight from west of Lan-chou in Shen-hsi Province, including thirty-eight from the Western Regions (西域); and F) a second category of western barbarians: fourteen groups from the Turfan region (吐蕃). As for Native Officials (土官) there were: seventy-one from Ssü-ch'uan; thirty-one from Kuang-hsi; eighteen from Yun-nan and seven from Hu-Kuang in the Hong-Wu period (洪武). Thus China proper was surrounded by six tribute groupings from all points of the compass, as well as by "native" administrations.

Under 'regulations of tribute' (『朝貢通例』), the Ming Code also stipulated the frequency of tribute missions (for example, every three years), the place of stay in Peking (the Peking Assembly Hall, 北京會同館), the place of entrance into and routes of travel within China, numbers of tribute mission members, and procedures for every ceremony.¹⁰⁾ China gave special certificates of trade (勘合符) to fifteen countries like Japan, Champa, Java, Malacca, Cambodia and Su-lu, after having first given one to Siam in 1383 (16th year of Hong-Wu), suggesting that China deemed these countries particularly important among the tribute countries as a whole.

In the Ch'ing period, China added to and reordered the lineup of tribute countries. The Ch'ing institutional code (『大清會典』) newly lists Laos (南掌), Vietnam (越南), and Burma (緬甸), as well as Portugal and Holland. As for the tribute mission routes, it stipulated that the Korean mission should pass

through the Shan-hai customs barrier (山海關) of Fen-t'ien Province (奉天), the Liu-ch'iu or Ryūkyuan through Fu-chou (福州), the Annamese through the Chen-nan barrier (鎮南關) of Chiang-hsi Province (江西), those from Cambodia and Burma through Yun-nan (雲南), from Su-lu through Hsia-men (廈門), Holland through Kuang-tung (廣東), and Portugal and Great Britain through Macao (澳門).¹¹⁾

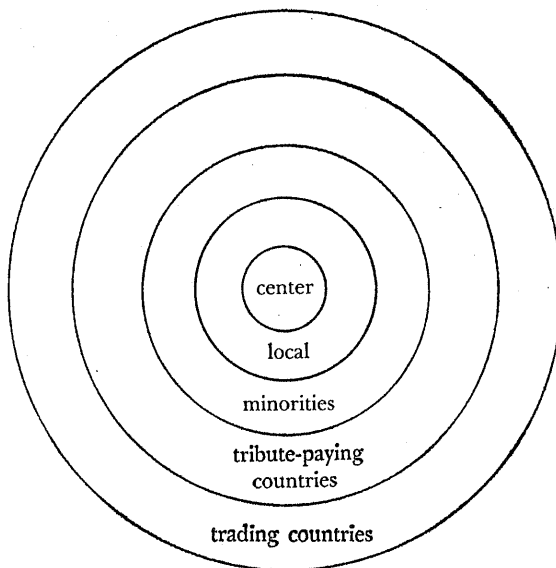
These routes and points of entry, whether by sea or by land, it will be noticed, were simultaneously trade routes and trade ports—which has strong implications for analyzing the treatment of Western countries in the modern period.

According to the degree of influence of the center (Central Government) over payers of "tribute," they may be classified as follows:

- (1) Administrators of the Natives (Tribes) (土司) and Native Officials (土官) from the southwestern provinces
- (2) "subdued" areas (羈縻) like the Nüchih (女直) group
- (3) countries with the closest relationship, like Korea
- (4) countries with dual tribute relations involving other states, like the Liu-ch'iu or Ryūkyus (which sent simultaneous missions to Japan)
- (5) countries in more remote peripheral areas, like Siam
- (6) countries engaging in mutual trade—which were essentially deemed as tributaries by China—like Russia and various other European countries.

These relationship may be shown schematically as concentric circles with the domestic center-local relation at the core (Diagram 1).

Diagram 1. The Chinese World System



It must also be noted that this structure of Chinese control was not rigidly fixed, nor did it imply absorption. China changed the rankings of tribute countries—Korea, the Ryūkyus, Siam and Vietnam, for example—according to actual political and economic conditions, and established tribute relations with Mongolian and Tibetan groups which themselves had no strong concept of Confucian ritual (禮). This shows that actual management of tribute relations with other areas and countries was rather flexible and could encompass peoples who differed in religious and other sociocultural respects. Furthermore, as tribute relations were not based merely on relations of control, but also had an important basis in trade relationships (to be explained in the next section), they were multidimensional relations, embodying a number of different elements and demands.

II. Structure of the Tribute System

With the complex historical and institutional implications of tribute relations just described as background, this section will enter into a more systematic and dynamic examination of how tribute relations actually functioned.

