

BOOK REVIEW

## How can the Japanese anomaly be explained? A review essay of Atul Kohli's *Imperialism and the Developing World*

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The impact of imperialism on long-term development in the non-Western world was once a popular agenda of inquiry. After the modernization paradigm turned into despair for postcolonial economies, the notions of informal empire (Gallagher and Robinson, 1953) and dependency (Prebisch, 1950; Frank, 1967; Cardoso and Faletto, 1979) marked economists' discussions on underdevelopment in the non-Western world. The agenda, however, lost its momentum after the 1970s, when some Latin American and East Asian economies began growing and research interests and policy agendas shifted from blaming external constraints to identifying internal enablers (Haggard, 1990, 2018). The externalist scholarship became almost moribund thereafter, although its leitmotif was taken over by some Marxian scholarship such as the world-systems theory (Wallerstein, 1974) and its structuralist and anti-globalization offshoots – also partly reincarnated in the literature on the resource curse (Auty, 1993; Karl, 1997).

Atul Kohli, in his latest book, *Imperialism and the Developing World: How Britain and the United States Shaped the Global Periphery* (2020), revisits this classic agenda. He updates the dependency logic of underdevelopment with *political* explanations rather than purely economic or Marxian approaches. Instead of blaming capitalism or free trade, he identifies imperialism's most detrimental impact on non-Western societies as undermining their national sovereignty, which he sees as a precondition for development. He argues that imperialism, both formal and informal, thwarts the rise of nationalist political coalitions that would otherwise pursue broad national interests; and instead keeps in place local client collaborators who seek only narrow advantages such as the export of commodities (Kohli, 2020: Introduction and Conclusion). In his earlier book *State-Directed Development: Political Power and Industrialization in the Global Periphery* (2004), Kohli compared four non-Western economies – South Korea, India, Brazil, and Nigeria – and attributed their diverging developmental outcomes to different colonial legacies. His latest book further unpacks the negative legacies of the British Empire, highlighting selected country cases such as India, Nigeria, Argentina, Egypt, and China. He also extends analysis to cases involving the informal postcolonial empire of the USA.

In addition to filling the major theoretical gaps regarding development, namely, an understanding of how international relations affect the process of development politically – which has been discussed only in limited scope, including the *non*-applicability of Charles Tilly's war making–state making linkage to non-Western contexts (Herbst, 1990; Tilly, 1990; Schwarz, 2008) and the aid curse (Morgenthau, 1962; de Mesquita and Smith, 2009) – the book's findings well-complement the recent scholarship on institutions and development. Although institutionalists argue that the root of development is institutions as the quality of institutions affects variables indispensable to economic growth such as total factor productivity, human capital, and physical capital (North and Thomas, 1973; Acemoglu, Gallego, and Robinson, 2014), the dynamic of institutional change that positively affects development remains

debated. Lately, political explanations have been sought in this subfield of development studies, too. Mushtaq Khan attributes institutional change to the shifting balance of power between agencies and their political settlements (Khan, 2017). In this context, the domination by external empires and their thwarting of nationalist coalitions, as discussed by Kohli, well-explains why the domestic balance of power does *not* shift in favor of pro-industrialization institutions: by intervening into local political configurations, imperialism warrants the continuity of institutions that only serve parochial interests as the dominant domestic forces. Growth may still occur with such institutions if commodities the country exports are in high international demand, but such growth is unsustainable as it puts the economy at the mercy of changes in external markets and ingrains lopsided development, as highlighted by the case of Argentina before the early twentieth century (Kohli, 2020: Chapter 2).

### 1. The Japanese anomaly

Nevertheless, Kohli's latest book also indicates the presence of some exceptional cases that survived imperialism and succeeded in building a sovereign state capable of pursuing national interests and directing development. Japan in the late nineteenth century and China and India in the current century are counted in this minority category (Kohli, 2020: 68% [Kindle]). The book, however, focuses on the negative cases and does not itself speak much about the genesis of these positive cases. Meiji Japan is mentioned in the book several times, but mostly in the context of explaining China within the same period (Chapter 2) through comparison to it.

