

East Asia in the Longue Durée: Regions in World History

Roy Bin Wong

Asia Institute & Department of History,
University of California, Los Angeles, USA
wong@history.ucla.edu

There are many ways to conceive regional spaces in history. Unlike modern countries which have political borders or cities which historically had city walls in many parts of the world, regions are a more abstract analytical concept which can be applied to areas of varying size and defined by diverse criteria. Regions are not fixed, durable and concrete spatial units like political entities. They express different types of ambiguity because neither their borders nor their content is certain. This condition poses both opportunities and challenges regarding our use of the concept of 'region' analytically.

Before considering these issues at a general level, I have to make a few remarks about the problems of region raised by "area studies" specifically since this is academic context in which the issues of regional space in relationship to global history are often raised. At first glance, area studies seems an appealing frame of reference to take us beyond the confines of national states and point us toward global issues, but in fact area studies as conceived in the United States after the World War II did not initially do this. Instead it focused on those traits believed particular to specific parts of the world and these initial concerns made it easy for subsequent generations of scholars to be critical of earlier work by saying that area studies stressed cultural continuities and ignored both diversity within the field of area studies and connections between a given area and other parts of the world. From this perspective, an older generation of area studies did little to explain the historical development of these areas. From another critical perspective, area studies was accused of serving the U.S. government because the funding for area studies came from it. Each of these criticisms identified particular problems but they hardly constituted a comprehensive critique to persuade most scholars that the arena of area studies was necessarily condemned to particular types of scholarship that either failed to address important issues of contemporary relevance or only did to serve government interests if they did so.

The possibilities of political agendas, either of the government or other groups, are always a potential problem for scholars. We thus do well to distinguish work that is in one sense or another policy-driven proprietary – research done explicitly for and paid for by some organization which retains rights to the content – from work that is more public and intended to express a point of view and from argument that can be engaged by others on a common intellectual terrain. These are of course problems affecting scholarship generally. More specific to area studies, there are great virtues to recognize the “areas” of area studies as sites of scholarship precisely because they are on a spatial scale within which it is possible to assess different dimensions of diversity and at the same time connect them to larger global trends and themes. I am pleased to see that the concept of ‘areas’ exists in Japanese scholarship on global history and this project has paid attention to both global connections and phenomena at particular regional sites.

Despite the historiographical gap between American approaches to area studies and to world history, regions more generally have played an important role in the development of world history. I need to mention two regional worlds, which also share traits different from those attributed to area studies by its critics. First is the Mediterranean, the subject of Fernand Braudel’s celebrated study of early modern history.¹ Braudel’s Mediterranean is a physical space defined by the water linking its distant shores, but it is socially constructed and put in motion historically by the connections and interactions of the people who live on its borders. Indeed it is human interactions that define and motivate Braudel’s Mediterranean: both the different cultural contexts of Christian and Muslim parts of the Mediterranean, and the political engagements within and between these cultures are prominently illustrated in his study. Braudel evokes the patterns and meanings of social life for different kinds of people, principally Europeans, whose lives were shaped by their Mediterranean locations.

More recently, Western historians have created a field of study called the ‘Atlantic World.’² This too is a physical space defined in the broad measure by the Atlantic Ocean and the sets of human connections forged by Europeans who, as they moved to the New World and settled it, also brought African slaves with them. Thus, the Atlantic World is formed out of the movements of people both free and forced and subsequently by the kinds of commodities that move between the Americas, Europe and Africa. Current students of the Atlantic World stress the fact that there are an English speaking Atlantic World and an Iberian or Spanish speaking Atlantic World. In other words, scholars divide this larger Atlantic world into smaller overlapping regions characterized by different linguistic and cultural clusters. They also argue about the nature of the common types of intellectual life as well as the very distinctive forms of cultural life that existed within the Atlantic world. Like Braudel’s Mediterranean, this Atlantic world is a region that is formed largely by the interactions of people and their activities. Two related features of these world regions are different from those found

1 Fernand Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l’époque de Philippe II*, 2 vols (Paris, 1966).

2 E.g., Bernard Bailyn, *Atlantic History: Concept and Contours* (Cambridge MS, 2005).

in the kind of area studies subject to the critiques. First, they consciously include diverse cultural components; second, they are created by connections between different kinds of people and places within the socially constructed region. If the subjects of area studies highlight these kinds of elements, they can overcome many of the criticisms previously made.

