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Retrieving Nishita Kitaro's Place of Nothingness in "Red Moon": Manchukuo as Civilizational Bridge Reinvented

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Retrieving Nishita Kitaro's Place of Nothingness in "Red Moon" :

Manchukuo as Civilizational Bridge Reinvented

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Rescuing Manchukuo as Civilizational Bridge

Manchukuo is still alive! Japan's defeat that physically terminated Manchukuo in 1945, which had been established and maintained by force under Japan's military guardianship, has never uprooted the romanticized ideal of the "princely way and the happy land" or the aspiration for a higher civilization that Manchukuo once symbolized. Manchukuo used to be the answer that Japanese leaders once gave to questions about Japan's place in the world in the 1930's. Deprived of such an answer for six decades after the defeat, cries for normal statehood surge again in post-Cold War era in which globalization seems increasingly prevalent. Globalization sensitizes contemporary Japanese thinkers to the ambiguous as well as insufficient representation of Japanese identification under continued American occupation troops. To move beyond, reconnection to the interrupted and suppressed path of Japanese self-identification through recollecting Manchukuo is a plausible measure. However, recounting should ensure that the awakened memory preserves an uncorrupt, grass-root image of Japanese subjectivity in order to undergird the return to normalcy. The movie "Red Moon" and the mini-series "The Princess in Migration and the Brother of the Last Emperor" are such acts of cultural governance indeed.

Having perceived a divided and unjust world of multiple civilizations, the Japanese

thinkers conceived of Manchukuo as the model of coexistence. It was in its life time a military endeavor of conquest and reformation, but, in its contemporary video revival, a cultural practice of transcending patriotism, which ruined the hope for Manchukuo to become a bridge of civilizations. This paper studies the notion of bridging civilizations and suggests that Manchukuo has been an ideal place for Japan to demonstrate its role as a bridge between civilizations, other than just nationalism or colonialism familiar to readers.¹ This paper is a conceptual exercise to explain how in the modern Japanese mind, the distinctive notion of bridging civilizations, Manchukuo, and Japan's identity strategy could have all been connected to one another. The ultimate cultural challenge for Japan has always been to present its inbetween ambivalence toward the binary world of the Orient vs. the Occident. Granted that critical reflections on Orientalism as well as Occidentalism challenge the authenticity of narratives on civilization,² the long-standing self-conception as a bridge among civilizations, which reproduces the image of their authenticity, continues to attract attention in many former colonies.

While the bridge is intended to bring together the East and the West, it inevitably shares the same ontological assumption leading to the confrontational understanding of civilizational politics. Namely, the East and the West have to be ontologically distinctive from each other on opposite sides of the bridge. The momentum of confrontation comes not only from the believed distinction between the two, but also from the attempt to integrate the 'East' into one single action unit to defend the intrusion of the West. This paper will discern how and why the quest for transcendence, presupposed by the bridge self-conception, could come from a retrospective discourse, as opposed to the future-oriented mutual learning and mingling. Under the peculiar narrative framework on the Japanese bridge, 'Japan' existed even before the birth of civilizations. By comparing an Indian bridging narrative with its Japanese counterpart, this paper shows how the reduction of the latter to a philosophical justification of conquest and

violence can come about.

Both Japan and India were threatened by imperialist intrusion and belonged within the scope of Oriental despotism designated to all Eastern polities by Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831).³ Thinkers of both nations promoted the idea of bridging civilizations at the turn to the 20th century. While both groups included each other in the scope of 'the East', each considers their own community as sitting on the line separating the East from the West. China was their common designated member of the East.⁴ In contrast, no noticeable thinker in China ever promoted China as a bridge between the East and the West. In any case, Indian, Japanese and Chinese thinkers together reproduced the authenticity of China as one belonging to an ontologically distinctive 'East', instead of seeing it as a bridge. However, Japan never became a colony while India remained one for over a century. Despite the placement of India and China in the East by Japanese thinkers, the Japanese reformation plan to modernize the East largely pointed at and yet incurred seriously debates about China, but not India. Yet, Indian intellectuals showed more interest in aligning with China, not transforming it.

It is in this civilizational context that Japan's practice of bridging in Manchuria, through the establishment of Manchukuo (1932-1945) united all narrators involved in the debate on China. Few, if any, were opposed to the annexation of Manchuria despite the great differences in deriving philosophical justifications of the act.⁵ Manchukuo served as a promise of "the Princely Way and the Happy Land," where East and West were allegedly harmonized.⁶ The epistemological speculation of this paper is that the role of Manchukuo served two functions in the construction of Japanese modernity: Manchukuo could transcend the ontological distinction between East and West by finding a higher ontology in nothingness; and Manchukuo could demonstrate the absolute inclusiveness of the Japanese nation as a collective bridge of civilizations. This grandeur of purpose, which the short-lived military occupation reduced to sheer camouflage of invasion at the time, can only be redeemed by culturally purging the

military aspect from the aborted Manchukuo before it can support Japan to credibly host civilizations of all kinds once more. The feminist exposure of the cruelty in the military regimes by both *Red Moon* and *the Princess in Migration and the Brother of the Last Emperor* contribute to that mission.

To appreciate historical context and the philosophical root of *Red Moon*, this paper closely examines Nishida Kitaro's (1870-1945) views. This is not because Nishida had spoken on Manchuria but because Manchuria, as reification, made his philosophy of nothingness practically relevant. Most existing notes on Manchukuo attested to the ardent support provided by the Oriental (*toyo*) Studies, which was in association with the Tokyo school indebted to Shiratori Kurakichi (1865-1942). Few ever tried to trace Manchukuo in the thoughts of the contending Kyoto School, of which belonged to Nishida. A possible explanation for the lacuna of Nishida in the literature on Manchukuo is the Kyoto school's strong relationship with the navy; Manchukuo was the result of efforts by the army, which was allied to the Tokyo School. Against the background of an Indian approach to bridging civilizations, envisioned by Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), the following discussion examines the rediscovery of Manchukuo in *Red Moon* which, although touching little on civilizational politics, tackles patriotism which destroyed Manchukuo and its attempt at bridging civilizations to Japanese modernity, then to Nishida's philosophy of nothingness, and finally back to Manchuria and Manchukuo. *Red Moon* is therefore about the grass root response to the failure of Manchukuo. Its silence on civilizational issue and seeming political ignorance may well be meant as a lesson of what exactly being a civilization bridge must call for.