Looked at from one point of view, the tribute "system" was a relationship between two countries, China and the tribute-paying country, with tribute and imperial "gifts" (回賜) as the medium, and the Chinese capital as the "center." Modifying this perspective, however, is the fact that the "system" did not function in this single dimension only, but involved several other lesser or satellite tribute relationships not directly concerning China, and forming a considerably more complex system of reciprocal relations. The tribute system in reality embraced both inclusive and competitive relations extending in a web over a large area. The case of the Liu-ch'iu or Ryūkyus, for example, shows China and Japan in a competitive relationship because the Liu-ch'iu kings sent missions to both Peking and Yedo during the Ch'ing period.

In the case of Korea, too, we find that while it was most certainly a tributary of China it also sent missions to Japan. And Vietnam required tribute missions from Laos. Thus all these countries maintained satellite tribute relations with each other and constituted links in a continuous chain.¹²⁾

The other fundamental feature of the system that must be kept sight of is its basis in commercial transactions. The tribute system in fact paralleled or was in symbiosis with a network of commercial trade relations. For example, trade between Siam, Japan, and southern China had long been maintained on the basis of profits from the tribute missions, even when much of the non-tribute trade was scarcely remunerative. In the eighteenth century, when the rice trade from Siam to Kuang-tung (廣東) and Hsia-men (廈門)

became unprofitable, the traders shifted their stress to Liu-ch'iu (琉球) and Nagasaki (長崎) in Japan, thus maintaining and even strengthening the general multilateral trade relationship.¹³⁾ The story of the commercial penetration of Chinese merchants into Southeast Asia and the emigration of "overseas Chinese" is of course historically intertwined with the building of this trade network. Commercial expansion and the tribute trade network developed together. Trade relations in East and Southeast Asia expanded as tribute relations expanded.¹⁴⁾

It should also be noted that this tribute trade functioned as an intermediate trade between European countries and the countries of East Asia. In the records of trade from Holland and Portugal to China in the K'ang Hsi (康熙) period, we find listed several cotton textile items made in Europe like 西洋沙喃匏布 and 西洋佛咬嘴布, as well as woollens. European cotton textiles can also be found on lists of tribute articles from Southeast Asian countries to China. Among the tribute articles from Sulu (蘇祿) to China in the fifth year of Yung-Ch'eng (雍正; 1727), for example, there is at least one article from Europe, 白幼洋布, and Western shirting (洋花布) and great Holland wool (大荷蘭氈) appear in the records of tribute from Siam in the eighth year of Yung-Cheng (1730).¹⁵⁾ These examples show that the tribute system played an intermediary role in trade. Tribute relationships in fact constituted a network of tribute trade of a multilateral type, absorbing commodities from outside the network.

These aspects of the tribute trade as a system were accentuated with the transition from Ming (明) to Ch'ing (清) (C.16-17). The developments may be summarized as follows:

- (1) The ideal of Sinocentric unity was expanded and consolidated, with Korea, Japan, and Vietnam being particularly strongly affected;
- (2) Tribute trade was expanded through the participation of European countries;
- (3) Private trade expanded along with the tribute trade, and trade-related institutions like trade settlement and tax collection were simultaneously elaborated.

As for the Sinocentric international order, Sinocentrism stimulated the emergence of nationalism among China's tributary countries. Vietnam, for example, began to require tribute from Laos (南掌), and Korea insisted on the continuation of orthodox Sinocentrism under the Ch'ing Dynasty, which was initially seen as a 'barbarian' dynasty by Korea. And Vietnam criticized China when forced to change its national name from Nan-yue (南越) to Yue-nan (越南) merely because a Nan-yue kingdom had previously existed in ancient China. These phenomena demonstrate how tributary countries began to take on national identities vis-a-vis China, based on their own understandings of Sinocentrism.¹⁶⁾ Thus the ideal of Sinocentrism was not solely a preoccupation of China but was substantially shared throughout the tribute

zone. Nationalism was born in Asia from within the tribute system and through common ideals of tribute relationships. Satellite tribute zones surrounding the Chinese-dominated core had an historical existence of their own which continued on down to their own modernization. These transformations may be shown schematically as in diagrams 2 to 4.

Diagram 2. Tribute relations

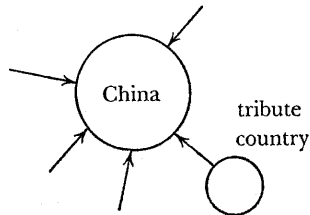


Diagram 3. Satellite tribute relations

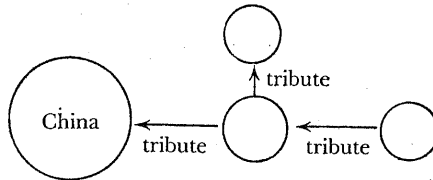
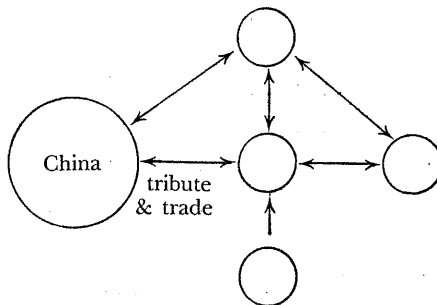