For the moment I will turn to the other main topic of this paper: how do we move beyond a regional world like the Mediterranean? Braudel suggests two kinds of answers. One concerns the reorientation of France from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic as the country enters into political and economic competition with England in the New World. France's interactions with northern European powers and connections across the Atlantic comprise a shift that Braudel refers to as "France leaving the Mediterranean." For a Japanese audience this phrasing might evoke thoughts of Fukuzawa Yuichi's 1885 pronouncement that Japan should "leave Asia" by which he meant Japan should develop in ways that made it more similar to Western countries than its Asian neighbors. This "leaving" in some ways meant increased interactions with Western powers, but it did not mean the creation of a separate regional world in the manner of France leaving the Mediterranean for an Atlantic world. Rather Japan's "leaving Asia" refers to a phenomenon of the modern era in which people in non-Western countries and their leaders especially have to decide what kinds of political, economic and social changes they wish to promote and how such changes affect their cultural identities. In a geographical sense, Japan did not leave Asia but came in the early twentieth century to assert its military and political power ever more aggressively in Asia, creating a colonial empire that constituted a very different regional order that had existed in earlier centuries when the Chinese agrarian empire was far more central and more important politically and economically.

Fukuzawa's notion of Japan leaving Asia is only possible after European ideas and institutions have become available for adoption by others. This condition happens only after the second path beyond a regional world suggested in Braudel's study of the Mediterranean. Braudel considers the maritime voyages of Mediterranean ships to waters across the sixteenth-century globe. His work made it easier for us to imagine what I would call a European world history, which is principally defined by the spread of European presence and power across the globe. This is in a very simple sense what the "modern world-system" achieves as argued in Immanuel Wallerstein's first volume of the *Modern World-System*.³ His debts to Braudel are reflected in his footnotes where there are more citations from Braudel's study of the Mediterranean than his subsequent study of capitalism and material life.⁴ Wallerstein seizes those elements of Braudel's Mediterranean which allow one to conceive a large world system emerging out of a global spread on Mediterranean Europe's presence elsewhere. Here I make two brief observations about this kind of European world history. First, while it is an old tradition frequently criticized by people sensitive to Eurocentrism, it remains a very

3 Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York, 1976).

4 Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th Century*, 3 vols, translated by Sian Reynolds (New York, 1981-84).

powerful intellectual presence implicit in some work and explicit in other scholarship. Second, creating alternatives to European world history is more important than simply bemoaning its existence and that part of this effort has to come as supplements and complements rather than as complete substitutes. The idea that we can escape Eurocentrism by adopting some other more universal or objective viewpoint may only work for some topics but not all. In addition we need to look at world history from different vantage points, from Asia or the Americas, and observe how the world looks and what it means to people who encounter Europeans upon their arrival. George Bryan Souza considers the world from the port of Batavia, so he is looking out from an Asian port to other parts of Asia and back to Europe.⁵ One can similarly start in the Americas and look out at connections from some points in there to other parts of the world. An example of this comes from recent scholarship that locates the west coast of North America within a network of connections along and across the Pacific Ocean.⁶ This creates a parallel to the history of an Atlantic world. It also undermines a simple narrative of western frontier expansion that informs so much American history by inserting a new recognition that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: the west coast of North America had very active ports of trade connected across the Pacific that were quite distinct and independent from the Atlantic world connections being developed on the opposite coast.