As Meiji Japan is concerned, one reservation which, I believe, needs to be advanced, is that a nationalist sovereign state did not exist in Japan *a priori*. Before the Meiji Restoration (1867/68), a revolution that ostracized the hegemonic Shogunate and established a unified centralized state headed by the Emperor Meiji (r. 1867–1912), the Japanese nation was politically fragmented into more than 250 local states (*han*). The hegemonic Tokugawa Shogun *pacified* the country in the early seventeenth century but did not *unify* it. From this viewpoint, Japan remained highly vulnerable to Western imperialism, whose major tool of domination was 'divide and rule' – frequently practiced by Britain toward local rulers and notables in its informal empire as Kohli argues (17% [Kindle]). Japan's Imperial Court directly ruled the country in the ancient period but had long been politically marginalized since the late twelfth century by region-based samurai clans, except for a short period in the fourteenth century, the strongest of whom assumed the title of Shogun (commander in chief).

The causal process of the decline of the Tokugawa Shogunate and events leading to the Meiji Restoration is highly convoluted, to the degree that Hiroshi Mitani, a historian versed in the Meiji Restoration, once sought an application of the geometric model of chaos theory (Lorenz attractor) to explain its complexity (Mitani, 2006). Moreover, although a large body of literature on the Meiji Restoration already exists, the influence of the modernization paradigm and Marxism was strong in past studies (*ibid.*), and its political process has not much been analyzed from the comparative perspective in relation to the political economy theories concerning developing economies. Only recently this under-charted sea has begun to be explored (Banno and Ōno, 2010).

Why, and how, did Japan survive imperialism and build its sovereign state capable of pursuing national interests and directing development? In light of Kohli's argument, this review essay will render two claims: (i) Japan faced relatively weak extra-regional imperialist interests and interventions and was also autonomous from the regional empire, China; and (ii) although the Japanese nation was fragmented, its national identity emerged in the form of embracing the then-marginalized authority of the Emperor and was later tapped by the Meiji revolutionaries as an emancipatory, unification ideology in lieu of republicanism in Europe.

### 2. Relatively weak imperialist interests and interventions

First of all, from Kohli's argument on the association between imperialism and underdevelopment, we can extrapolate that Japan *evaded* imperialism. Kohli says: 'Britain undermined the possibility of a

more nationalist building of more complexed economies on the global periphery ... there were to be no Meiji restorations within the scope of the Britain's informal empire' (Kohli, 2020: 69% [Kindle]). This evasion thesis appears to be valid at least to a certain degree: Japan, in fact, faced relatively weak levels of imperialist interest and intervention because of its low strategic value to Western empires. To Britain, which became the hegemon in the East Asian region after the Opium War (1839–42), Japan offered little given its geography and the size of the country. Kohli argues that some formal colonies of the British Empire, such as Nigeria, did not have strong immediate value but still provided access to markets, such as those in the African interior (25% [Kindle]). Nevertheless, in the case of Japan, which is located at the eastern end of the Western world map, it was not even on the route to any markets – behind Japan is only the vast Pacific Ocean. Neither did Japan itself present a sizable market, especially as compared to China, which occupied a key corner of the British imperial economy by importing opium from Britain's Crown Colony, India (Nish, 1966: 9; Kohli, 2020: Chapter 2). Japan's population was not small, estimated to be over 30 million at that time, but it was not large enough (less than a tenth of China's) for Britain to pay the cost of entering the confrontation with its xenophobic and militarizing state that did not agree, until 1899, with the free movement of foreigners in the country.

Thus, as long as Japan did not challenge British interests in the region, there was little imperative for London to proactively intervene in Japan's internal affairs. Only in the 1890s Britain substantially revised this indifference to Japan due to China's visible decline after the First Sino–Japanese War (1894–95) and Russia's penetration into Northeast Asia such as Manchuria and Korea (Nish, 1966); by then Japan had already achieved early industrialization. Similarly, France, whose imperialist interventions in the region focused on Indochina and southern China, did not find strong interests in Japan either. According to Richard Sims who investigated the French diplomatic archives for the period around the Meiji Restoration, the French policy toward Japan was primarily driven by the pursuit of prestige, not even by commercial interests, and was constrained by its consideration to avoid friction with Britain (Sims, 1998: 296–297).<sup>1</sup>

