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Ikenberry, American Empire and the U.S.-Japan Relationship

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> … [W]e often forgot how much more thoughtless and dangerous people in power can be when, driven by fear, they choose to arrogate to themselves the prerogative of declaring the exception.
>
> — Partha Chatterjee

In recent years, there has been a growth in the literature on the concept and practice of the "American Empire." Referring to empire, many scholars and journalists have emphasized the neo-imperial characteristic of the United States. After the Bush Administration sent troops to Afghanistan and Iraq in the name of a "war on terrorism," American foreign policy has revived the memory of an old-style colonial empire. In opposition, G. John Ikenberry argues that the notion of American empire is misleading, since the United States has embraced democratic rules and values in its diplomacy and national security considerations. His neo-liberal argument suggests that U.S. leadership and security presence in the Asia-Pacific, including Japan, significantly contributes to the peace and stability of this region and the world.

The purpose of this paper is not to decide whether the United States should be described as an empire, but rather to critically assess an assumption upon which the U.S. liberal strategy has been grounded. In this article, I particularly question Ikenberry's influential proposition by examining the internal dissonance of the Japanese situation in the context of the U.S.-Japan security alliance. First, I provide a brief overview of Ikenberry's the perspective from which an international order led by the United States is stable and mutually agreeable. Second, I develop the argument that the U.S. security strategy accelerates the shrinking of the democratic sphere in its relationship with Japan. The third section considers the U.S.-Japanese policy cooperation and internal conflicts within it, especially focusing on the case of Okinawa. I conclude that the U.S.-Japan security alliance represents the way in which a liberal state betrays its original

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principle once it has spread it beyond its border. Ikenberry's denial of the concept of American empire incorrectly eliminates this important aspect of U.S. activity on forming alliances.

Ikenberry's argument on the United States

G. John Ikenberry is a liberal strategist who specializes in U.S. foreign policy. Whilst teaching at Georgetown, Princeton, and Pennsylvania Universities, he has held a post at the State Department and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. He is a well-known, influential scholar in Japan, especially as an editor-in-chief of the *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* (the English journal of the Japan Association of International Relations). He has conducted a multi-year project on "United States and Japanese Collaboration on Regional Security and Governance" in collaboration with Takashi Inoguchi with financial support from the U.S.-Japan Foundation and the Committee for Global Partnership.

His argument on empire appears to be a response to the enormous popularity of the concept of American empire.[1] A widespread tendency to label the United States as an empire derives mainly from three aspects of the second term of the Bush Administration. First, the U.S. attack on Iraq failed to gain an institutional agreement such as that from the United Nations Security Council. Second, U.S. owned interests in oil in the Middle East seemed to be an important motivation for this military intervention. Third, when the target of the U.S. anti-terror war was extended from al-Qaeda and the Taliban to Iraq, U.S. foreign policy unavoidably acquired the tone of cultural imperialism. Even though Bush aims to boost morale among the U.S. troops for the smooth democratization of Iraq, promoting democratic values helps intensify an anti-U.S. sentiment in the Islamic world.

Ikenberry himself argues in 2002 that the new ideas within the Bush Administration after September 11 put at risk the U.S. legacy "to exercise power within alliance and multinational frameworks, which made its power and agenda more acceptable to allies and other key states around the world."[2] This is based on his acceptance of a view that any power that disregards the interdependence of the international system would endanger its liberal values and global influence in future.[3] He also suggests that the recurrence of debate over an American empire is "an attempt to make sense of the new unipolar reality" because the United States possessed "near-monopoly" in terms of military force after the break-up of the Soviet Union.[4] However, he ardently argues that, despite the sudden change of American policy after September 11, the U.S. liberal characteristic has not been changed. For Ikenberry, this new international order is consistent with the principle of multilateralism and rule-based negotiation. He explains the U.S. unipolar order from three aspects:

> First, the United States provided public goods — particularly the extension of security and the support for an open trade regime — in exchange for the

cooperation of other states. Second, power in the U.S. system is exercised through rules and institutions; power politics still exist, but arbitrary and indiscriminate power is reigned in. Finally, weaker states in the U.S.-led order are given "voice opportunities" — informal access to the policymaking processes of the United States and the intergovernmental institutions that make up the international system.[5]

Even though the United States has powerful military forces and economic influences, Ikenberry emphasizes that the order led by the United States is a far more stable and less coercive venture for the promotion of democracy. Therefore, this country is fundamentally different from previous empires in the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. It can be best understood not by the concept of empire but by hegemony, primarily because this country is an unprecedented state which rejects the exercising of imperialistic power to which previous empires subscribed.