Identifying various regional worlds in the early modern era that can be vantage points to look out at larger global patterns is one way to go beyond a European-centered world history. Just as there is more than one Europe and hence we have Braudel's Mediterranean world and an Atlantic regional world, there is more than one Asian regional world in the early modern era. There is a Chinese Mediterranean of a sort treated in Denys Lombard's three-volume study of Java entitled *Le carrefour javanais*.⁷ The physical space is quite different since Java is an island at the cross roads of several sets of cultural influences rather than a body of water across which are set two very different cultures. But there is a methodological similarity between Lombard's work and Braudel's Mediterranean because both scholars create a picture of a social world located in a specific physical place that is made up by the connections forged between multiple groups and kinds of people. In Lombard's Java, different waves of influence wash over the island each living its imprint, beginning with Hindi and proceeding to Islamic, Chinese and European. He argues that the cultural compound forged in Java is made up of elements from each of the outside influences combining with native practices at the same time as there remain distinctive cultural differences in early modern Java. Quite separate from Lombard's Chinese Mediterranean are other maritime regional spaces in part inspired by Braudel. For instance, K. N. Chaudhuri has written of the Indian Ocean as a maritime world with several

5 George Bryan Souza, 'A Global History of the Political Economy of Commerce and Commodities in Asia and the Early Modern World? An Introduction' (unpublished seminar paper 2006).

6 Iglar, David, 'Diseased Goods: Global Exchanges in the Eastern Pacific Basin, 1770-1850', *The American Historical Review*, 109.3 (2004), pp. 693-719.

7 Denys Lombard, *Le carrefour javanais: essai d'histoire globale*, 3 vols (Paris, 1990).

sub-regions in an Indian Ocean world stretching from the east coast of Africa to the Sea of Japan.⁸ In Japan there is Takeshi Hamashita's influential work on a maritime Asia defined by the agrarian empire's tributary relations as well as by flows of silver and of commodities.⁹ Like Chaudhuri, Hamashita also divides his largest maritime space into smaller sections, each again defined by the character of connections and transactions giving them coherence.

To these various perspectives on different maritime Asian regional worlds akin to Braudel's Mediterranean, I would add an observation about agrarian and maritime political economies that makes Asian cases quite different from the Mediterranean and Atlantic worlds. The south and southeast coasts of China are simultaneously part of an agrarian empire and connected to a kind of Chinese Mediterranean. The economic and political roles of Chinese maritime merchants is in part shaped by the perspective on maritime trade held by officials who serve in a bureaucracy in which the major concerns are those of an agrarian empire. Thus we do not find maritime trade holding the same kind of importance for Chinese officials as it does for European officials who seek to gain tax revenues from the lucrative maritime trade. Compared to European ones, the Chinese government does relatively little, either positive or negative, regarding maritime trade. We can imagine that a more autonomous or independent political regime in south or southeast China could have promoted maritime trade more aggressively and sought to benefit fiscally in ways more similar either to European states or Southeast maritime states like the culturally Thai state based at Ayuddhya.

At least some of the characteristics of regional worlds are different from each other in the early modern era. These regional worlds increase their contact and they become regions of a more integrated world. A European world history sees this integration principally in terms of a European center subordinating other world regions both politically and economically. Such a view often sees this modern domination to be an outgrowth of early modern era interactions. But this view mistakenly conflates the importance of maritime trade for certain European countries with the importance of this trade for those living in Asia. There is an asymmetry of significance here that is quite different from the subsequent kind of asymmetry of relationships in which one can see quite clearly that nineteenth-century Europeans enjoyed sources of wealth and power that Asian states and elites wanted to enjoy as well, but with the exception of Japan seem to have been unable to move effectively to capture. At the same time it is easy to miss the ways in which East Asian states were able to work effectively in a world where the growing presence of European and American power presented new challenges. As Japanese scholars have analyzed in the past 15 years or so, the subordination of the Ryūkyū islands under Japanese rule and subsequent transformation into Okinawa prefecture was in part of a result of anxieties in the Ryūkyūs over British moves into Singapore in the 1820s and their

8 K. N. Chaudhuri, *Asia before Europe: Economy and Civilisation of the Indian Ocean from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge, 1985).