The strategic value of Japan was relatively higher for the new empire emerging at the other end of the ocean: the USA. Ports in Japan provided the US Navy, whalers, and merchants with base points in the Pacific after California and Hawaii. Indeed, it was the USA that forced the Tokugawa Shogunate in the 1850s to end its isolationist policy, which had been in place since the early seventeenth century. Nevertheless, although this gunboat diplomacy triggered the process of the Shogunate's decline and eventual demise, the USA was preoccupied with its own Civil War (1861–65) and postwar settlements at the time of Japan's political transition (Iokibe and Minohara, 2017: 12). Moreover, at that point US commercial interests in the Pacific were still not sufficiently high. It was only after the late 1880s that the US government and businesses began to fully seek foreign markets because the frontiers of their own continent had closed and recession and unemployment had begun to press them to find new opportunities – leading to the annexation of Hawaii and the occupation of the Philippines, which both took place in 1898. Until then, there remained plentiful domestic investment opportunities in production (agricultural, mineral, and industrial) and infrastructure (construction and railway) (LaFeber, 1963; Kohli, 2004: Chapter 4).

Russia's imperialist outreach in Northeast Asia was also limited before the late 1880s. Although Russian colonists had already reached the northern Pacific Rim and demarcated borders with China's Qing Dynasty in the seventeenth century, Saint Petersburg long remained indifferent to this remote frontier. Only in response to the rise of the British presence in East Asia following the Opium War, Russia sought territorial expansion along the Pacific coast north of Korea (Stephan, 1994). Nevertheless, after fixing its territorial control with the new treaty with China in 1860, the focus of Russia's imperialist expansion shifted to West Turkistan (Central Asia). Its interest in the northern Pacific receded again: Alexander II even sold Alaska to the USA in 1867. Only in the late 1880s,

<sup>1</sup>Sims finds that, although the Tokugawa Shogunate before its demise received French support, this ill-fated foreign intervention was essentially an individual initiative of the French envoy to Japan Léon Roches, who made use of the leeway permitted by the geographical distance in pre-telegraph times (Sims, 1998: 297).

the Tsar cast his eyes to Northeast Asia, facing new geopolitical realities such as Russia's increasing tensions with China over East Turkistan (today's Xinjiang) and the rising Sino-Japanese rivalry over Korea (*ibid.*). Russia's full penetration into Manchuria and Korea began after China's defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War.

In this way, fortunately for Japan, the old Western empires, British and French, did not find in Japan substantive colonial values, whereas the new empires, American and Russian, were yet to fully intervene in the East Asia when Japan underwent the period of early industrial growth. Nevertheless, what was probably even more fortunate for Japan was the country's autonomy from the empire in the region, the Qing Dynasty. Indeed, the logic advanced by Kohli that imperialism has prevented non-Western countries from forming developmental sovereign states induces the very assumption that Western countries themselves were capable of forming such states *because they were not constrained by similar empires*. This thesis particularly applies to Western European countries, which were after the seventeenth century autonomous from the outreach of the Habsburg Empire and where the balance of power between the major autonomous states such as England, France, the Netherlands, and Prussia was the norm (Luard, 1992). Indeed, the notion of sovereignty – unitary internal authority and mutual non-interference – was engendered through such non-hierarchical interstate order in this particular region of the world.<sup>2</sup>

Such egalitarian balance of power did not exist in East Asia, where dynasties in China had been the regional hegemon since ancient times. These dynasties with colossal political influence practiced the tributary system toward neighboring countries, conferring political legitimacy to submissive smaller regimes within the frame of Sinocentric civilizational order and allowing them trade opportunities. However, Japan, geographically insulated from the Chinese continent by sea, remained outside such tributary system most of the time throughout history. After the failed expeditions by the Yuan Dynasty and its Korean subordinate Goryeo in the thirteenth century, Chinese dynasties made no further attempts to militarily subjugate Japan. On the contrary, Japan's hegemonic warlord Hideyoshi Toyotomi aimed to invade China and attacked the Yi Dynasty in Korea in the sixteenth century, but this time the Min Dynasty defended its Korean satellite regime. Since then, until Japan's rise in the late nineteenth century, a certain equilibrium had been maintained between China and Japan owing to the insulation provided by water.