Reinventing the Grass-root View of Manchukuo

Lusting for the princely way in Manchuria has persisted even for Japan of the 21st century. Two popular films featuring award winner Takako Tokiwa, including the movie "*Red Moon*"

(2004) and the mini-series “The Princess in Migration and the Brother of the Last Emperor” (2003), are stories about the Japanese settlers’ aborted aspiration to build Manchukuo. Both films are outright critical of the Japanese military’s manipulation, as well as its abuse of Manchukuo’s set up. However, there was ambivalence toward Manchukuo in itself. Ironically, at the very end of Red Moon, Manchukuo remained a dream land for the fleeing settler. In the mini-series, the critical voices toward the Fascist tyranny in Manchukuo mainly come from females. Actions, revolutionary or not, were initiatives by women. It is the collection of these different feminine roles that the ideal of the princely way has been carried throughout the 20th century. The military is in the film exclusively to be faulted for the loss of Manchukuo. On the other hand, the princely way represented by the combination of these energizing roles parallels the place of nothingness that absorbs all specific situations into a fundamental, mothering existence where all lives originate.

To open the narrative of Red Moon, Namiko Morita and her family answered the call by the government to migrate to Manchuria for a new life. She helped her husband Yutaro Morita to run a wine brewery. She had a number of men in her new life. In addition to Yutaro, there was her old lover Colonel Kanji Osugi, who guaranteed the profit of the brewery through his connection in the Kwantung Army, Japan’s infamous troops that once defeated Russia in 1905 and the major girder of Manchukuo. She also met the secret agent Keisuke Himuro, whom she developed a secret desire of love to the extent she mistakenly contrived the death of her children’s Russia teacher Elena after discovering she and Himuro had an affair. The informant had never wanted Elena to die but ironically her report led Himuro execute Elena in front of her. Note that Elena’s death is the single most important watershed of the movie, after which the seemingly prosperous Manchukuo evolves into a disaster. It is so important that a clip of Elena’s execution precedes the formal beginning of the movie. The other important men in Namiko’s life were her two sons. The first son, Kazuo, joined the military; the other, named

Kohei in the movie, composed his mother's story in his real life in 2001, which was made into Red Moon in 2005.

Three of the five men died for their country. The fourth wanted to die out of guilt. The fifth thought of death out of shame. To begin, Yutaro resolutely left her and children after a brief reunion which they passed the ordeal of exile to accomplish. He wanted to honor his country and, despite overage, voluntarily joined the concentration camp and died of disease. Osugi was by no means a model of patriotism in comparison. Nevertheless, having heard Himuro's severe criticism of the escaping Kwantung Army, Osugi was determined to ending his life in an ultimate and yet futile battle with the Russians. Kazuo similarly died for his country during his conscription. Namiko's vivid refusal to celebrate Kazuo's conscription along with the crowd at the moment of his innocent departure was a harbinger for his inevitable death. Himuro, out of deep guilt of having executed Elena, sought capital punishment from her father, only to be punished by a shot on his right knee. Addicted to opium afterwards, Himuro was the only adult male in Namiko's life that survived, albeit in great pain. Even Kohei, at 10 or so, wanted to die upon witnessing the affair between his mother and Himuro. She was just in time to save him. This coincidentally gave her an opportunity to assert her motherhood, which in the end appeared to be what Manchukuo should have been really about.

Two kinds of men appeared in the narrative, those who struggled to run away from dangers and those who were not afraid of death. Life is not free. One has to work extremely hard for chances of survival in the time of war, particularly if one is unfortunately on the losing side. Morita's staff that was slow or reluctant to run all died. She tried to persuade everyone to run for life and asked why many men did not. Sarcastically, the only man in her life that survived was a secret agent, who had double faces. Indeed, Himuro's reason for giving up was the guilt of killing, not any patriotic cause, nor consistency with the required loyalty expected of a secret agent. As Elena's father refused to kill him for revenge, Himuro sank into an opium

addict. Namiko was determined to bringing her lover back to life, even to the extent of alienating her children. Like a mother giving life to her children, she succeeded in giving a new life to Himuro. Himuro, however, decided to surrender himself to the Chinese authorities, in the hope that he could help to relieve his country of the crime done to Chinese people. This was the first step of rebirth, according to him, and a decision that Namiko conceived of as the spirit of her own life from then on.

Namiko was uncharacteristically different from the other two women in the movie—Elena and Namiko's teenage daughter Misaki. They were both traditional as Elena subscribed to Soviet patriotism and Misaki to the duty of faithful wife which her mother failed. In fact, patriotism was the cause of Elena's death and lacking patriotism, Namiko's insensitive miscalculation of the consequence of her amateur spying. Namiko was, on the contrary, adamant in pursuing her personal love, from the power of which she could care the lives of all. Her line that "don't give up, and follow the mother, then there will be a way" echoes her advice to all the others that one's life is more important than one's mother land. Children were intrinsic to her personhood, she declared. If she died, they died. For them to live, she must live. For her to live, she went on pronouncing, she needed the support of love which Himuro was the only one who could offer during their refuge. Living and loving were the two key messages Namiko left for the audience. While suffering hardship in the refugee camp, she was able to burst into ecstasy upon a sudden realization that all the suffering actually meant that, happily, the war had concluded. Her emotional mobility enabled her to quickly withdraw from whichever situation that was becoming dangerous, hence her constant interrogation—why can't one run away? And her ultimate advice—whoever wants to live, follow me (read: the mother).

The lessons Namiko learned and gave in Manchuria were multiple. First of all, to survive was not being selfish. She was not just for her own survival, but for the survival of everyone else who was willing to listen. Secondly, survival required efforts. Luck was not reliable. Thirdly,

ironically in light of Elena's death, the most shameful thing in the world was wasting lives, rather than running away. Fourth, confusion was the base of rebirth as Himuro's loss of consciousness paved his way to a new life. In the end, amidst the curse on Manchukuo by the fleeing soldiers on their way home, Namiko confessed that she was thankful for Manchuria. Red moon at the end of the film replaces red sun in the beginning of the Moritas' adventure. Red sun was Kwantung Army's portrayal of Manchukuo. By contrast, the feminine red moon symbolized the true spirit of life that was reborn, discovered, or transformed by Namiko's incessant pursuit of love to empower herself and thus open up new possibilities for survival of herself, her family, her lovers as well as her other acquaintances. Manchuria as the origin of life and meaning outlives the political Manchukuo.