9 Takeshi Hamashita, 'Tribute and Treaties: Maritime Asia and Treaty Port Networks in the Era of Negotiation, 1800-1900', in Giovanni Arrighi, Takeshi Hamashita and Mark Selden (eds), *The Resurgence of East Asia: 500, 150 and 50 Year Perspectives* (London, 2003), pp. 17-50.

vulnerability to British and French influences. With the Qing state unable to offer much diplomatic protection, Ryūkyū leaders found themselves relying on Japanese diplomats to negotiate their position as a part of Japan when Commodore Perry learned from the Japanese that the Ryūkyūs were a part of Japan. The Qing state also proved able to reconquer its northwestern territories and assert greater control than in previous decades. This consolidated the Qing state's position within a larger Central Asian area where British and Russian competition would grow in subsequent years. Thus, East Asian leaders were able to maneuver in their world region into which European and American power was becoming increasingly visible and threatening. I suggest that one can follow through various aspects of East Asian geopolitics by considering how Chinese and Japanese leaders navigated situations in which Europeans were already present or would soon become more important. Their successes are in some considerable contrast to the fates of much of Southeast Asia, where, with the exception of Thailand, all other countries become formal colonies.

A similar contrast between Northeast and Southeast Asian economies has been drawn by Momoki Shiro and Hasuda Takashi in their paper for the November 2006 workshop on dynamic rimlands and open heartlands sponsored by Osaka University's 21st Century COE Program and the Asia Research Institute of National University of Singapore.¹⁰ Momoki and Hasuda argue that Northeast and Southeast Asia were far more connected economically in the early modern era than they would become in the modern period when Southeast Asia was more fully subordinated economically to the West as a raw materials producer, while Northeast Asia, Japan especially, was able to begin to industrialize.

The varied experiences within Northeast and Southeast Asia with the coming of nineteenth-century European and American political and economic expansion suggests that the transformation of regional worlds into world regions can include different kinds of developments in which both Asian and Western agents play significant roles. Thinking about regions as a useful spatial unit between national and global scales continues to matter. A focus on regions can help us organize our understanding of differences across the world and is one way to address the dangers of seeing the world solely from a European vantage point. Much has been made by scholars across the humanities to avoid the pitfalls of Eurocentrism. One formulation, influential in South Asian Studies and in the United States especially is Dipesh Chakrabarty's call to "provincialize Europe."¹¹ Though on hearing such a phrase one might easily think the meaning is to be aware of the regional dimensions of Europe's experiences, this is in fact not what he intends. Chakrabarty comes out of post-structuralist tradition in which Marxism still matters for setting out the large-scale economic changes that remake the entire world; no one can escape the spread of global capitalism. People construct the social

10 Shiro Momoki and Takashi Hasuda, 'A Review of the Periodization of Southeast Asian Medieval/Early Modern History, in Comparison with That of Northeast Asia', 桃木至朗 (責任編集)、佐藤貴保 (編) 『大阪大学21世紀COEプログラム「インターフェイスの人文学」研究報告書2004-2006、第4巻: 世界システムと海域アジア交通』 (2007年)、pp. 59-89.

11 Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, 2000).

meaning of their lives at more local levels – this is where Europe is provincialized. Chakrabarty looks at how middle-class Bengalis in the 1920s and 1930s create their own life worlds quite distinct from those constructed by Europeans. The economic structures of Bengali middle class life are the product of European capitalism which provides the structures within which individuals achieve subjective agency. This kind of dichotomy between agency and structure on local and global scales seems to me problematic because in many places actors do create political economy not just poetry and other forms of subjective meaning. There are choices affecting the institutions of political economy that can be quite different from those of American or European capitalism, which themselves are not entirely alike. Neither Japanese political economy before or after the World War II nor Chinese political economy before or after the beginnings of reform simply conform to norms established by Europe and the United States.