This autonomy factor of Japan is *comparatively* important as, because of it, there was no conceivable option of intervention for China's Qing Dynasty when the Tokugawa Shogunate was challenged by nationalist revolutionaries. The contrast is made with Korea, where a coup by radical reformists occurred in 1884 but the new regime immediately collapsed due to the Qing Dynasty's intervention to support the incumbent pro-Chinese conservative regime and preserve its tributary system (Namihira, 2014: 328). However, the exception in Japan was Okinawa, an archipelago in the southern Japan. The Ryūkyū Kingdom, which existed before Japan's annexation of Okinawa, was simultaneously subordinated to Satsuma, one of Japan's local states, and the Qing Dynasty. After the abolishment of the Kingdom in 1879, some royalist Okinawan activists moved to China to lobby Peking in the hope of restoring the Kingdom with the help of the Qing Dynasty. Concerned about China's possible intervention, the Meiji regime postponed its full reform in Okinawa, coopting the former royalist elites by preserving their privileged status until the First Sino-Japanese War (Nishizato, 1981: 231; Namihira, 2014: 312–321), in contrast to the rest of Japan where the previous samurai elites were swiftly deprived (Ochiai, 2015).

Moreover, this association of autonomy and development is also applicable to *inside* Japan. Japan's national state building under the Meiji regime was preceded by state building at the local level, especially in local states that formed the core of the regime such as Satsuma and Chōshū. The Meiji regime was able to harness human capital and institutions already developed in these states. In other words, although Meiji Japan was nearly the only exception to the 'Great Divergence' – the widening disparity between the West and the rest (Pomeranz, 2000) – the 'Little Divergence' occurred *within* pre-Meiji

<sup>2</sup>This does not mean that sovereignty was practiced in a thorough manner: the principle was often violated. However, the fact that the concept was born in Europe, not elsewhere, and remained not entirely fictional is important here.

Japan. This Little Divergence owed to national fragmentation and the limitation of the power of the Tokugawa Shogunate. It was the autonomy of some local states that enabled these states to develop competitive productive institutions. If the Shogunate had already unified the nation rather than pacified it, and if such local autonomy had not been allowed, then reform attempts in the peripheries could have been nipped in the bud by the center, which would have seen such attempts as a potential political menace.<sup>3</sup> The building of developmental sovereign states by local states that were autonomous and successful in their own economic reform was seen in some late-industrializing European countries such as Germany and Italy (Ziblatt, 2006), too.

### 3. The emergence of a national identity and its rise to the political center stage

However, the absence of strong imperialist interests and interventions alone does not explain the formation of the sovereign state in Japan, which had long been politically fragmented across more than 250 local states each ruled by daimyo (lord). Such fragmentation, if not internally overcome, could have been easily exploited by the divide-and-rule intervention, which was a common imperialist strategy and practiced by Britain toward rulers and notables in the Middle East (Kohli, 2020: 17% [Kindle]) as well as nationalists in its formal colonies such as Nigeria. The alternative path of modern Japan, thus, could have been a fragmented nation that was mildly, if not fully, penetrated by imperialist interests. (In fact, pre-Meiji Japan was forced by Western powers to sign unequal treaties that stipulated conditions detrimental to its economy, such as the relinquishment of its sovereign right to determine tariffs, which lasted for almost half a century.) To know why centralization occurred and stayed, closing off such potential path, requires a combined analysis of discourse and political economy: how the national identity emerged in the fragmented polity, and how such identity became a politically central ideology.