Red Moon rediscovers a Manchukuo that was not consciously military or political and is not to be erased all together with Japan's military defeat. There is an invincible drive for hope and the spirit of primitive love inside of Namiko, who is the witness of political fiasco as well as the ultimate source of life. What is it about Namiko that enables her incessant quest for survival, along with other nameless immigrants that dreamed of the Princely Land in Manchuria? If the military and political forces could not make sense of her character, self-empowerment and agency for hope must have had deeper and stronger sources. While the literature records the fascination with Mongolia and Manchuria amongst the Japanese rank-and-file, the arousal caused by Mongolia and Manchuria is in itself yet to be explained. Namiko cannot explain her own drive or her ultimate gratitude for being in Manchuria. The historical and philosophical contexts that make sense of her character and her encountering in Manchuria are left unspoken, but are essential to understanding the atavistic attachment to Manchuria in the movie. In short, Red Moon's silence on the civilizational issue is no reflection of its irrelevance. Rather, the silence testifies to its prevalence that makes Namiko's deconstruction of patriotism a purposeful move to redeem Japan's capacity to be a civilizational bridge and Manchukuo's

destiny to become one. The rest of this paper explores the philosophical root that girds the narratives of Red Moon, which connects Manchukuo, civilizational politics and Japan's place in the world, to make the continuous agency for cultural bridging possible.

Japan's Manchuria in the Pre-WWII Context

Ishihara Kanji (1889-1949), an ardent advocate of the princely way and the happy land who plotted the Mukden incident, gave a quite materialist interpretation to the meaning of Manchukuo by identifying the Mongolia-Manchuria region as Japan's lifeline.⁷ Later on, the notion of East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere likewise strengthened the adherence to materialism since the 'sphere' was conceived of as the constitution of mutually supporting economies. However, Manchukuo was not just about materialism. Facing the opposition by Western nations, Japan insisted on pushing through its plans in Manchuria with determination – even to the extent of quitting the League of Nations in 1933. Ishihara's theory, instead, stressed the harmonious cooperation among the five 'nations' in Manchuria (Han Chinese, Koreans, Japanese, Mongolians and Manchurians). He believed that the spirit of "the princely way and the happy land" could be a model for neighboring Asian people to emulate whereby Japan demonstrated to the world its achievement of true universality.⁸ As Osugi proclaimed in Red Moon upon the arrival of the listening Moritas, "The end of the world," "the wild field," and "the hopeless" land would all become a symbol of hope.

To extend the Sun Goddess' influence to Manchukuo, the Kwantung Army arranged for the marriage between the last Manchurian (or Chinese) emperor's family and a Japanese woman of imperial descent to complete the story of the princely land. *Kojiki* (the earliest Imperial Chronicle) notes that all the lands in Japan should be connected in the kinship of blood with the Goddess's line. Through the marriage, Manchukuo also acquired a place in the

Goddess' domain. Japanese settlers responded to the extension of the imperial family with enthusiasm. Thousands moved to Manchuria to witness (or be witnessed by) the princely way by contributing to the development of the happy land of Mancukuo. Neither capitalism nor imperialism could explain the exodus of lower class immigrants or the noticeable enthusiasm amongst them. There was the desire for new life as Yutaro fearlessly cut his finger to express his determination to seek "reliance on Manchuria" for his brewery without Osugi's participation. The phenomenon could not be explained by for-profit incentives, interest in accumulating capitals, or imperialist conquest of territory. The competitive atmosphere against Western dominance could have played a part,⁹ but the excitement over being a witness, and even a participant in the rise of the princely way alone should have been a sufficient incentive.

The Mongolian-Manchurian lure to the Japanese rank-and-file existed even before the Mukden incident, as well as Nishida's philosophy of nothingness. Shiratori's research, both in terms of the subject and the findings, reflected the appeal of Manchuria to intellectuals. Stefan Tanaka detects an Orientalist mind set in Shiratori's writing on Manchuria. Before he was trained in Western philosophy and science, Shiratori was a student of conservative Sinology,¹⁰ hence the burden on him to prove that Japan was historically as well as spiritually independent from China. The Orientalist writers in Europe never experienced the same burden of proof that Shiratori was forced to shoulder. Under the pressure of simultaneously showing independence of Japan from Sinologist convention and the capacity of Japan to overtake Europe, Shiratori's so-called Orientalist treatment of China and Mongolia mimicked the European treatment of China. Such mimicking was instrumental to the cleansing of Japan's Chinese component. Moreover, it was not Christianity that supported Shiratori's view on China, but Goddess Amaterasu. The latter represented an appeal to the origin rather than to the destiny in modernity. Despite his exaggerated critique on Shiratori's Orientalism, Tanaka is nonetheless keen on Shiratori's motivation behind his treatment of Mongolia.

Shiratori, as well as his student Tsuda Soukichi (1873-1961) and others, joined the Geological Survey Institute of Southern Manchurian Railway under the leadership of Goto Shinpei (1857-1929) in 1906; Goto was a former Governor of Taiwan. By 1914, they together concluded a large-scaled survey in Northern China's villages. Although the military dismissed these materials as being impractical and shut down the research department, Shiratori was able to make significant intellectual use of the data in his later proposition on China and, ultimately, on Japan, particularly regarding the future of their civilization. Shiratori altered his thinking on Japan's Manchuria policy accordingly, from supporting the neutrality of Manchuria to its conquest. In fact, most China scholars of Japan at the time supported military action in Manchuria despite their irreconcilable perspectives. For Shiratori, a neutral Manchuria could avoid other powers from intervening within its territory, so as to leave room for Japan's influence. As the United States place its support behind China, Shiratori agreed that since Manchuria could only fare well under Japan, interference from other powers had to be denied. Himuro's execution of Elena is agreeable only in the same patriotic, competitive frame of world politics, which Namiko's contrarian insistence on living exposed to be defeating the purpose, however. Namiko was tantamount to challenging Shiratori to admit that the power of origin should be motherhood rather than Shinto patriotism.