I would like to conclude by suggesting that this paper has been a search for ways different from those stressed by Chakrabarty to provincialize Europe. If we consider the types of world history that can be conceived beginning from Asian bases we might see the world quite differently. To compare how the world looks from different regional perspectives, we might think about the different kinds of hierarchical and horizontal ties that make up relations within regions and between regions. Hamashita Takeshi's construction of regional space, for instance, depends simultaneously on the hierarchy of tributary relations and social and economic networks. The relative importance of vertical versus horizontal ties socially and economically and politically can help us define regional space and we can gain more traction on how globalization works by asking how its components map onto vertical and horizontal dimensions. What kind of Asian regions will exist in the future? Will they be similar to Asian regions in earlier historical periods or will they be formed in new ways? When we are better able to answer this question, we will also be better able to see how global history is moving from the present into the future.

General Discussion

ISLAM IN ASIAN HISTORY

Question:

I am engaging in the specific history. You argue Asian history and European history in comparative context. But, in Asia, do you contain some Islamic states, pre-modern Islamic states or central Eurasian states? If you say you do not contain these countries, would the global sights also be differentiated because of these countries not being considered?

Bin Wong:

If I understand the question properly, the issue is how you deal with Islam and in particular the presence of Muslims and Islamic states in certain parts of Asia? Is this right? Well, certainly Islam is massively important in some parts of Asia. And its importance is underestimated in other areas.

So how is one deal with the presence of Islam in Asian history? The answer to this question of what do you do with Islam very much turns on what kind of question you are interested in answering. It matters whether you want to talk about social organization, different types of politics, or yet some other kind of problems. I would stress the importance to recognize that the very large areas within which Islam is an important religion must also be distinguished from each other based on the kind of world region in which they are found. The roles of Islam in the Middle East and Southeast Asia can hardly be the same in all respects but rather must be defined to a considerable measure by regional and local contexts.

PROBLEM OF SOURCES FOR HISTORIANS

Question:

I am a student of Professor Momoki. I am majoring in Thailand and Asian history in the early nineteenth century. I do only aim a specific study. I have to read material and write the story. Even though I read real material, I think there are many, many other materials. It is very confusing. When you speak of larger history like global history, you have to depend on the other people's studies. How do you know when to believe other studies? Sometimes they are true and sometimes they are not.

Bin Wong:

That is one of the basic and important questions and it is one of the reasons why many people are skeptical of the notion that we can do world history because as historians we believe that our knowledge is ultimately based in the primary sources and works up from these materials.

I say two things to response for it. There are some historians who read nothing but primary sources. But they are highly unusual. And often have little to say that the rest of us can understand. So typically, even a historian with a narrow focus still related scholarship. For instance you would read David Wyatt and you believe this scholarship because you know the sources on which this

scholarship is built. We belong to a conversation based on sources and scholarship of earlier generations so we have an orientation to the likely utility of different pieces of scholarship. My point is that we work as historians using secondary scholarship. The question is how many kinds of sources does one have to understand? Does one have to control primary records for all areas one reads about? How far beyond the sources with which a historian is familiar can he or she comfortably read secondary scholarship and remain confident in his or her ability to judge? The reason I am putting the question this way is to make clear that the boundaries between what is and is not acceptable. Over time a historian reads more kinds of sources and can judge more kinds of history. How does one judge history for which one cannot read the sources? Professors advise students who work with materials outside of their primary linguistic competence. But based on specialty an historian can still judge a research topic. As an economic historian of China, for instance, I can be an advisor for a student looking at Japanese banking in colonial Korea. There are different ways in which read and evaluate history for which we cannot control linguistic evidence and some of this is legitimate. When we move to global history there is little to separate us from historical sociology and it is easy for historians making syntheses to make mistakes.

