

Review on the Development of Eurasian Relations

Eurasian relations mainly refer to the ties between two large regions: East Asia (including Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia) and Western Europe (including Southeast Europe); the respective builders of the ancient East Asian and Western European civilizations. For several thousand years, the East Asian and Western European civilizations have been pushing the wheel of human history forward in integration and interaction.

Research >
General

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The communication between Asian and European civilization has a long history, although geographically East Asia and Western Europe are at a remote distance. In the course of the twentieth century, however, separate relations of both regions with the New World, naturally of more recent date, have surpassed these ancient ties and continue to dominate the scene. With the luxury of peacetime it has become apparent that, to further a world economic balance of power, equal collaboration between Europe and an independent Asia seems necessary.

Unequal Eurasian Relations

With the Great Discoveries and the expansion of the world market at the turn of the sixteenth century, global history changed into the development of the world as a whole. By might and force, Western European powers then attained their status as the centre and leader of the world; a status which they held during the following 400 years. Concomitantly, East-West contact became more frequent.

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Portuguese, Spanish, and Dutch, followed by the British and French arrived in India, Southeast Asia, and China, designing companies striving to monopolize the trade in specific goods with Asia. From the nineteenth century onwards, Asia's initial trading advantage was speedily erased with the development of European industrial products and their trade. Relying upon radically broadening industrial and scientific gaps after the Industrial Revolution, European powers cleared the way for their goods with warships. Smashed by the high waves of cheap goods, the Asian self-sufficient agricultural and handicraft economy suffered. The Asian economy gradually evolved into a dependent economy changing Asia into a market for dumping goods and a supplier of raw materials.

Political, military, and cultural oppression accompanied economic exploitation and forced a series of unequal treaties upon Asian countries. At this juncture, the relationship between the colonies and the suzerain states formerly took shape on an unequal basis between Asia and Europe.

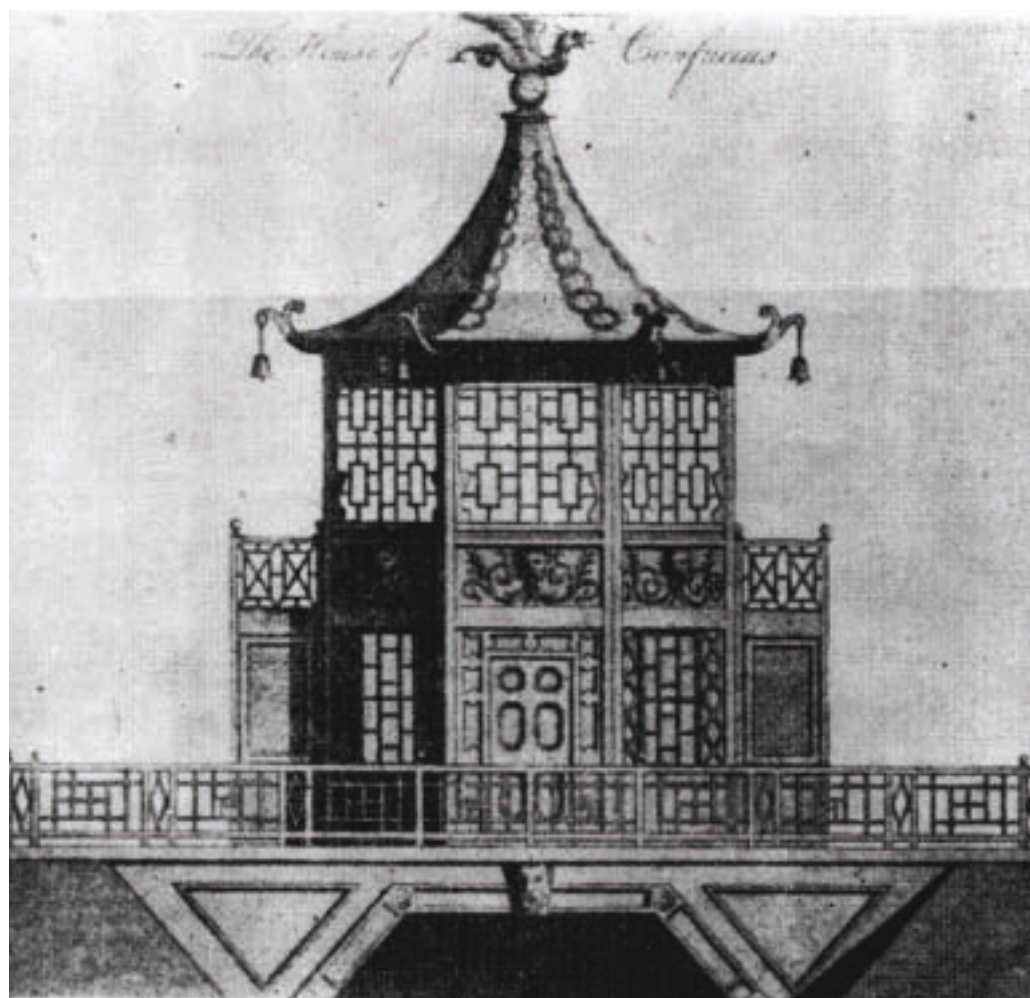
The Upsurge of Asian National Movements

From the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century, European powers began fighting for colonies, resulting in Asia, with the exception of Japan, having been divided up before the outbreak of World War I. The Great War then, may be regarded as the historical turning point marking Europe's loss of power. The weakening of both Britain and France, the two old-branded colonial powers, severely injured the European colonial system in East Asia. The war also sharpened the contradictions between the European powers and the Asian nations. After the war, the European states increased their economic enslavement of the colonies and reinforced colonial rule, thus unintentionally intensifying the Asian nationalist movement.