Tanaka discovered an ulterior intention beneath Shiratori's treatment of his subject. Shiratori wanted to show that Mongolia was the origin of heaven both in Christianity and in Confucianism so as to equalize the Eastern and the Western civilizations. In the East, he wanted to show how Japan and China evolved into different paths contingent upon the imagined kinship to Amaterasu. The Kinship enabled the Japanese to learn from foreign cultures with a firm identity; but without it, the Chinese eventually reduced itself to no more than a bunch of cultural conservatives that blocked learning for the sake of protecting an increasingly outdated identity. Therefore, Shiratori was able to explain why Japan could learn

from Western modernity while at the same time still understand the Eastern way. If Tanaka's reading is accurate, Shiratori shared with younger Nishida a will to achieve a higher level of universality for Japan than Europe could ever dream of. By implication, both the East and the West are ontologically fixed.

In addition to intellectuals' attention on Manchuria, Li Narangoa also briefs an incident which suggests that the same appeal was there for the Japanese in general.¹¹ Li records how Onisaburo Deguchi (1871-1948), the spiritual teacher of Omotokyo, arouse worship of his heroism after his coincidental trip to Manchuria and Mongolia. Omotokyo was a religious derivative of Shinto, whose priests promoted the new religion as a bridge of civilization. They preached about world peace and humanism in Europe but anti-colonialism in Asia. Omotokyo promoted the idea of uniting East Asia by first taking over Manchuria and Mongolia. Ishihara, the Japanese military in Manchu area, and Omotokyo were mutually informed. In fact, Omotokyo specifically believed that the Eastern Spirit could liberate Manchuria from Western materialism. However, Omotokyo was treated as a suspect by the military whose state Shinto Omotokyo disliked and criticized. In 1921, the military put Onisaburo under house arrest by accusing him of treason.

Coincidence led Onisaburo to Mongolia in 1924 wearing the disguise of a Lama. He led a troop of 1,000 independence fighters in Mongolia to oppose Zhang Zuoling, the Manchurian Warlord. His action later triggered syndromes of hero worship among Manchurian Ronins, pan-Asianists and the Japanese media, where Onisaburo consolidated his image of the king of fairyland. He returned to Japan after six months, reporting his alleged contribution to the agricultural development in Manchuria-Mongolia purported to resolving the surplus population in Japan. Travels to Mongolia and Manchuria quickly became a fad in Japan. On the other hand, the treason trials against Onisaburo lost momentum, as he seemed effective in demonstrating his loyalty to Japan.

What had driven the military, the settlers, and the religious disciples to Manchuria-Mongolia was more than the mundane interests in expansion. Perhaps the quest for higher capital accumulation, the opportunity to start a new life, and the excitement over imaginative adventure was all part of the overall motive to support the taking over of Manchuria-Mongolia. However, anywhere else such as Korea, Taiwan, Burma, etc., would have to a different extent satisfied these motives. They did not, though; none of them could have represented the East as China could. To do so would have completely fallen short of the promise of transcendence beyond the East-West divide. Something more fundamental should have been working to fascinate the Japanese of the time with the formation of Manchukuo in 1931.¹² It was the new life given by the ultimate motherhood to transcend the past that, noted in a script of Red Moon, “bred the colossal hope never possible in Otaru” (Read: Japan). This is where Nishida’s theory becomes most powerful. It explains, as well as reflects, an inexpressible connection among the imagination of mothering Amaterasu, Japan’s readiness to bridge civilizations, and the meaning of Manchukuo. This does not mean that Nishida and his school caused the expansion moves, but that their enthusiasm aroused by Japan’s rise, which was witnessed and cemented by the Manchurian-Mongolian lifeline, provided a clue to the otherwise mysterious motivating force. The imagination of being related to the Goddess – thanks to the actual physical presence in Manchuria – was the shortest road to the Goddess’ place, being the ultimate seer and the place of nothingness.

According to Nishida, the place of nothingness could not be seen by any, but it could ‘see all’. It could not be derived from anything, yet could be the origin of anything. It could not take an action, but actions of all sorts could only take place in the “place.” Shiratori’s life long struggle for a Japanese identity removed from China pointed to a Manchuria that happened to be the origin of civilizations, which later evolved into the Confucian East and the Christian West. His absolute loyalty to the Imperial family sanctified his scholarship to the service of Shinto.

Manchuria was not a virgin land or an Orientalized 'Other', which critics of later generations denounce the Kwantung Army's expansion for: Instead, from Nishida's philosophical hindsight, the Kwantung Army and the settlers were in Manchuria to "be seen". This was similar to the politics of representation where, in the later period of globalization, multi-culturalists want to voice from a subaltern, local identity before an imagined global audience. In pre-WWII Japan, when Shinto ran into the predicament of Japan being either indistinctly separated from Chinese Confucianism or obsessively indulged in Westernization, how to represent Amaterasu's lasting spirit of over ten thousands years proved to be extremely challenging. Manchuria could well have been the perfect answer to this quest for being "seen" in action. It is on this topic Red Moon contests the meaning of Manchuria powerfully—it should be a place to live, not to die. Killing the worthless Chinese, the Soviet spy, or oneself is no less than killing Manchukuo. Note the moment when Namiko overcame the death instinct of Misaki and Kohei, the frozen river of Manchuria melt into springs.

The philosophy of place and nothingness could provide a language that could put words into describing the inexpressible desire of representing a universal spirit. Actions in the origin of civilization paralleled the sense of "coming from the place of nothingness". Actions were to be seen by the ultimate seer, Amaterasu. The princely way and the happy land that supposedly brought together the East and the West in their common origin, the motherhood of the Sun Goddess, would have proven the unlimited possibility and the highest form of universality under Shinto. If the sense of representing the lasting spirit of Amaterasu was so pervasive and common sensual in pre-WWII Japan, it was not an expressible motivation in the familiar language of modernity. Nishida was able to devise a self-philosophy that took advantage of such concepts as "subjectivity," "goodness," "experience" and so on, which he borrowed from European philosophical traditions, to translate the ubiquitous desire to transcend the East-West divide in Japan.¹³ Manchuria, embedded in the imagination of the happy land, the life line, the

collectivity of the mothering settlers, and the place where the ultimate seer looks out into the world; the land/regime bridges civilizations of the East and the West not only through their common destiny but in their common origin.