Diagram 4. Tribute trade system



A much closer investigation of the contents of tribute trade will be necessary in order to shed light on the internal sources of motive energy of these networks and to flesh out a picture of how they worked as an historical system. For the moment, we may classify aspects of the tribute trade in a three-fold manner:

- (1) The two-way relationship between formal tribute articles (貢物) carried by tribute embassies, and "gifts" (回賜) from China;

- (2) licenced trade in the Peking Assembly Hall (北京會同館) by the limited group of merchants allowed to accompany tribute embassies—the amount of commodities traded also being limited;
- (3) frontier trade between merchants along China's land frontiers and in specified Chinese ports.

The forms and frequency of tribute missions varied according to the degree of intimacy between the various tribute countries and China. The treatment of tribute missions by China also differed.

(a) The frequency of tribute from the "Native" Tribes and Districts was stipulated variously as once a year, once every two years or once every three years. Their tribute missions were allowed to open markets in the Assembly Hall in Peking which fell under the jurisdiction of the Board of Ceremonies (禮部), and their major tribute articles were horses and gold and silver vessels. In return, the Chinese side "gave" one hundred taels of paper currency per horse. As recompense for simply demonstrating submission by way of tribute, the Chinese side granted a hundred taels of paper currency and three bolts of satin (綵緞三表裏) to third (三品官) and fourth rank officials (四品官), and eighty taels of paper currency and three bolts of satin to fifth rank officials.¹⁷⁾ These rewards for tribute submission were comparatively large.

(b) In the early Ming (明) dynasty, the Yung-lé Emperor (永樂帝) carried out a "pacification" policy (羈縻政策) in the Northeast or Manchurian area. Later, Nü-chih groups in the area accepted Ch'ing control, were organized into a "Pacification Guard" (羈縻衛所) and established tribute relations with the Ch'ing dynasty. This type of tribute relation was virtually compulsory, much like the tax payments of other subjects. Tribute articles consisted mainly of horses and fur products. The return "gifts" of the Ch'ing court were divided into two groups. The first group of gifts was for the embassy proper. The institutional code of the Ch'ing stipulated that the governor (都督) of the Nü-chih was to receive four bolts of satin plus two bolts of silk commuted into paper currency (折鈔絹二疋), and the guards (都指揮) a fixed number of bolts of various grades of silk, some of it also commuted into currency.¹⁸⁾ The other group of gifts was really recompense for items brought in tribute. Again, a fixed number of bolts of silk, some of it commuted into paper currency, was stipulated for each tribute horse, and one bolt of silk was to be given for each four pieces of fur products. Thus, "gifts" from the Ch'ing court were mainly of silk, though a certain part of this was replaced by paper currency.

Besides these gifts, trade transactions in the mandated markets both in Peking (北京衛市) and Fu-shun (撫順城) also served to increase exchange with the Northeast.

(c) Korea maintained the closest relationship of all the tributaries with China. Tribute missions from Korea to the Ming Court were initiated in the second year of Hong-wu (洪武; 1369), when the king of Korea (高麗國王) sent

an embassy reporting his enthronement and asked China to recognize his status (册封). After the Yung-lê (永樂) period, Korea paid tribute every year, sending gold and silver utensils, white cotton textiles, various hemp textiles (苧布), white paper and ginseng, as well as studhorses as stipulated in the Ming code. The prescribed gifts from China included books and musical instruments as requested by the embassy up to a certain number, and gifts to members of the embassy and to the king of Korea amounting to one hundred taels of silver, four bolts of cotton textiles and twelve bolts of hemp textiles.¹⁹⁾

After a brief pause in tribute missions during the period of chaos at the end of the Ming dynasty, the Yi Dynasty in Korea (李氏朝鮮) started paying tribute again in 1636 and reopened the market at Yi-chou (義州) on the border of Korea and China. The first tribute articles to the Ch'ing consisted of one hundred taels of gold, one thousand taels of silver, paper, furs and skins, cotton textiles, medicine (ginseng), rice and other items—twenty-eight categories altogether. It should be noted that the appearance of such items as gold and silver among the tribute coincided with the expanded circulation of silver in China and that silver served alongside silk and brocade as a medium of exchange.²⁰⁾

In the tribute transactions here described, the relationship between tribute goods and “gifts” was substantially one of selling and purchasing. In fact, it is quite legitimate to view tribute exchange as a commercial transaction. Even the Chinese court, then, acted as a party to business transactions. The mode of payment was often Chinese currency, whether paper money or silver. Seen from an economic perspective, tribute was managed as an exchange between seller and buyer, with the “price” of commodities fixed. Indeed, “price” standards were determined, albeit loosely, by market prices in Peking.²¹⁾ Given the nature of this transaction, it can be shown that the foundation for the whole complex tribute trade formation was determined by the price structure of China and that the tribute trade zone formed an integrated ‘silver zone’ in which silver was used as the medium of trade settlement. The key to the functioning of the tribute trade as a system was the huge “demand” for commodities outside of China and the difference between prices inside and outside of China.