Here again, the extrapolation from Kohli's argument is that European countries were able to industrialize *because they were nationalist*. As for Japan, the understanding that the Meiji Restoration was a nationalist revolution is not new itself (Beasley, 1972), but the theme is worth revisiting with a comparative lens: the Japanese context was different from that of Europe, where, after the French Revolution, nationalism shaped the rules of the political game between republicans and incumbent regimes. The associated ideologies of republicanism and nationalism were not yet a major political discourse in Japan in the period of its political transition (Bendix, 1964: 184). Japanese nationalism, instead, took the form of embracing the authority of the Emperor that had been politically marginalized by the Shogunate. Because the replacement of the Shogunate by the Imperial House was a shift from one dynastic regime to another, the Meiji Restoration is often not counted as a 'social revolution' (Skocpol, 1979) but is seen as an 'elite revolution' (Trimberger, 1972). In this sense, post-1868 Japan was also different from other empires in Asia such as the Qing Dynasty. In these empires, the incumbent dynasty long survived, and despite emerging nationalists' attempts to reform its government, the royalist client elites remained as vested interests and hindered such attempts (Kohli, 2020: 24% [Kindle]). The Qing Dynasty declined only gradually, and eventually became an *ancien régime* in the early twentieth century. In Japan, in contrast, the old fragmented regimes were dismantled fast, and the monarchical but revolutionary-nationalist government started as a *nouveau régime*.

The origins of Japanese nationalism also derived from the country's having political autonomy from the regional hegemon. Its root was a philological movement illuminating Japan's own ancient texts and questioning the dominance of Chinese texts in the country's intellectual sphere: although Japan was politically autonomous from China, intellectually it wasn't – even the Shogunate adopted Confucianism as its official scholarship. This literal movement then turned into a general criticism

<sup>3</sup>One likely case of this was Mito, a local state ruled by one of the branches of the Tokugawa family. Mito's reformist lord Nariaki (r. 1829–1844) was abdicated by the Shogunate as the latter was allegedly concerned about Nariaki's ambition to intervene in its politics after the local reform using his blood (Mitoshi-shi hensan iinkai, 1982: 48–55).

of the historical influence of Chinese ideas on the minds of Japanese intellectuals, and further into an attempt to reframe Japanese history with ethnocentric claims. This new discursive trend, called *Kokugaku* (National Study), became popular through the writings of Norinaga Moto'ori (1730–1801) who claimed that Japan, instead of China, had been the center of the tributary order (Tanaka, 2016: 314–315).

Such 'reverse' tributary worldview induced an embryotic nationalist conception: although the original Chinese tributary order was based on the concept of *civilizational* center and peripheries without assuming *national* borders, Moto'ori's (largely fictional) version rested on nationhood as a way to validate its superiority over the factual Chinese one. Moto'ori defined Japan as the *mikuni*, the 'country of the Emperor,' referring to the idealized ancient past when the Imperial Court directly ruled (Be, 2017: 188–194). Such Emperor-centric conception of nationhood in the *Kokugaku* influenced another major intellectual trend, *Mitogaku* (Mito Study), scholarship in the intellectually active local state of Mito. Ruled by one of the branches of the Tokugawa family, the *Mitogaku* endorsed the Emperor's historical centrality in the Confucian language instead of through mythical ethnocentrism, but it concurred with the *Kokugaku* in claiming Japan's superiority over China, on the basis that, whereas dynasties kept changing in China because of the flaws in their virtue, the same dynastic family had lasted in Japan since the beginning of history (Mitoshi-shi hensan iinkai, 1976: 915).

The Emperor-centric national identity advanced by the *Kokugaku* and the *Mitogaku* was, however, apolitical and confined to philology and history. The political reality surrounding the Emperor at that time was utterly different. The Imperial Court directly ruled in the ancient era, but then power shifted away from it toward region-based samurai (warrior) clans. The Emperor became a nominal authority which approved the ruling mandate of the strongest samurai clan by conferring upon it the title of Shogun. The Emperor's political leverage temporarily increased when the incumbent Shogunate declined. However, under the long Tokugawa hegemony, the imperial authority was significantly marginalized. The Imperial Court itself survived through its institutionalization in the new order as the Shogunate exploited the Emperor's divine spiritual authority to cement its legitimacy,<sup>4</sup> but the political power of the Imperial Court declined to its lowest point in the history (Fujita, 2018: 4). Living in the age of the Tokugawa hegemony, even *Kokugaku* scholars had to develop logic to validate the Shogunate's rule, such as the mandate delegation (*miyosashi*) theory (*ibid.*: 245–246).