There is a range of ways of thinking about and using knowledge. There are number of issues we will never think of unless we reach out and confront things beyond our specialties. One of my teachers, who died tragically, Joseph Fletcher Jr. (1934-1984), read more than twenty languages and was preparing to write a real Eurasian history from primary sources when he died at the age of 49. He was both a meticulous philologist and an eager reader of other scholars' work. He was therefore prepared to study sources carefully and to consider larger questions that came from outside the immediate sources. There is a point to be much broader than the topics we work on in order to conceive larger and more significant themes.

There is another worry to have that balances the worry you expressed. We all bring to the particular subject we are studying expectations that derive from more general knowledge and apply these to our analysis of specific facts we learn from our sources, whatever the particular kind of subject we are examining, about economics, politics or social change. As historians, while we usually think of it very implicitly, we do not think explicitly about why we make the assumption we have. The documents do not tell us how to think about them. The way we are trained to think about documents include what we absorb to form our general expectations and much of this is ultimately distilled out of European historical experiences.

GLOBALIZATION AND EUROPEAN EXPANSION

Question:

Was there an Asian globalization movement or is it linked more to European movement? Did regional worlds become world region because of European expansion?

Bin Wong:

There are no question that historically it is Europe that expanded to create connections with Africa,

Asia and the New World. The advantage of thinking in terms of world regions is two-fold. First, it allows us to think about historical changes within East Asia, for instance, in terms of how Asian political and economic leaders took advantage of European technologies to begin to transform their economies rather than to think in terms of Europeans being the major agents of change. Second, this perspective helps to prepare us for future realities – more important developments are coming out of the East Asian world region than ever before. An advantage of the concept of world regions is that it does not insist on a particular kind of hierarchical relationship between regions. Relations can change.

INDUSTRIALIZATION

Question:

You emphasize regions in your presentation but when Braudel speaks of France leaving the Mediterranean he is also talking about the country developing economically toward an industrial society. You skipped industrialization. I think you should talk more about industrialization.

Bin Wong:

A good and careful question. France left the Mediterranean well before there was industrialization, Braudel did indeed care about the commercial developments that created profits for European merchants in Asian markets, as well as the subsequent Atlantic movements of people and goods. I mean in terms of industrialization, it is not long before industrialization becomes important. I would say that economic change, especially since the Industrial Revolution in the late eighteenth century, has remade world regions. The world region that is becoming increasingly important based on its economic development in Asia.

NATIONAL STATE / NATION-STATE

Question:

I am not sure whether we should reject national states and the immense power of nationalist movements or not. I also think bringing the state back in is important. I would prefer to talk about the overcoming methodological nationalism because of the power of nationalism and because we have to redefine the role of the state.

Bin Wong:

I agree completely. The state of the discipline worries about the national state and has sought to go toward the local and global as alternatives. I wish to reframe the context within which the national state is seen to include the regional as a supplement to scholarship that focuses on either the local or the global. National states still matter. For instance, I have spent much time on the political economy of national states and argued that the kinds of political economy among states are different according to their regional contexts. I agree with your concern for national states which I see as somewhat distinct from the necessity to introduce the regional between the local and global.

THE DEFINITION OF “REGION”

Question:

I asked you a question five years ago when you visited Osaka University. What is the basis of a region? Today you raise the problem of regions, which is subjective. Is there a general basis for defining regions?

Bin Wong:

“Region” has been defined in many different ways. We can define “region” in terms of geophysical features or of some set of boundaries. Braudel and to some extent people working on the Atlantic world define regions as historically situated and constructed out of human interactions. More generally, a region is defined by a threshold of density of interactions among people in a region which is different from relations that connect people within a region beyond its space. So as observers, we should say ‘yes’, this is a region and people define it in certain ways. So a small region could for instance be the border zone between Southeast Asia and Southwest China including as well parts of Burma and Vietnam. The notion of the Chinese being part of the south east maritime region is precisely because Chinese people move back and forth between the south east coast of China and Southeast Asia, and thus that region is defined by the movements of the people, ideas and goods within it. Those movements in some ways must be seen in a separate form or distinct form, other kind of movements.