Along this line of argument, Ikenberry values Niall Ferguson's reading of the United States. Ferguson has considered the role of an empire to be important in maintaining the stability of an international order.[6] He understands that the political aspirations of the British Empire included not only the prosperity of its own country but also the promotion of peace and development in other parts of the world. The strong emphasis on the positive legacy of the British Empire is rather bizarre, even though Britain has a liberal and moral tradition from the age of Adam Smith.[7] Yet Ferguson describes the United States as a similar kind of liberal power and highlights the U.S. global role that would enforce order and stability. Ikenberry basically supports this view, even though he believes that, instead of a "liberal empire," "liberal hegemony" is an appropriate term to describe U.S. power. For him, it is the U.S. liberal thinking that has sustained the post-1945 world order as a pluralistic society. This is fundamentally different from the old-style empires that use coercive forces for the maintenance of order.

Does Ikenberry then completely deny the imperialist legacy of the United States? Indeed, as Cox argues, the memory of the Founding Fathers apparently shows that the United States acquired other people's land; American Manifest Destiny became a convenient guidance for the invasion of some regions in the Caribbean and the Pacific.[8] How does Ikenberry see the imperialist legacy of the United States?

The United States has a long history of pursuing crude imperial policies, particularly in Latin America and the Middle East. But America's relations with Europe, Japan, Russia and China are not best described as imperial — and this is true even when the term empire is modified with neo-, liberal, or democratic. It is a political order built on 'liberal hegemonic' bargains, diffuse reciprocity, public goods provision, and an unprecedented array of intergovernmental institutions and working relationships. The advanced democracies operate within a 'security community' where the use or threat of force is unthinkable. This is not empire — it is an American-led open democratic political order that has no name or historical antecedent.[9]

Ikenberry admits that the United States has made an imperialistic intervention in Latin America and the Middle East, but not in any other region. In this context, Japan is one of the countries that have a partnership with the United States.[10] He argues that "Japan may be a subordinate security partner, but the U.S.-Japan alliance also allows Tokyo to forgo a costly buildup of military capacity that would destabilize East Asia."[11] For this reason, even though Japan has an alternative to ask the United States to leave, Japan has taken an autonomous decision to be a subordinate partner of the United States.[12] Consequently the U.S. alliance system creates a "stable, open political space."[13] In another paper, he also argues that the U.S.-Japan relationship "solved regional security dilemmas by creating restraints on the resurgence of Japanese military power." Put differently, "American power is seen less as a source of domination and more as a useful tool."[14]

As Ikenberry describes it, can one be so sure about the support and effects of the U.S.-Japan relationship? Is there any doubt that the United States provides a secure, democratic world order with sufficient consent of its partners? The crucial question is: who actually has "voice opportunities" without a feeling of being threatened? In the next two sections, I aim to examine the international and domestic implications of this U.S.-Japan alliance relationship. First, I suggest that the Japanese engagement in the U.S. security strategy may destabilize the order of this East Asian region. Second, I examine the development of the U.S.-Japan security alliance, particularly focusing on the way in which this bilateral relationship has developed in respect of Okinawa without a satisfactory level of mutual consultation.

Asset and liability of U.S. presence in East Asia

Ikenberry argues that the U.S. presence in East Asia helps to stabilize this region. However, it is not so clear whether or not the U.S.-Japan security alliance truly helps to create a "stable, open political space" in East Asia, especially because of the very nature of this region. Unlike Europe, East Asian countries do not have a real political network that could restrain any military conflicts. Since there is little institutional framework in terms of security, bilateral treaties have been the dominant mode of protection in this region. This tendency largely continues to exist, as can be seen in the East Asian Summit in 2005, which did not produce any particular outcome in terms of security cooperation. In this context, the presence of the U.S. troops is supposed to deter any regional power from taking military actions. Amongst several alliance relationships, the U.S.-Japan security agreement has been considered to be a vital source of East Asian security, especially during the Cold War era. The Pentagon continues to believe that the U.S. alliance system largely contributes to the "containment" of the China.