### ***The political rise of Emperor-centric nationalism as an emancipatory, unification ideology***

The Emperor-centric national identity, which initially developed from the narratives of Japanese history, assuming the country's independence from the Chinese tributary world order, however, faced different political and social contexts in the mid-nineteenth century. As the Shogunate was compelled to open ports and commence trade with Western countries under conditions legally and economically disadvantageous to Japan, samurais increasingly saw the Shogunate as defeatist. The slogan *sonnō-jōi*, or 'revere the Emperor and expel barbarians,' widely circulated among those who were frustrated with the Shogunate's policy. In the new regional security environment, Emperor-centric nationalism came to be associated with defensive patriotism *vis-à-vis* perceived Western imperialist threats (Tanaka, 2016: 310–311).

The trajectory of how this Emperor-centric nationalism arose politically and became reality with the Meiji Restoration is, indeed, complex, and its detailed explanation is beyond the scope of this essay. One noteworthy factor behind the dissemination of this ideology, however, is that Mito was a pioneering case of local state reform, and thus many scholars and civil servants in other local states learned from Mito's reform experience and also studied its scholarship (Mitoshi-shi hensan iinkai, 1976: 909). The *Mitogaku* also attracted fresh attention after Mito's previous lord Nariaki

<sup>4</sup>At the request of the Shogunate, the Imperial Court posthumously conferred divine status to Ieyasu Tokugawa, the founder of the Tokugawa Shogunate, and began to annually dispatch an envoy to the Nikkō Tōshō-gū, a sanctuary enshrining Ieyasu (Fujita, 2018: 85–86).

Tokugawa was involved in the Shogunate's military reform following the beginning of the country's contact with Western states. Furthermore, the change to the regional security environment after the Opium War caused samurais to become more interested in political, economic, social, and international affairs in and around the country, resulting in the rise of cross-local state intellectual networks and the formation of epistemic communities of civil servants, in general, in which ideas and ideologies rapidly circulated (Mitani, 2017: 83–86).

The key political dynamic was that *both* anti-Shogunate activists *and* the Shogunate embraced this Emperor-centric nationalism as a means to legitimize their action. The Shogunate attempted to shore up its damaged credibility by re-exploiting the imperial authority, such as through the arranged marriage of the Emperor Kōmei's sister Kazunomiya to the Shogun Iemochi (Fujita, 2018: 295). On the contrary, activists who lobbied the Imperial Court embraced the same ideology as a cause for further undermining the Shogunate's authority. These activists included many from Chōshū who were inspired by Shōin Yoshida, a patriotic intellectual who learned both the Mitogaku and the Kokugaku (Kirihara, 2016), taught a number of would-be Meiji revolutionaries, and was executed by the Shogunate for his rebellious plans. The political game between the Shogunate and anti-Shogunate activists became a competition, with each hoping to win the Emperor over to their side.

The parley on the eve of the Meiji Restoration was heading toward a new arrangement of creating a national assembly of daimyos under the Emperor, similar to aristocratic parliaments in reactionary Europe. It was not only agreed by major daimyos but, in fact, was advanced by the Shogun Yoshinobu (r. 1867) himself too, who strategically aimed to exercise his leadership within such an assembly. Then, activists from the lower samurai class waged a coup and grabbed control of the Imperial Court, ostracizing Yoshinobu and the Shogunate through the civil war (1868–69),<sup>5</sup> and dismantling all local states (1871). In this regard, although Ellen Trimberger described the Meiji Restoration as the 'elite revolution,' the political process, in fact, ended up with a revolution by the 'peripheral elites,' to be terminologically more precise.

These revolutionaries with lower-elite backgrounds aspired to break the hierarchy that had long constrained them. By directly being connected to the Emperor, they transcended all the Shogunate, daimyos, and the upper-class samurai in political power (Tanaka, 1963: 23). They dared to deprive the samurai class itself by terminating traditional distributions and instead incorporating them into new institutions such as modern bureaucracy, the education sector, and the financial and commercial sectors (Ochiai, 2015). Such productive elite redeployment not only strengthened the new regime fiscally and administratively, but also helped the samurai shift their allegiance from their old local lord to the Emperor. Moreover, their extensive deployment in the education sector also contributed to an infusion of patriotism into the children of commoners via the ethics of the loyal samurai (Karasawa, 1956) – which the regime saw as indispensable to national survival in the age of conscription-based total war (Makihara, 1998: 7–8).