The actual working of the system was often a cause for complaint from both the tribute countries and Chinese merchants because the stipulated “prices” of tribute commodities often fell below actual market prices. And when China paid in paper currency, the profits accruing from tribute articles were pushed down by debasement, thereby reducing the funds the embassies had to buy Chinese goods. Despite these problems, the private—formal—trade which accompanied tribute embassies expanded, increasing silver circulation and leading to the absorption of silver both from Europe and the Americas. On the whole, this tribute trade system took on the attributes of a silver circulating zone with multilateral channels of trade settlement in

which silver was used as medium.²²⁾

To sum up, the entire tribute and interregional trade zone had its own structural rules which exercised a systematic control through silver circulation and with the Chinese tribute trade at the center. This system, encompassing East and Southeast Asia was articulated with neighbouring trade zones like those of India, the Islamic region and Europe.

III. Sino-Japanese Relations in the Modern Asian World

If we view the tribute trade zone, composed of an East Asian economic zone and a Southeast Asia-South China economic zone, as an historical system functioning with its own integrating rationale, what implications does this have for our understanding of the relationship between East and West? And how should we view the long history of the Sino-Japanese relationship within this zone? Finally, how might we reinterpret the "modernization" of Asia?

As was mentioned at the outset, generally speaking, the Western countries did not constitute their own category outside the tribute system. They were all included under the logic of tribute relations, and even geographically speaking were seen as being situated at some indeterminate distance beyond the frontiers of China. In Kuang-tung, for example, Great Britain was not even identified by Chinese officials as the same country that had sent a diplomatic representation to Tibet.²³⁾ Accordingly, when Western countries first dealt with Asia, they had little choice but to deal with the tribute relations which were the basis of all relations in the region. They could enter Asia only by participating in the tribute trade network and managed to modify it only after they had established a working base within it. From the viewpoint of Asian history, Asian countries never responded individually or separately to Western countries coming to Asia, but rather through the tribute trade system to which all of them belonged as integral parts.

The history of relations between China and Siam provides an interesting example of how Asian countries viewed Western countries and utilized them for Asian purposes. In 1884, during the Sino-French war over Indo-China, the Governor-General of Kuang-tung and Kuang-hsi, P'êng Yü-lin (兩廣總督彭玉麟), sent the self-strengthening movement entrepreneur Chêng Kuan-yin (鄭觀應) on a mission to Siam. His personal records contain the following section, which at first glance seems to contradict the image of an enlightened intellectual of the time.

"On the 26th of May, 1884, when Chêng Kuan-yin met the "consul" of Siam in Singapore, Ch'en Chin-chung (駐星加坡暹羅領事陳金鐘), he said that (a) it was a "crime" for Siam to have stopped its tribute embassies to China and (b) that such a decision by Siam was not justified *even* under international law (公法)."²⁴⁾ Although Chêng was supposedly an enlightened, Western educated Chinese referring to international law and borrowing it as a

standard of judgment, he did not in fact apply the Western concept of international relations to Siam but argued for maintaining the historical tribute relationship, a superior-subordinate relationship. In other words, he utilized international law only as a means of argument, not as a basis for equal relations. On the other hand, Ch'en Chin-chung counterattacked by saying that if China wanted to arrange a treaty with Siam, it should welcome Ch'en in Kuang-tung or T'ien-chin (天津) for 'negotiations' (交涉).²⁵⁾ Ch'en thus utilized the concepts of Western 'international law' and treaty negotiations between equals to back his argument. Both of them, however, clearly saw the relationship between the two countries as a tribute relationship, making only partial use of Western ideas.

In general, we may say that the entrance of Western countries into the Asian tribute trade zone started with their participation in intra-Asian trade. Portugal and Holland, for example, conducted an intermediate trade within the Asian area to earn funds to purchase necessities in Europe. Great Britain's penetration of Asia began in the 17th century on the strength of its superiority in shipping. British ships carried Asian products like rice to China, products which had previously been imported by China through the tribute trade relations, and they bought Chinese products like tea and silk with proceeds from the sale of these other Asian products. In the 19th century, Western countries started to directly cultivate raw materials like rubber in Asia to meet their own industrial needs, and to sell their industrial products to Asia. For this purpose they had to link the intra-Asian trade with the international market by establishing spots where the settlement of trade balances might be conducted. Such places played an intermediary role between two quite distinct markets. Thus, Hong Kong and Singapore took on the role of junctures between the two markets and absorbed huge amounts of funds from overseas Chinese.²⁶⁾ In consequence, the Southeast Asian and southern Chinese economies were linked much more closely, and their ties extended to the Indian Ocean trade zone. Despite this geographic extension of the trading zone, however, the marketing structure in European colonies in Asia continued to display the characteristics of the traditional intra-Asian trade associated with the tribute system. Elements of domestic, intermediate and international markets were all to be found in Singapore and Hong Kong.²⁷⁾