And this leads me back to the question about Islam. If the relations that Islamic traders create between Southeast Asian ports and their homelands do not forge the same kinds of connections that Chinese from Fujian do with Southeast Asian ports, we might be able to make a distinction between the interconnections formed between Fujian and Southeast Asia that makes them part of a common region, while those relations typical of Islamic traders would not contribute to a similar kind of region of Southeast Asia with the homelands of Islamic merchants. The goal is to create criteria to define regions. Of course geographers have defined space in many different ways and as I have said earlier, what we mean by region depends a lot on what we choose to study.

I think I recall part of your question from five years ago, and assuming I remember correctly, you were concerned about scholars recognizing the great variation that exists within China and to avoid generalizations that suggest too homogeneous a society and culture. I both agree with this concern and believe it has to be balanced by recognition that China had a long-lasting and durable state structure that provided a particular political context for social and cultural variations quite different from what we see in South Asia, for example. Chinese claims about political control and integration were never as strong in reality as they were in rhetoric, but they were far more extensive and realer than rhetorical assertions of political control made in South Asia.

Let me say why I think the notion of world regions matters. I think it is easy to include many things under the rubric of globalization. Some have argued that globalization is a new phenomenon, beginning no earlier than the 1980s. These scholars wish to represent the contemporary age of globalization as a new kind of historical moment. To the contrary, others argue that globalization

is much older. Some people have written good books to show earlier moments of globalization and thus suggested that the term can be broader than its use by some other scholars.¹² The vast majority of the globalization literature addresses a recent period of world history with little attention to the crucial fact that the strength and importance of ties over long distances waxes and wanes. There were far more global connections forged before the Great Depression of the 1930s than were maintained once the Great Depression began. Once the Depression began, the world was more segmented than it had been. This was part of the context in which the Japanese colonial empire continued to take on its importance as a world region.

We had in the twentieth century a period when it was at least as important to think of what happened within world regions as what between them. In fact in the mid 1970s there was talk about regional economic integration, just before people were stressing globalization. In economic terms, it is by no means clear that if you are responsible for economic policy in a certain country you necessarily want to promote trade over longer distances at the expense or trade over shorter distances. For instance, for the parts of South East Asia that lie just across Chinese border the way towards further economic development is regional integration across this border. Similarly, if you go to central Asia, Chinese policy in their northwest encourages economic integration with the interior. More generally, many people in the world may in fact be better off developing regional trade than seeking to be larger more global trading networks. If this is true, global patterns of trade could look different twenty or thirty years from now. Globalization need not lead to continuing integration. There is time when connection and integration at smaller scales become more important. This is why I think the concept of “world region” matters.

Momoki and Hasuda’s paper for Nagasaki Workshop made a strong argument for the greater integration of Northeast and Southeast Asia in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries than in either the tenth or nineteenth centuries. This means we have different kinds of regional space in different historical periods. Similarly, in the twentieth century we can think about world regions. In addition to think about the 1930s, we can look at the development of the EU, which I have suggested can be considered the achievement of political centralization over a large territory and population which resembles as a pale and weak parallel the much earlier integration of political rule by imperial China. Despite having been created out of very different historical processes, China and the European Union face some very similar challenges regarding the division of authority and responsibility among different levels of government – what levels of government are responsible for what kinds of taxes, which levels of government are responsible for which kinds of social services. If this contrast is true, then we are comparing a world region (Europe) with a state (China). So I am acknowledging that my call that we think about regions is not a precise call and that there is much room to develop new and useful definitions of regions.

12 E.g., Frederick Cooper, ‘What Is the Concept of Globalization Good For? An African Historian’s Perspective’, *African Affairs*, 100 (2001), pp. 189-213