Two Models of Bridging Civilizations

Contrasting the civilizational bridge in a common origin, the civilizational bridge in a common destiny is an opposite alternative. Rabindranath Tagore represented this alternative. A quick study of Tagore indicated different strategies of cultural governance. Tagore was one excellent example of how a colonial intellectual, once accepted by the governor's society, could become an ardent advocate for mutual learning among civilizations. Indeed, he traveled to both China and Japan with the purpose of convincing local intellectuals of the merit of their traditions, from which Tagore believes Western materialist civilization had much to learn. To liberate human beings from materialism, Tagore resorted to the spiritual civilizations of the East. His preaching encountered suspicion from those who endeavored to catch up with Western materialism. Positive repercussions registered in some circle nonetheless. Okakura was Tagore's best intellectual comrade in Japan while Tan Yunshan (1898-1983) was the most well known ally in China. Interestingly, Okakura lived the latter part of his life in the United States and Tan Yunshan accepted Tagore's invitation to manage *Visva Bharati* in Shantiniketan for the most part of his career.

"The princely way and the Happy land" which the Kwantung Army struggled to establish in Manchuria wedged right through Tagore's relation with Japan. Despite the suspicion and criticism he experienced while visiting China in 1924, the 1931 Mukden incident sparked Tagore's call for rescue to the Chinese side. The fact that the Chinese Marxists were against him was, after all, a quite modern/Western phenomenon, which could be easily dismissed in his

quest for an Eastern spiritual alliance. Tagore had always imagined China to be just another civilization along side of India, destined to join forces in transforming materialism. He was disappointed that Japan ignored his advice to seek wisdom from tradition. However, the irony was that the princely way was a direct manifestation of a Goddess' blessing that originated from *Kojiki*. The "princely" combination of the East and the West was not incompatible with Tagore's own effort of bridging civilizations, at least at the abstract level; there were clearly remnants of ancient thought in Japan's military conquest of Manchuria and the establishment of a modern state of Manchukuo. Accordingly, Manchukuo could not be reduced to only a materialist product of modernity or a base for capitalist/mercantilist industrialization.¹⁴

Japan was no India, indeed, in that Japan was never a colony while India had been one for over one hundred years. Resistance became the dominant discourse toward imperialism in the colony if India were to achieve independence. But in Japan, independence was a different issue defined mostly in terms of culture. Learning from the West was thus still a viable approach in Japan, since learning did not simultaneously take physical subjugation for granted as it would have under colonialism rule in India. It was also possible for the Japanese intellectuals to imagine the day when Japan eventually overtakes the West. Furthermore, the Japanese nation is, according to the ancient myth, the descendent of Goddess Amaterasu and was one in unity. By comparison, India was divided into numerous smaller gatherings – each distinctive in religious and linguistic characteristics. This probably explains why in Japan the narratives on modernity resided primarily on the national level, while India witnessed mostly the individualist discourses of liberation.

For Tagore, the East and the West met with each individual's mind. Individuals as meeting places required conscious preparation. Contemporary Japanese American scholar Akira Iriye similarly stresses the effort of each individual to bring together civilizations, almost a century later. Iriye's career began at Harvard University a few years after Japan's thorough defeat at

the end of WWII. It appears that his conditions have not been much different from Tagore's, which was one from a supposedly inferior and yet well-recognized position of achievement. Iriye portrays his own scholarship as one of "centrism,"¹⁵ which urges the Japanese people to engage in self-reflections on their nation's China policy during the war. Through what he calls cultural diplomacy and individual diplomacy, Iriye embodies Tagore's ideal of bridging civilizations through learning and mediation at the individual level.

Tagore, in his time, while enjoying friendship of Okakura,¹⁶ benefited mostly from Chinese Tan Yunshan,¹⁷ who assisted the poet in establishing the International/World University in the poet's hometown Shantiniketan – in affiliation with which the first institute of China studies in India emerged under Tan Yunshan's entrepreneurship. Tan raised fund from China and acquired books for the library. His son Chung has likewise devoted his entire career to the development of India's China study. Tagore wanted to expose children to a persistent imbuing of humanism and Mother Nature. As a result, his lectures were given under the open sky and beneath trees.¹⁸ Even today, home students attend Vishva Bharati starting from kindergarteners and, hopefully, conclude their academic careers with PhD in philosophy. The hall that hosts the Institute of China Studies is one filled with both Buddhist scriptures and images. Guest lectures are given with listeners sitting on the blanket, who compliment the lecturers with affirming tones in accord and sing Tagore's poem at the end as a show of gratitude.

Although Tagore appeared active in preaching the necessity of mutual learning and the importance of preserving Eastern traditions, he was conservative to the extent that his answer was neither one of reformation nor change at the societal or 'civilizational' level. The action that one should take to open up and allow civilizations to meet inside one's mind seemed functional to the preservation of civilizations as they are. In fact, Tagore praised Confucianism and frequently cited the exportation of Buddhism from India to China in ancient time and its

re-importation back into India. For Tagore, all exchanges were equal and no such question of who was more superior needed to be asked. All this depended on the Eastern societies to willingly treat their own tradition with a positive attitude and the resultant effort of preserving the tradition. In comparison, Okakura seemed less anxious in the sense that for him, the Eastern culture, from India to Japan, already displayed unity. Individuals in the East were ready and capable of providing love and benevolence. In short, Okakura was not worried that the Eastern traditions would dwindle before Western materialism.¹⁹

Readiness and Levels of Civilizational Bridge

Civilizational bridges	Collective	Individual
To be achieved	Kwantung Army's Manchukuo	Tagore's India
Already existent	Nishida's Japan	Okakura's Asia

Okakura's decision to settle in Boston attested to the limitation of his thought in Japan and the difference between the Indian bridge and the Japanese bridge of the time. His image continues to inspire cosmopolitan thinking in the 21st century Japan. While noticeable attention to the role of individual endeavor emerges in Japan today, the Japanese bridge since the early 20th century has primarily focused on collective Japan, between the East and the West. It was Japan's collective subjectivity that bothered Nishida. In fact, most Japanese modern thinkers were likewise preoccupied with how to represent the Japanese subjectivity to the world. Shiratori wrote the first systematic theory on Japan's role as a bridge of civilizations. Japan's role was to lead the East into modernity, according to Shiratori, because Japan was the only modern country that simultaneously understood the East. The West lacked such a universal spirit in comparison. Shiratori's enthusiasm in the origin of civilization in Mongolia- Manchuria provided a clue to why this area fascinates most Japanese.