With this brief description of the relationship between the Asian tribute trade system and the West behind us, we may now turn to the problem of the modern relations between Japan and China. How did they start? Former studies on the subject have concentrated on comparative analyses of the differences in speed or direction of "modernization" under "Western impact."²⁸⁾ Studies of the relationship between the two countries focused on the Japanese adoption of a national strengthening policy and Japan's expansion into China from the time of the Sino-Japanese war in 1894. In

general, such studies traced the history of modern Japan only from the viewpoint of "Westernization"—the emergence of a "small West" (小西洋) in Asia. In my view, however, Japanese modernization should be traced mainly from the perspective of its generation from within the tribute system centered on China. To put it in its starkest form, Japanese modernization was the process of relocating the center of the tribute trade structure in Japan. Put another way, the main issue in Japanese modernization was how to cope with the Chinese dominance over commercial relations in Asia, a dominance which had functioned as a Sinocentric economic integration through the tribute trade system. As for the international political relations of modern Japan, the important question was how to reorganize relations among Japan, China, Korea and Liu-ch'iu or Ryūkyū, with Japan relocated at the center.

First, let us consider these questions from the economic angle. Former studies have described Japanese modernization in terms of recovery of autonomy in tariff matters and of industrialization, that is, as matters of national sovereignty and the formation of a national economy. Analysis of these issues started from an interest in clarifying the process of realization of "national wealth and power" (富國強兵). But if we ask why Japan chose to industrialize in the first place, past studies do not prove very convincing. In other words, although there are many discussions of the processes of Japanese industrialization, investigations of the motivation for Japanese industrialization are rare. Because the course of Japanese modernization was studied from the standpoint of recovery from subordination to Western countries, or independence from the West, the importance of the historical relationship between Japan and China in the tribute system was lost sight of. But to understand the direction and nature of Japanese modernization more deeply, it is most important to recognize that the motivation for Japan's industrialization after the opening of Japan's ports was generated from within a web of commercial relations with China.

The main reason why Japan chose the direction of industrialization was its defeat in attempts to expand commercial relations with China. Japanese merchants faced the well-established power of overseas Chinese merchants built through the Dejima trade (出島貿易) in Nagasaki (長崎) during the Edo (江戸) period. Chinese merchants monopolized the export business for seafoods and native commodities and Japanese merchants simply could not break their hold.

When the Japanese consul in Hong Kong, Suzuki (鈴木領事) emphasized the importance of the Hong Kong market in 1890 in a report he sent to the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs commenting on the low spirits of Japanese merchants in Hong Kong, among other things, he pointed to the following:

- 1) The Chinese merchants were united and had a long-term strategy

- which went beyond short-term profit;
- 2) Japanese merchants lacked funds and when they suffered even a single loss, had to withdraw;
 - 3) There were indications that Japanese products of which Chinese people were fond were sold to Chinese merchants much cheaper than to Japanese merchants by Japanese producers.²⁹⁾

According to the consul's report, the influence of Chinese merchants not only held the local market in its grip but even extended to Japanese producers, and he was very pessimistic about Japanese merchants entering the Hong Kong market. It was under such circumstances—the commercial power of the Chinese merchants and their influence in Japan—that new possibilities for cultivating the Chinese market presented themselves. And it was Chinese merchants in Japan who introduced the information necessary to produce the cotton textiles which could substitute for the Western cotton textiles which already had secured a significant share in the Chinese market.

In the 19th year of Meiji (明治; 1887), Chinese merchants in Yokohama (横浜) started to buy cotton cloth produced in Saitama (埼玉) prefecture. The parties concerned pushed the authorities to promote exports to the Chinese market and asked the Japanese consul in Hong Kong about future possibilities. The advice given by prominent Chinese merchants in Hong Kong was: 1) wide cloth, the same as Western textiles, was required, 2) plain, striped cloth should be supplied, and 3) the price should be appropriate. Based on this advice, production and export to China got underway.³⁰⁾ This example is symbolic of the general course of Japanese industrialization, which started with the production of substitutes for Western textiles in Asia. Competition among Japan, China and India in the production of cotton textiles also started at about this time.