However, the pre-emptive strategy of the United States risks creating a security dilemma, that is, a close connection with this military power would provoke reactions from the regional states. According to DiFilippo, "Because

the U.S.-Japan security relationship is an alliance between the two biggest economies in the world with a combined military power that would be difficult to challenge, it is increasingly being perceived by China, North Korea, and Russia as a destabilizing or at least threatening, regional force."[15] Despite the liberal outlook of the United States, there is no obvious limit in terms of when and how to use force in a particular situation. The maintenance and further increase of military forces and armaments under the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty may escalate unnecessary tension in East Asia.

In addition, it is also doubtful that the U.S. military presence in Japan and other parts of East Asia truly contains the resurgence of Japanese militarization. In fact, Japan has developed its own military power whilst cooperating with the Unites States. In the process of strengthening the security alliance with Washington after the end of the Cold War, Tokyo has significantly expanded the role of its military in the international arena, by completing the review of the Guidelines for U.S.-Japan Defense Cooperation in 1996, commencing the Ballistic Missile Defense program with the United States, and passing anti-terrorist legislation in the Diet. The LDP considers revising Article 9, the war-renouncing clause of the Constitution, and giving more autonomy to military activities by replacing the Defense Agency with the Defense Ministry. Despite the U.S. military presence in Japan, this political and military transformation in the framework of the U.S.-Japan security relationship will destabilize East Asia by escalating tensions with China and posing serious questions for the defensive character of Japan's alliance role.

Facing the rapid increase of Chinese military capabilities, widespread concerns are focused on the Taiwan Strait. In 1996 the United States sent its troops to Taiwan when China threatened the democracy of Taiwan by commencing a large-scale military exercise in the Taiwan Strait. Since then, the Taiwan issue has become a source of tension and U.S. conservatives have described the perceived threat of China. In this context, whether or not the United States will intervene in a conflict if ever China attacks Taiwan is the most contentious issue. According to Auer and Kotani, "The US-Japan alliance is a double-edged sword. A strong alliance discourages Beijing, while encouraging Taipei. A weak alliance discourages Taipei but encourages Beijing. Therefore, the alliance should not allow either side to take advantage of it, and both governments should strongly demand the maintenance of the status quo in the Taiwan Strait and oppose any unilateral change by Taipei and Beijing."[16] Their analysis suggests that if the balance of the region is broken by any misjudgment or miscalculation of the United States, Japan would be further committed to an unwanted conflict between China and the United States. Therefore, one has a good reason to doubt whether the U.S.-Japan relationship is the best way to contribute to the security and stability of this region.

Similarly, the possibility of military intervention by the United States may easily stimulate North Korea to accelerate its nuclear programs as the most

appropriate means of deterrence. According to Smith, the general perception of U.S. policy-makers that North Korea is either mad or bad considerably endangers the peaceful negotiation process with North Korea.[17] It was symbolic that the 1994 nuclear crisis was settled down not by the assertive policy of the Pentagon but by the ex-President Jimmy Carter's "track-two" diplomacy.[18] This means that the U.S. strategic analysis is not always correct or effective, especially concerning states whose society is relatively unknown, closed, and culturally distant from that of western liberal states. For this reason, blind faith in the United States can lead the allied partners such as Japan to be entrapped by conflicts, which could be otherwise avoided.

In a nutshell, it is unclear whether the alliance system really contributes to the peace and stability of East Asia. There is obviously the downside of the alliance, especially when the United States aims to shape the structure of this system in its own interests. Although Ikenberry does not mention this security dilemma when he defends the role of the United States, it is imperative to acknowledge the wider meaning of U.S. global power in the region. For this double-edged nature of the U.S.-Japan security alliance, each development of the alliance has gained serious attention from other East Asian countries.

Japanese dissonance and Okinawa

For the Japanese population, the U.S.-Japan security alliance has given cold comfort as a means to diminish threat and instability. After the San Francisco Peace Treaty and the U.S.-Japanese Security Treaty became effective in 1952, Japan as a legally independent state committed itself to a security alliance with the United States. Ever since, Japanese security policy has been built on the legacy of the U.S. occupation period of 1945–1951: Japan's "peace constitution" and its defense forces. The former was prescribed by the American initiative in the Government Section of the Supreme Command for the Allied Powers.[19] The latter originated in the National Police Reserve, which was created after the United States demanded Japan to rebuild military forces for the defense of free Asia against the Soviet Union and China. Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru saw this apparent contradiction not as a liability but as an asset to save his economically devastated country. On the one hand, he accepted the U.S. defense strategy as an inexpensive means to defend Japan, but on the other, he used the Constitution as an excuse to restrain a military build-up. Yoshida, as a pragmatist, writes that "the maintenance of close bonds of friendship with the United States, based upon a deep mutuality of interests, must be one of the pillars of Japan's fundamental policy and always remain so."[20] This so-called Yoshida doctrine became the main policy of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party for the following decades.