Stefan Tanaka noted how, with the assistance of scientific linguistics and archeology, Shiratori was able to trace the origin of Christianity (as well as Confucianism) to Mongolia-Manchuria, thereby equalizing the two civilizations.²⁰ As a Shinto absolutist, Shiratori held that Japan, due to its permanent and stable divine identity, was the only God-made country in the world and the only country that was able to acquire new civilizations without suffering the fear of extinction. Shiratori painstakingly showed how Japan was able to constantly mingle different civilizations through north-south contacts, which the secular Chinese dynasties, embedded in conservative ritual politics, had failed to accomplish. The implicit parallel between Mongolia-Manchuria and Japan's divinity exists in their both being original in divinity as well as transcendent of specific civilizations. Ironically it was Nishida of the rivalry Kyoto School that gave a philosophical foundation of their connection. Nishida, after all, was a University of Tokyo alumnus.

In effect, the puzzle that Nishida dealt with was also the one left by Shiratori. Precisely, the puzzle was a mechanism for what could have been a justification allowing the Japanese nation to stay together and simultaneously provide it with a divine origin and a constant mixer. Moreover, how exactly could have the true learner been exempted from the internal split if both the East and the West had co-existed? Eventually, how exactly a bridge of civilizations – one which acquired both the East and the West characteristics – could have had its own subjectivity? Or, put differently, he would like to know where Japan's place was. At the grass root, this appeal causes no puzzle. Namiko felt no split among lovers, nor attachment to the national state. Likewise, these were concerns quite far away from Tagore's attempt at transcendence beyond national identities. Nishida was eager to show what Japan had always been rather than what Japan could be. In addition, Nishida denied the possibility of other countries mimicking Japan's way of bridging, so preaching was not necessary for Nishida as for Tagore. Tagore did not worry about the maintenance of subjectivity since individuals had to consciously allow their

own bodies to serve as the meeting places of civilizations. Subjectivity was thus the assumption for such meetings to take place.

In contrast, Nishida wondered about where such subjectivity (i.e. *jiti*, or literally foundational corpse) was possible while Japan shifted between the East and the West. He finally gave birth to the philosophy of “nothingness.”²¹ It was in the place of nothingness where the Japanese nation must have existed, according to his argument. In all specific situations, Japan was an actor whose meaning was contingent upon an ‘Other’ (Osugi, Yutaro, Hirumo, Kazuo, or Kohei) that was interacting with Japan. Shifting between situations (or between Namiko’s lovers), Japan the actor could not determine the shifting in specific situations. There must have been ultimate motherhood (read: Japan, Amaterasu, Namiko, red moon, Manchuria), that existed beyond specific situations watching and providing the subjectivity that determined the shift whenever it occurred. By definition, the subjectivity beyond specific situations did not depend on an “Other.” Logically it would have to be in nothingness and, as an ultimate seer, could not be seen.²² The ultimate seer, in nothingness, might as well be such a dramatic expression of divinity, whose form (or lack of form) could not be seen or shown.²³ Thus, the ultimate seer parallels the imagination of Amaterasu, the Goddess and the pre-ontological origin of everything possible, hence the invincible drive for living through repeated oedals.

Scholars of the Kyoto school did not hesitate to cite Shinto scriptures when expounding the meanings of Japan’s Pacific War, indicating a connection between Shinto and the philosophy of nothingness.²⁴ The constant shifting actor among specific situations and nothingness composed such a dialectical dyad to enable the simultaneous existence of everything and their opposite.²⁵ Learning from the West was, for the Kyoto School, no longer Tagore’s sense of learning, but a divine mission to be carried out through a predestined role given by the Goddess expressible (or inexpressible) only in nothingness. Because for each individual, it was a duty to learn and, conceptually, it was something that only the Japanese

could learn, Japan was the sole country that could represent the world. Equally important, Nishida's was not learning from his own culture, which Tagore urged, since his own culture should have been transcendental. As a result, Tagore's individual learners learning each from their own culture gave way to Japan as the collective learner that was freed by an ultimate seer from any specific culture.

The time Tagore was in Japan was also the time the Kwantung Army prepared for actions in Manchuria. The Mukden incident of September 18, 1931, which set off a chain of events leading to the establishment of Manchukuo, pushed Tagore into the pits of disappointment. This was five years after the publication of the philosophy of nothingness and ten years before the Kyoto School gave their open support for the Pacific war. Instead of blaming Kyoto school's notorious intervention during the heyday of war for being partially responsible for the war, the earlier discussion suggested the contrary--that it was the Kwantung Army's action in Manchuria that sent the innocent philosophers of nothingness into a fit. Manchuria reified the origin of civilizations and, wishfully, its development could further testify to the mix of civilizations that only the Goddess state of Japan could facilitate.

The Meaning of Bridging Civilizations

It should be intelligible by now to argue that Namiko's loving and living for the sake of rescuing Manchukuo plagued by patriotism has a much deeper repercussion. The morale to provide a grass root reinterpretation of the meaning of Manchukuo is to re/assert Japan's civilizational identity. Without such a purpose, Red Moon is unnecessary. At best, its Manchukuo background would be cosmetic. Anti-war films could be shot anywhere, after all. In other words, Red Moon is more than transcending patriotism. There is a next step, which the scenario of Manchukuo implicates. And, the next step is to reclaim the status of civilizational

bridge for Japan to which the scenario of Manchukuo exclusively alludes.

A bridge of civilizations exists wherever different civilizations meet. Theoretically, this rendezvous point could exist at any level of civilization – say, a marriage between two family traditions, such as the migrating princess, or an immigrant, such as Namiko.. However, to justify one's own community as a bridge of civilizations requires conscious conceptualization of a self-role as a two-way meeting point. Colonies often witness the adoption of the notion of the bridge, especially among indigenous intellectuals trained in the 'motherland'. Many Indian intellectuals, for example, consider India to be a bridge for the East and the West. Colonial Taiwan, another example, adopted a similar self-expectation, save that the bridge was between China and Japan rather than one between East and West.²⁶ In comparison, there has been no noticeable narrative on China as a bridge of civilizations in Chinese literature, despite the humiliation felt by Chinese during the second half of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century under Western imperialism. Interestingly Japan, a country spared the fate of colonization and protected by ocean on all sides, the bridge notion has always been fashionable, defeating other contending national role-conceptions. This is still true even today.