Thirdly, increased foreign trade with Western countries through foreign firms also provided a motivation for industrialization. The development of new exports like silk and coal, alongside such traditional items as seafoods, accelerated the building of industrial infrastructure.³¹⁾ Although this tendency was the result of the commercial activities of Western firms, the main aim of such firms was not to export the industrial products of their own countries but to import Asian products. Hence trade relations in east Asia were not significantly changed by the opening of the Japanese market.

Political relations between Japan and China in the early Meiji period can now also be reinterpreted. Most previous studies of the Sino-Japanese treaty signed on the 13th May, 1871 (日清修好條規 [中日辛未條約]) conclude that the treaty gave expression to the equality of the two nations, as demonstrated by the approval of mutual consular jurisdictions. In general, it is pointed out that the treaty embodied the idea of the equality of nations common to modern international intercourse, and that it marked the opening

of the modern era in international relations in East Asia.³²⁾ It is doubtful, however, whether the equality supposedly secured by the Japanese side was recognized as such by its Chinese counterpart. Underlying Chinese recognition of other states was the long-established idea of a hierarchy of dignity with the Emperor at the top—just as in the domestic sphere. It was virtually impossible for the Chinese to conceive of “equality” with the Emperor. The Kiakhta Treaty of 1727 with Russia can serve as an example of the problem.

The Kiakhta Treaty also embodies a stipulation of “equality” in its sixth article, dealing with exchange of official letters. The article provides that such letters should be exchanged between the Russian Senate (元老院) and the Ch'ing Colonial Office (理藩院).³³⁾ Compared to the one-sided nature of the tribute system in which China was clearly dominant, the exchange of letters under the Kiakhta arrangement appears evenhanded. But China did not really see Russia in equal terms because the mandate of the Colonial Office was to *control* the affairs of the Mongols. The treaty also provided for the opening of mutual trade (互市) on the frontier in place of trade in the Assembly Hall in Peking. Although this regulation also may seem to imply equality between the two countries, the trade in question was originally conducted as a part of the tribute trade relationship. We can also find a good deal of evidence to show that knowledgeable Chinese believed the Emperor was merely doing Russia a favor.

Given this historical experience with “equality,” how should we reinterpret the significance of the Sino-Japanese treaty of 1871? The Chinese party concerned with the treaty negotiations was the Yamên of Foreign Affairs (總理各國事務衙門). The duties of the Yamên were similar to those of a ministry of foreign affairs and it included among its members some of the ministers of the Council of State (軍機大臣) and was thus much more powerful than the Colonial Office or Mongolian Superintendency (理藩院). It nonetheless did not have the power to bind governors-general and governors of provinces who actually implemented the policies. In fact, the Yamên had been established due to strong pressure from Western countries as an office specifically to manage foreign affairs in place of the Ministry of Ceremony (禮部), for which foreign affairs had been merely one of a number of duties. Consequently it is difficult to imagine that when the Yamên signed treaties with foreign countries, China was always recognizing them as equal nations.³⁴⁾ It was the Japanese side, utilizing this expression of “equal” relations as if it were a concession by China, that tried to reorganize international relations in East Asia in Japan's favor.

Taking these economic and political factors as among the motivations for Japanese modernization—factors which were implicit in the tribute system and not a part of the so called “Western impact”—allows us to see that the modernization process was initiated within a fairly unstable international environment. After Japan emerged from the closed-door isolation policy of

the Edo period it adopted the two-fold policy of repudiating the tribute system of which it had previously been a part and of re-entering into East Asian relations on a new basis. Japan had to confront the tribute system when it tried to reconstruct its relationship with Korea and the Ryūkyūs. Historically speaking, it ultimately proved fatal for Japan to confront in all its aspects a system which was still largely functioning in East Asia.

Conclusion

“Modernization” in Asia was generated as a negative reaction to the all-inclusive superior-subordinate relations of the traditional tribute system. Mercantilist control over tribute by the Ch’ing dynasty led overseas Chinese merchants to oppose the trade policy and expand their own private trade. As a result, the Ch’ing dynasty was in turn compelled to shift from the role of monopolistic trader-merchant to that of tax collector. European countries expanded their influence in Asia by first utilizing the tribute trade system and heavily investing in it. Japan, using Westernization as a means of modernization, tried to reconstruct the Asian system, but found itself trapped between a strong Sinocentrism and an equally strong West.

Our approach has been to try to grasp Asia as an integrated historical system. What is required now to understand modern Asia is an effort to trace how each country and area within Asia attempted to cope with the transformation of the tribute system. Modern Asia can no longer be fruitfully measured by such yardsticks as the degree of Western “impact” and Asian “response,” but must be examined by delineating the region’s fundamental traditional characteristics, and then analyzing how the traditional system turned even the Western “impact” to its own purposes.

* This essay was originally published as “Chōkō bōeki shistem to kindai ajia” 濱下武志「朝貢貿易システムと近代アジア」 in *Kokusai Seiji* 『国際政治』 (*International Relations*) Vol. 82 (May, 1986), pp. 42-55.