Meanwhile, World War I created favourable conditions for the struggles of the Asian nations seeking independence and liberation. Busy with war, the European states reduced their export of capital and goods to their colonies in Asia, increased their demands for foods and raw materials, and loosened economic control over the colonies, thus opening the way to the development of Asian national capitalist industries. The success of the Russian October Revolution also actively influenced the anti-colonialist struggles of the Asian people. Thus, around 1919-1927, Asian nationalist movements shook European colonial rule.

If European control of the Asian colonies was weakened, but not thoroughly destroyed by World War I, then World War II became the historical point for the break-up of the European colonial system and the rebirth of the Asian nations. During World War II, German, Japanese, and Italian fascism was the number one enemy. In East Asia, China as well as Southeast Asian countries joined hands with the allies fighting fascism.

The House of Confucius. This house is an imitation of a Chinese pavilion in Europe during the Rococo Era.



Within about ten years after the war, East Asia became the centre of a flourishing national movement. The victory of the Chinese Revolution together with successful struggles and wars in Burma, Indonesia, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, and Malaysia banished colonial rule and won national independence, amounting to the complete collapse of the European colonial system in Asia.

In the early post-war days, most Asian countries got rid of the rule of the suzerain states, obtaining national sovereignty. However, they were still in an unequal position in the international economic order; economically controlled by developed countries, they remained 'economic colonies' in the world system. The slow growth of Eurasian relations during the Cold War is in part due to the confinements of the Yalta System on Europe. Asia was not able to form a concerted policy towards Europe. Neither Asia nor Europe could, therefore, free themselves from the shackles of the Cold War system, without which intercontinental contact, superseding the various problems, could not be built.

A New Asian-European Equal Partnership

It is oft said that the world is continuously moving, developing, and changing. Great changes have taken place in Asia in the years after the war. Firstly, supported by the US, defeated Japan experienced fast economic recovery in the first post-war decade. Secondly, following the rise of Japan, East Asia witnessed the formation of newly rising industrial countries and regions, such as South Korea, Singapore, Chinese Taiwan, and Hong Kong.

The soaring East Asian economy increased Eurasian communications. A basis for Asia and Europe to establish a truly equal relationship was formed. In 1980, the European Community and ASEAN signed cooperation agreements. By the 1990s, Asia-Europe cooperation was obviously strengthened. On this basis, the EU adjusted its global strategy and emphasized relations with Asia and China. In July 1994, the EU formally announced its Eastward Declaration, namely, the New Strategy in the March to Asia. In the meantime, East Asian countries also recognized the necessity to develop Eurasian relations. In October 1993, Singapore organized a summit between East Asia and the EU, which was supported by ASEAN states and EU states.

In March 1996, all fifteen EU and ten East Asian states (seven ASEAN states plus South Korea, Japan, and China) held the first ASEM (Asia-Europe Meeting) Summit in Bangkok. The summit resulted in a blueprint to reinforce political dialogue and enhance economic, technological, and cultural cooperation. The success of the ASEM I meeting heralded both a novel and equal partnership between Asia and

Europe and a new stage of cooperation. The establishment of this new Asia-Europe partnership at the turn of the century is the result of the following factors.

Firstly, the global advent of a time of peace and growth prepared a favourable international environment for the development of Eurasian relations. Secondly, the world economy was balanced by three forces, namely: Western Europe, North America, and East Asia, and a mechanism of Eurasian cooperation was urgently needed to fill the lack of contact between East Asia and Western Europe.

Thirdly, the continuing high-speed growth of the East Asian economy narrowed the economic gap between the two regions, which now witness how the potential for mutually supplementing their economies continues to expand. Fourthly, the trend of multi-polarization reinforced the autonomy of the foreign policy of Asia and Europe. An ASEM without the US is doubtlessly a golden chance for the EU, China, Japan, South Korea, and ASEAN to check and balance US strategy.

Last of all, cultural conceptions are changing. An Asian consciousness, aimed at seeking independence, equality, and collaboration, is taking root in East Asia. In the meantime, Europe is overcoming traditional thoughts of European centralism and Western superiority, dealing with Eurasian relations with an equal and friendly stature.

After the Bangkok ASEM, Asia-Europe cooperation steadily moved forward, as stressed by the success of ASEM 2 in London (April 1998) and ASEM 3 in Seoul (October 2000). This year ASEM 4 will be held in Copenhagen in September. I believe this summit will bring new impetus to the new Eurasian partnership in the new century, which will be beneficial to peace, stability, and development in the world as a whole.



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