In the earlier discussion, bridging civilizations refers to those thinkers, places, themes, mechanisms and other factors that provide routes allowing mutual influence between different civilizations, as defined by any narrators on civilizations. The missionary, the merchant or the comprador facilitating one-sided influences are not considered relevant in this paper. Bridges that have been consciously understood as bridging the East and the West probably exist in everywhere in Asia – except in China. Perhaps because most Chinese narrators on civilization are more interested in importing Western civilizations to China than the other way around. China is always regarded as the representative of the East in the minds of Japanese and Indian thinkers. In China or elsewhere, Asian thinkers on civilization tend to conceive of Western civilization as materialist while seeing the Eastern civilization as spiritual.

Usually intellectuals from communities suffering the intrusion of imperialism are ready to reevaluate their own past. One useful way to compensate the humiliation brought by political and military defeat was to stress the spiritual superiority of one's cultural tradition. The adherence to tradition would typically run into criticism from progressive forces eager to promote Westernization as the only way for reviving the nation. Equally notable is the advocacy for a mix that reconciles the conservative with the progressive. All three approaches inevitably turn hybrid as the conservative should also acknowledge and desire the material superiority of the West while the progressive have likewise settled to the continuation of some form of tradition. More importantly, they share one same orientation in that all are attempting to reform their own culture. Historically, one of them would emerge as the victor, either in modernization achieved by the progressive or in the revolutionary war waged against the imperialist; yet, their own cultural tradition is invariably the one encompasses a problem and requires treatment (Osugi, Yutaro, and Himuro all came to Manchuria to seek new hopes). The introspective epistemology almost guarantees that postcolonial intellectuals lack enough confidence in facing the West, usually represented by the society of the colonizer, which has always been the given point of reference.²⁷

To overcome the sense of inferiority, a narrator is required to not only prescribe for the problems of the Eastern society, but also for the equally ailing Western society. In other words, instead of competing on the Western standard to see which civilizations could eventually end up being more 'Western', one would have to identify the possibility of an alternative destiny beyond the West before one could regain self-confidence. Self-reformation which often casts doubt on one's own tradition would no longer appear self-pitiful if the Western societies are targets of reformation at the same time. This would mean that both are somehow flawed. Presumably, only narrators who appreciate the strength of both the eclipsed materialist civilization of the West and the eclipsed spiritual civilization of the East have the final answer to

the human destiny. It is likely that these narrators, engrossed in the Eastern culture when young and the Western culture after reaching adulthood, will have a stronger desire to bridge civilizations because this would be how they could better cope with the distain from both sides for failing their purity test.

Despite the fact that only intellectuals from inferior colonies have the intrinsic need for self-respect granted by the bridge, their colonial inferiority is at the same time the premise of attraction because learning from the West satisfies the self-image of a superior civilizer in the West. When an Eastern intellectual could recite Shakespeare or expound St. Agustin better than his Western colleagues, he wins more respect and likings due to the contrast evident in the stereotyped difference represented by his Eastern identity. Their intellectual capacity wins reputation and their advice receives serious attention. Once they achieve this status, they are able to return to the East with the encouragement that not everything indigenous is backward. There is much to contribute to a universal civilization that could not progress without the mix of Eastern civilization. Through this process, the East that is on one side of the bridge consistently includes China.

The fact that for the intruding civilization, bridging civilizations is rarely a popular thought to begin with, discloses the colonial identity of those who see bridging as their mission. However, there are always sufficient feedbacks from the Western societies to support the mission of bridging, to make bridging a credible advocacy in the Eastern society. Narrators on bridging should be good at showing the elegancy of the Eastern civilization to Western societies. Intellectuals of the West who are suspicious of the current trend in the West may believe that the Eastern civilization has an answer. They look to those who are able to translate the deep meanings of the so-called spiritual civilization of the East for the answer. Bridging is a twofold task accordingly: A bridging narrative should convince the Western societies that there are essential things to learn form the East. It should likewise convince the Eastern society that

its cultural tradition is the remedy to the obsessive materialism of the West. The burden of proof is typically on the Eastern civilization--that it is indispensable.

A bridge in between should be located neither solely in the East nor the West; therefore, the bridging narrative must defend the East or the West from dominating one's own identity. To take on this objective role, the West can be easily defined racially as well as geographically, while the East can be anchored in China. In comparison, a bridge is always understood in the cultural or religious context, so it is not a role in which everybody is ready to assume. *Why* a collective bridge exists in Japan rather than India and why an individualist bridge exists in Tagore or Okakura Tiensen (1862-1913) are relatively easier questions to answer, since their places are always between China and a racially, geographically distinctive Europe. By contrast, *how* to be a bridge requires conscious interpretation. This intervention of human interpretation explains why there are many different models of bridging. The paper has introduced the Nishida Kitaro model, which has the intellectual power to coordinate thoughts on Japanese modernity before and after Nishida.

Alongside Nishida, the Japanese intellectuals have generally welcomed the influence of Western civilizations following an earlier period characterized by resistance. Most reflected upon Japan's role at the collective level. Before Nishida, Shiratori was a thinker deeply engrossed in the in-between position of Japan between the East and the West. The Kyoto School of philosophy, which Nishida had helped to shape, likewise considered Japanese intervention an inevitable step in the formation of truly world history. Despite their otherwise wide difference, both schools were confident that Japanese could demonstrate their role in facilitating world civilization by being the only people that succeeded in converging the West with the East. On the other hand, there were also Japanese thinkers devoted to the fusion at the individual level, though minor in number. For example, Okakura summarized the all-compassing Asian culture in individualized notion of "love."²⁸ Contemporary Akira Iriye

(1934 -), for another example, actively engages in inter-cultural communication,²⁹ not unlike Tagore did almost a century ago.

A bridge en mess at the collective level has to refer to a real place most of the time. Even an individualized bridge, which theoretically should be moving with the physical body and has no territorial restraint, may benefit from a place. Tagore's university of Vishva Bharati at Shantiniketan was a case in point, whose establishment was aimed at establishing an atmosphere of free learning between civilizations.³⁰ Collective bridges, which are physically fixed, must show why their place is already a bridge for civilizations. This means the construction of a "display house." The paper has compared the two models of bridging civilizations. One is individualized and incomplete, represented by Tagore's model; the other is collective and complete, as seen in Nishida's. The paper further speculates that Manchukuo was the display house for the Japanese bridge of civilizations. Hopefully, this explains why Manchukuo had been a land of dreams before, during and even after WWII.