During the Cold War, left-wing politicians and pacifist scholars criticized the LDP's cooperative approach to the U.S. "containment" strategy towards communism. Although neither the Japanese Socialist Party nor the Japanese

Communist Party could manage to replace the LDP, they helped reject any attempt to amend the Constitution. Both parties attacked the LDP's cooperation with the United States throughout the Cold War era primarily because strenuous opposition to any commitment to war was deeply rooted in post-war Japan. The climax of this internal tension was probably at the time of the Vietnam War. A number of mass protests against this war questioned the legitimacy of U.S. forces sent from bases in Okinawa and mainland Japan to North Vietnam without any prior consultation with Japan. It may be for the first time in Japanese history that such a massive scale of civil protest was organized by a voluntary group like *Beheiren* [Citizens' Federation for Peace in Vietnam]. Even though the LDP continued to occupy the ruling seat, the protests reached a significant level that restrained further Japanese cooperation with the United States in the 1960s.[21]

The disagreement over the U.S.-Japan security relationship is particularly significant in regard to Okinawa. The U.S.-Japan alliance has created an excessive burden on Okinawa since 1945. From 1945 to 1972 Okinawa was under U.S. occupation. Even after Okinawa reverted to Japan in 1972, approximately seventy percent of all U.S. military facilities in Japan were concentrated on the land of Okinawa. Because of this military occupation, Okinawa's economic structure was heavily dependent on the U.S. bases. Any restructuring of the U.S. strategic position certainly affected Japanese foreign policy whose posture tended to be subordinate to the United States as the guarantor of Japanese security. However, the effect of change appears more explicitly in Okinawa.

The "partnership" between the United States and Japan was seriously questioned in September 1995 when three U.S. servicemen abducted and raped a young girl in Okinawa. This incident ignited the rage of the Okinawan residents and drove the largest demonstration (85,000 protestors) in Okinawa since 1972, which consequently raised nation-wide voices against the U.S. forces in Japan. Gabe points out the significant lack of Japanese-side initiative in handling Okinawa's problems: "perhaps those political leaders find it difficult to change their perception that, so long as they follow in the wake of decisions by the U.S. government, they need not have any purpose of their own in terms of diplomatic and national security policies."[22] In this sense, the Japanese government's stance is a "dependent variable" in negotiations with the United States.

Despite the institutional development of the Special Action Committee on Okinawa (SACO) for the coordination of Okinawa's issues, Okinawa has continued to suffer from its subordination to the U.S. military. More importantly, the democratic decision-making process continues to be ignored by Tokyo. The most recent contentious issue was over the relocation of the functions of Futenma airbase to a new offshore heliport in Henoko. Since 'relocation' is fundamentally different from 'reduction', citizens formed a grassroots opposition movement to this plan. As a result, Nago City, which had already negotiated with Tokyo, reluctantly held a plebiscite. The result was the rejection of the heliport plan (52.86% against, 45.33% for this plan). Nevertheless, Mayor Higa Tetsuya

pledged his city's support for the plan and then resigned.[23] Ota Masahide, the governor of Okinawa, endorsed the plebiscite and skillfully attracted the media's attention by contacting Washington officials directly and refusing to sign off the enforced leasing of Okinawa's land.

However, Ota's effort did not succeed. He eventually had to leave office when he lost his support in 1998. Ota explains that this is because of the politicization of economy. He writes: "residents think that although the base relocation and economic development are separate issues as the government has repeatedly emphasized, the two issues have been actually linked before they knew it, because the government is proceeding with its plan for relocation as if it were a quid pro quo for economic development."[24] According to the public opinion poll, most Okinawans expressed their support for Ota's policy, whilst they were worried about the direction of Okinawa's economy.[25]

The contradiction between the rejection of outside authority and a desire for economic development has not lessened. Without having a serious discussion with the Okinawa government and the residents of the region, the Japanese and U.S. governments reached an agreement over a heliport plan in Henoko. The Japanese government decided on the relocation with the United States prior to consultation with Okinawa, and afterwards, demanded that Okinawa Governor Inamine Keiichi accept it.[26]

