CHAPTER SEVEN

IMAGINING REGIONAL, NATIONAL AND LOCAL IDENTITIES: ‘ASIANISM’ IN FUKUOKA

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Introduction

Situated 900 kilometres southwest of Tokyo, Fukuoka serves as an entrance to Kyushu, one of Japan’s four main islands, and for many centuries has acted as an interface between mainland Japan and the Korean Peninsula. The space of Fukuoka has been defined by its geographical proximity to Japan’s Asian neighbours and also through the historically constructed layers of its relations with Korea and China. This space can be conceived of as a metaphor for both invasion and a bridge between the people of the Japanese archipelago and neighbouring countries. They combine to form an everyday reality that is quite distinct from anything found in other cities in Japan, and as a result, the concept of ‘Asia’ itself has been imagined in a particular way in this area. In the late nineteenth century it gave rise to Pan-Asianist thought, and in the twentieth century as well this outlook has been implicitly connected to post-war urban development policy, a process which has entailed re-packaging the very notion of Asia.

To negate Asia as the negative ‘other’ under a Western Orientalist gaze has been a dominant theme in Japan’s modern history. In Fukuoka, however, the local identity has taken a somewhat different trajectory by negotiating its own space within this national discourse. The question of whether modern Japan is part of the ‘West’ or rather part of ‘Asia’ has been central to modern Japanese discourse on national identity. In the post-war era, meanwhile, northern Kyushu, with its location far from the

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centre of political power and yet globalizing in its own way, has shaped its own particular local identity.

This chapter addresses the connection between the locality of Fukuoka and ‘Asianism’ by exploring how the idea of Asia has been imagined and appropriated in this area. To place this in some context, I first of all cover some background on Pan-Asianism in Japan generally and the forces at work in the making of locality in northern Kyushu. I then concentrate on two inter-connected case studies over a time period of a hundred years in recent history. The first examines the Black Ocean Society (Genyōsha), a political association established in the late nineteenth century which first propagated the agenda of Pan-Asianism. The second focuses on the urban development policy of Fukuoka in the late twentieth century, tracing some of the continuities and discontinuities involved, and ways in which the idea of Asia has featured in the local imagination.

Pan-Asianism in Modern Japan

The very concept of ‘Asia’ has been established in relation to the West, for without the West there is no Asia.3 Japanese intellectuals of the nineteenth century adopted this distinction and developed various responses in order to situate Japan within the asymmetrical space between the West and Asia. In doing so, they followed the unilinear narrative of civilization and enlightenment then prevalent in Europe, which regarded the West as ‘universal’ and ‘progressive’, and the Rest as ‘particular’ and ‘backward’.4

In the mid-nineteenth century both Japan and China were forced to open up to trade with the West. With the collapse of the Sinocentric tributary system, Japan had to engage with a new world order dominated by the Western imperial powers. The main concern of the late Tokugawa and then the Meiji government was to secure national independence from

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4 Hall, Stuart, ‘The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power’ in Hall, Stuart and Bram Geiben (eds.), *Formations of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992). However, this does not mean to say that this view has been endorsed completely. See for example, Kاراتани Ко́джи, *Teikoku to nashon* [Empire and nation], in *Senzen no shikō* (Tokyo: Kōdansha Gakujutsu Bunko, 2000).