Bridging Civilizations in Their Common Origin

The narratives of Red Moon give no explanation why Manchuria aroused enthusiasm even at the abortion of Manchukuo. Namiko, for example, never regretted her adventure in Manchukuo upon her forced departure, despite the loss of almost all men in her life during these years. To appreciate Manchukuo's significant role in pre-war Japan and its harbinger for Japan's future role, one must attend to Japan's quest for a meaningful and dignified place in the world. However, this enthusiasm needs no explanation if its origin is supposedly inexpressible in the first place. The silence in combination with the drive for action demonstrates the power of cultural governance. Atavistic representation of the aborted

Manchukuo in the 21 century testifies to the longevity and the ubiquity of the quest for transcendence over defeat (not in terms of war, but in terms of enhancement) as well as inbetweenness.

Initial encountering of the Western civilization resulting from imperialism or colonialism invariably incurred the sense of inferiority in local societies. Responses can usually be divided into three different approaches: progressivism promoting radical Westernization, conservatism resisting Westernization and centrism reconciling the East and the West. Actual narrators and activists switch allegiances easily when one approach seemed denied by the conditions while another appeared to be viable at a certain point. They advocates of different approaches share one common mentality – all of them look at their own society as the target of reformation and believing in some imagined kind of West as their reference. Achievements – in terms of either progressive modernization, conservative war of anti-imperialism/anti-colonialism, or centrist mediation among different forces – all acquired significance by proving success in face of the imagined Western civilization: progressivism succeeds in progression toward the Western model; conservatism, resistance against the Western intrusion; and centrism, incorporation of the Western strength into the Eastern spirit. Needless to say, the appeal to something Western in order to begin the construction of one's self-knowledge produces a sense of inferiority.

To rebuild one's self-confidence, local intellectuals must transcend the practice of treating the West exclusively as the reference point. Transcendence begins by including the Western civilizations into the scope of examination at the same time, instead of simply a model to be emulated or an evil to be resisted. Nevertheless, one could simultaneously show appreciation of the West and display the wisdom of the East only when the strength and the weakness of the Western civilization are in sight. The appreciation of the West might enhance one's acceptance among Western colleagues, who could only respect the wisdom represented by the colleague coming from the East after accepting him or her. Whenever the intellectuals from the

East accept in themselves a Western component, they would be ready to provide remedy to the problem of “their own” Western civilization. The East and the West could now learn from each other as Eastern intellectuals learn from both sides. The intellectuals themselves are the bridges between the colony and the mother country. Hopefully, their community would eventually develop into the bridge between the Eastern and the Western civilizations as well.

Despite the common wish to be “in between” and to pose as a teacher for both sides by preaching one’s strength to the other and vice versa, the bridge conceptualization nonetheless differs among individual thinkers. First of all, any bridge conception defines who composes the bridge. British Indian Rabindramath Tagore and Japanese Nishida Kitaro represented two different answers: Tagore saw individuals as the meeting place of civilizations, while Nishida looked to a collective subjectivity. Next, the bridge thinkers are preoccupied with determining whether or not a bridge is considered ‘existing and complete’ or ‘incoming in formation’. Tagore, for example, demanded active learning and counting in every individual so that his bridge resembled a kind of process thinking and was constantly in formation. On the other hand, Nishida envisioned the “place” of nothingness where fusion was original and almost automatic, though limited to Shinto. Last, but not least, is that China is always the representative of the East in almost all the bridge theories.

Alongside Nishida, Shiratori’s scholarship on Manchuria-Mongolia reified Nishida’s place of nothingness. Interestingly, Shiratori and Nishida were different on many other aspects. For example, Shiratori was affiliated with the army while Nishida, the navy; likewise, Shiratori founded the Tokyo School with modern science while Nishida, the Kyoto School of philosophy. Nishida was too late to intervene in the Manchurian crisis, but his philosophy of nothingness could have been a perfect outlet for the supporter of Manchukuo as a mean of expressing their deep attachment. Nonetheless, Nishida could still posthumously explain what sort of thinking prompted the incessant dream of Manchuria.

In light of this, as well as the connection between Nishida's philosophy of nothingness and the establishment of Manchukuo, one is able to implement a deeper reading into Japan's action in Manchuria and the lingering regard of the contemporary Japanese society toward Manchuria. Nishida's language was intended to introduce Japanese selfhood to the curious Westerner. However, it is useful in another aspect – one that has been largely ignored. Nishida pointed out the possibility that the bridge of civilizations does not have to be one of mutual learning for the time to come. Rather, a bridge of civilizations could well exist philosophically even before the momentous meeting between two civilizations. It was the drive to actualize this possibility that had prompted Shiratori to discover the beginning of civilizations in Mongolia and Manchuria. The same drive also prompted the rank-and-file settlers to believe in the princely way and the happy land, each in their response to the call of the Fascist regime.

Practically, Red Moon contests the meanings of Manchukuo narrated by the Kwantung Army. To reify Manchukuo's appeal to the ultimate place of nothingness, one needs to transcend the dichotomy of East and West as well as one's own nation and other nations. Despite the Kyoto Schools' substitution of world history for nationalism, the Kwantung Army was practically unable to move beyond Japan's own identification. If Manchukuo were a remedy to rampant patriotism, the Kwantung Army as well as its complying victims defied the appeal to world history because of their shared dedication to Japan's own cause. Namiko's practice was exactly to run away from man's patriotism. Namiko's consistent urge to run away from Japan's cause was therefore the grass root response, albeit belatedly, to the ideal of Manchukuo, which was meant to be hopes and lives, rather than fixation and death. Enacting motherhood, Namiko re-interpreted the death of Manchukuo. Her red moon replaced red son of the Kwantung Army's in order to care the lives of the Russian, the Chinese and the Japanese. A civilizational bridge is only possible when every human being is ready to run away from the patriotic calling that is dangerous to one's life. Manchuria becomes an escape, not a destiny.

That is how the place of nothingness can be a drive for life, instead of destruction.

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