Compared with Europe, the nationalist representation of the Emperor, it may be said, was a functional substitute for republicanism or, given the nominal political power of the Emperor, was 'republicanism with Japanese characteristics.' As in post-French Revolution Europe republican nationalists challenged the incumbent conservative regimes, some patriotic samurais resisted the old order of the Shogunate hegemony with the Emperor-centric vision of national unification. And as republicanism in Europe provided a new vision of the future to the commoner, the notion of the equality of people under the Emperor (*mitami*) supplied to Japan's lower-caste populaces, such as farmers, a hope for egalitarianism (Miyachi, 2012: 33–35) – despite the fact that such a future remained fictional in both cases until the progress of democratization.

<sup>5</sup>One noteworthy contingency is that the last Shogun, Yoshinobu, was from the Mito branch of the Tokugawa family. After the anti-Shogunate alliance won the support of the Imperial Court, Yoshinobu surrendered at an early stage of the civil war so as not to fight against the Emperor. This decision resulted in a reduction in the scale of the civil war, making it not fought at the full national scale and not fatally divisive for the country.

In the non-Western intellectual spheres, republican nationalism became an influential ideology around or after the turn of the century. However, it was swiftly followed by socialism. Thus, many regimes in developing countries, when these countries were decolonized and attained certain autonomy, suffered from another long-term pathology, namely, popular distribution (Waldner, 1999; Vu, 2010), upon which regimes' nationalist legitimacy began to hinge – unlike Western Europe and Japan before the twentieth century, when liberalism remained elitist. Combined with the dependence on commodities, popular distribution forms what is nowadays described as the 'rent curse' (Auty and Furlonge, 2019) – a political squandering of non-productive national income. In other words, distributional justice has come to mediate between nationalist politics and the building of institutions, which arguably makes conditions in today's political economy of development more complicated than those in the nineteenth century.

#### 4. Concluding remarks

Kohli's new book marks an invaluable contribution to the studies of development in the non-Western world. The study sharpens our understanding of the political association between imperialism and underdevelopment by identifying the deterrence of the rise of a sovereign state as a key causal process. This review essay sought to provide some explicit explanations of the Japanese anomaly to this rule, which Kohli hinted at in the book, with the following two claims: (i) Japan faced relatively weak imperialist interests and interventions, both extra-regional (Western) and regional (Chinese); and (ii) although the Japanese nation was initially fragmented and without a unified sovereign state, its national identity emerged in the form of embracing the then-marginalized authority of the Emperor, which was later adopted by the revolutionaries as an emancipatory, unification ideology.

Through its analysis, the essay further implied a comparability of Meiji Japan with pre-twentieth-century European countries from the viewpoint of Kohli's discussion. On the first issue, both Japan and major European countries were autonomous from the regional hegemon – the Qing Dynasty and the Habsburg Empire, respectively. On the second, Japan's Emperor-centric national identity, with its emancipatory and unification symbolism, is deemed to have served as a functional substitute for the republican nationalism in Europe, or what may be described as republicanism with Japanese characteristics. Of course, these two factors are not sufficient to account for the full story of the Meiji development: other issues such as premodern agricultural and commercial activities and proto-industrialization, human capital, institutional change, and political stability also need to be counted. Nonetheless, it is safe to say that the insights advanced by Kohli provide promising agendas that urge us to revisit this oft-forgotten past development experience in a comparative manner.

Except for England, the timing of industrialization in major European countries was less than a century before, or more or less at the same time as, that in Japan. Thus, it would be analytically beneficial to seek consistent theories that explain why *only some European countries and Japan* industrialized early while others did not. The scope of such inquiry should be the opposite of the modernization paradigm: instead of teleologically calibrating contemporary development with endogenous understandings of the past, the past should be reassessed with exogenous insights emanating from contemporary development, such as those rendered by Kohli. Such an approach will be not only useful for understanding development in light of the fact that the positive cases of non-Western development are still limited, but also conducive to discovering 'lost ladders' – ladders that some climbed in the past but that no longer exist (Chang, 2002).

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