Notes

- 1) This article grows out of the fundamental interest of the author in the internal ties of the Asian area in the modern period. See also Takeshi Hamashita, “Tribute and emigration: China’s foreign relations and Japan,” in T. Umesao and M. Matsubara, eds. *Control Systems and Culture*, Osaka, National Museum of Ethnology, 1989.
- 2) Although discussions of the world economic system stress the importance of the role of nations in the Western world, the Asian tribute system will be described here as a complex of areas. See John W. Meyer, “World policy and the authority of the nation-state,” in Albert Bergeson, ed., *Studies of the Modern World-System*, New York, Academic Press, 1980.
- 3) To investigate center and local issues does not mean to distinguish centralization and

- decentralization of power separately, but to analyze center-local relations from the viewpoint of the strengths of local society. See Ch'ü T'ung-tsu (瞿同祖), *Local Government in China under the Ch'ing*, Cambridge, Mass., 1962.
- 4) See J. K. Fairbank and S. Y. T'eng, "On the Ch'ing tributary system," in *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* No. 6, 1941; J. K. Fairbank, *Trade and Diplomacy on the China Coast: The Opening of the Treaty Ports, 1842-1854*, Cambridge, Mass., 1953; J. K. Fairbank ed., *The Chinese World Order, Traditional China's Foreign Relations*, Cambridge, Mass., 1968; Morris Rossabi, ed., *China among Equals: The Middle Kingdom and its Neighbors, 10th-14 Centuries*, Los Angeles, 1983.
 - 5) H. B. Morse, *The Chronicles of the East India Company Trading to China, 1635-1843*, 5 vols. Oxford Univ. Press, 1926, 1929; John K. Fairbank, "The early treaty system in the Chinese world order" (*ibid.*), Key-Hiuk Kim, *The Last Phase of the East Asian World Order; Korea, Japan, and the Chinese Empire, 1860-1882*, Berkeley, Univ. of California Press, 1980.
 - 6) Ch'ü T'ung-tsu, *op. cit.*
 - 7) Shê I-tse 余貽澤, *Chung-kuo T'u-ssü Chih-tu* 『中國土司制度』 1947.
 - 8) Huang Shêng-tsêng 黃省曾, *Hsi-Yang Ch'ao-kung Tien-lü* 『西洋朝貢典錄』, 1982 edition.
 - 9) *Ming Hui-tien* 『明會典』 vols. 105-108 (Ch'ao-kung 「朝貢」).
 - 10) *Ibid.*, Vol. 108 (Ch'ao-kung T'ung-li 「朝貢通例」).
 - 11) *Ch'in-ting Ta-Ch'ing Hui-tien Shih-li* 『欽定大清會典事例』 Kuang-hsü ed., Vol. 503 (Ch'ao-kung 「朝貢」). John E. Wills, Jr., *Embassies & Illusions, Dutch and Portuguese Envoys to K'ang-hsi, 1666-1687*, Cambridge, Mass., 1984.
 - 12) Kaneyoshi Uehara, *Sakoku to Han Boeki*, 上原兼善『鎖國と藩貿易』 (*The Closing up Policy and [Liu-ch'iu-Satsuma] Provincial Trade*) 1981. Fusataka Nakamura, *Nissen Kankeishi no Kenkyu*, 中村榮孝『日鮮關係史の研究』 (Research into the history of Japan-Korean relations) 1969. Ryôji Takeda, Gencho shoki no shin to no kankei, 1802-1870, 竹田龍兒『阮朝初期の清との關係』 in Tatsuro Yamamoto ed., *Betonamu-Chugoku Kankeishi*, 山本達郎編『ベトナム中國關係史』, 1975.
 - 13) Sarasin Viraphol, *Tribute and Profit: Sino-Siamese Trade, 1652-1853*, Cambridge, Mass., 1977, Chapter IV. Harukatsu Hayashi, Nobuatsu Hayashi eds., *Kai-i hentai*, 林春勝, 林信篤編『華夷變態』 I, II, III. (Conditions Accompanying the Change from the Ming to the Barbarian Ch'ing), 1958-59 edition.
 - 14) Hisanori Wada, Tōnan Ajia ni okeru shoki kakyō shakai, *Toyo Gakuho*, 和田久徳『東南アジアにおける初期華僑社會』『東洋學報』 42-1, 1959. H. Wada, Jūgo-seiki no Jawa ni okeru Chugoku-jin no tsū-shō katsudo in *Ronshū Kindai Chūgoku Kenkyū*, 「十五世紀のジャワにおける中國人の通商活動」『論集近代中國研究』山川出版社, 1981.
 - 15) *Ch'in-ting Ta-ch'ing Hui-tien Shih-li* 『欽定大清會典事例』 Vol. 503 (Ch'ao-kung Kung-wu 「朝貢」貢物).
 - 16) Pak Chi-won, *Yeol ha ilqi* 朴趾源『熱河日記』今村與志雄譯, 平凡社, p. 5. Ryôji Takeda, *op. cit. Batabia-jō nishsi*, Vol. 1-3, 『バタヴィア城日誌』(村上直次郎譯註, 平凡社) 1-3卷. Chang Tsun-wu, *Ch'ing-Han Tsung-fang Mao-i, 1637-1894*, Academia Sinica, 1978, 張存武『清韓宗藩貿易 1637-1894』中央研究院. Yoshiharu Tsuboi, *l'Empire Vietnamien: face à la France et à la Chine 1847-1885*, L'Harmattan, 1986.
 - 17) *Ming Hui-tien* 『明會典』 Vol. 113 (Kei-tz'ü 給賜).
 - 18) Hisao Ejima, Min-dai Jochoku chōkō bōeki no gaikan, 江嶋壽雄「明代女直朝貢貿易の概観」(*Shien* 『史淵』 77).
 - 19) *Ming Hui-tien*, Vol. 111 (Kei-tz'ü).
 - 20) *Ch'in-ting Ta-ch'ing Hui-tien Shih-li*, Vol. 503 (Ch'ao-Kung).
 - 21) Shigeo Sakuma, Mindai no gaikoku bōeki-kōhaku bōeki no suii-, 佐久間重男「明代の外國貿易一貢舶貿易の推移一」(*Wada Hakushi Kanreki Kinen Toyo-shi Ronshū* 『和田博士還曆記念東洋史論集』 1951).
 - 22) Takeshi Hamashita, Kindai Ajia bōekiken ni okeru ginryū-tsū-Ajia keizaishi-zō ni kansuru ichi-kōsō-, 濱下武志「近代アジア貿易における銀流通—アジア經濟史像に關する一構

- 想—』*Shakai Keizai Shigaku* 『社會經濟史學』 51-1, 1985-4).
- 23) Chusei Suzuki, *Chibetto wo meguru Chūin-kankei shi*, 鈴木中正 『チベットをめぐる中印關係史』 (一橋書房, 1962) Chap. 8.
- 24) Cheng K'uan-ying, *Nan-yu Jih-chi* 鄭觀應 『南遊日記』 (學生書局, 1967版) p. 26.
- 25) *Ibid.*, p. 33.
- 26) Chiang Hai Ding, *A History of Straits Settlements Foreign Trade 1870-1915*, Singapore, National Museum, 1978.
- 27) K. N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean*, Cambridge, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985. Wong Lin Ken, *The Trade of Singapore, 1819-69*, *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 33. pt. 4, Dec. 1960.
- 28) Frances V. Moulder, *Japan, China and the Modern World Economy*, Cambridge, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1977, chap. 1.
- 29) Otojirō Okuda, *Meiji Shonen ni okeru Honkon Nihon-jin*, 奥田乙治郎 『明治初年に於ける香港日本人』 (臺灣總督府熱帶産業調査會, 1937), pp. 275-281.
- 30) *Ibid.*, pp. 244-247.
- 31) Kanji Ishii, *Kindai Nihon to Igrisu-shihon—Jādin=Maseson Shōkai wo Chūshin ni—* 石井寛治 『近代日本とイギリス資本—ジャーディン=マセソン商會を中心に—』 東京大学出版會, 1984), Chap. 2.
- 32) Michio Fujimura, *Meiji shoki ni okeru Nisshin-kōshō no ichi danmen—Ryū-kyū buntō jōyaku wo megutte—(I)*, 藤村道生 「明治初期における日清交渉の一断面—琉球分島條約をめぐる—(上)」 (*Nagoya Daigaku Bungakubu Kenkyū Ronshū—Shigaku—*) 『名古屋大學文學部研究論集(史學)』 16, 1968.
M. Fujimura, *Meiji-ishin-gaikō no kyu-kokusai kankei e no taiō—Nisshin shūkōjōki no seiritsu wo megutte—*, 藤村道生 「明治維新外交の舊國際關係への對應—日清修好條規をめぐる—」 (*Ibid.*, Vol. 14, 1966).
- 33) Kin-ichi Yoshida, *Kindai Roshin Kankei Shi*, 吉田金一 『近代露清關係史』 (近藤出版社, 1974), Chap. 3.
Eric Widmer, *The Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Peking During the 18th Century*, Cambridge, Mass., 1976.
- 34) Masataka Banno, *Sōrigamon no setsuritsu katei, Kindai Chūgoku Kenkyū*, 坂野正高 「總理衙門の設立過程」 (*Kindai Chūgoku Kenkyū* 『近代中國研究』 東京大學出版會, 1958), Vol. I, pp. 55-61.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: I am most grateful to Mr. Niel Burton and Mr. Christian Daniels for bringing this paper to completion.