It is critical to ensure that agreements between the United States and Japan have passed through a "joint decision-making" process. Regarding the U.S.-Japan relationship, institutional decision-making processes have been underdeveloped so far. For the sake of security strategy, the United States and Japan have largely ignored Okinawa's public opinion. Despite a plan to empower Okinawa's economy, this region has been largely disempowered by its political constraints. Okinawa's case symbolically suggests that the Okinawan people have carried an excessive burden on their shoulder against their will. It is doubtful that the political measure to deal with the Okinawa problem is truly a rule-based and consultative one.

Ikenberry dismisses the dissonance between Okinawa, Japan, and the United States primarily because his focus is limited to inter-state relationships. His suggestion has been built upon a logic shared by the Japanese central government that the alliance has benefited Japan's national security and economy. Based on this "Japanese" support of the U.S.-Japan alliance, he asserts that an American empire is not a correct expression. However, it is hard to see clear evidence that the United States is the exception in taking a consensual approach in comparison with the empires in the past. Chatterjee argues that colonies have been disciplined either by force or by culture.[27] Both an empire and a liberal hegemony share not only a strong military force to coerce its decisions but also an influential normative power to decide what is right. Thus, unlike Ikenberry's proposition, the concepts of empire and liberal hegemony are not exclusive but form an amalgamation. The history of normalizing the U.S.-Japan alliance is inseparable from the history of

empire.

Ikenberry's liberal strategy and beyond

This article has examined Ikenberry's influential view of the United States as a liberal hegemony that helps stabilize the international and regional order. I particularly focus on what he regards as the partnership between Japan and the United States. According to Ikenberry, the U.S.-Japan alliance is an assurance that the United States has enhanced security and order by rule-based negotiations and mutual consent. By rejecting the label of empire, he seems to overthrow a skeptical view that perceives the U.S. alliance as a destabilizing force in the region. His arguments rest on two assumptions: first, that the US military presence and leading role undoubtedly remains important for the peace and stability of the world, and second, that the Japanese government's approval of the alliance is the result of a mutual agreement.

Ikenberry's argument sounds plausible, especially at a time when the Koizumi administration emphasizes that Japan is also intent on the improvement of its security alliance framework and seeks a more assertive foreign policy. However, Japan is taking the risk of increasing instability within the region by placing itself firmly in the U.S. alliance system, and of weakening its democratic process through non-representational decision-making. Okinawa has been forced to stay at the frontline of U.S. military strategy and to obey both the Japanese central government and the United States. Although it is the Japanese government that has the responsibility to take the voice of Okinawa into account, the United States has undeniably helped to impose its military strategy without a democratic and open consultation. The people of Okinawa still seek a public arena for "voice opportunities" to express their opinion on the forced leasing of Okinawan territory. In Ikenberry's counter-argument to the concept of an American empire, Japan's political conflicts and the tension caused by American liberal strategy is overlooked and buried.

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[1] The major target of Ikenberry's criticism may be Chalmers Johnson. See, for example, G. John Ikenberry, "American unipolarity: The sources of persistence and decline," in G. John Ikenberry, ed., *America Unrivaled: The Future of the Balance of Power* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2002), pp. 284–310.

[2] G. John Ikenberry, "America's imperial ambition," *Foreign Affairs* (September/October 2002), p. 56.

[3] For useful accounts of the importance of normative consensus in international relations, see, Ian Clark, *Legitimacy in International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[4] G. John Ikenberry, "Illusions of empire: Defining the new American Order," *Foreign Affairs* (March/April 2004), p. 145.

[5] *Ibid*., p. 146.
[6] Niall Ferguson, *Colossus: The Price of America's Empire* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004).
[7] See, Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, Ch. 5.
[8] Michael Cox, "Empire, imperialism and the Bush doctrine?", *Review of International Studies*, vol. 30, no. 4 (October 2004), p. 599.
[9] John Ikenberry, "Liberalism and empire", *Review of International Studies*, vol. 30, no. 4 (October 2004), p. 611.
[10] Ikenberry also describes America's relations with Europe and Japan in the same terms such as "stable cooperative, and interdependent." G. John Ikenberry, "Democracy, institutions, and American restraint," in G. John Ikenberry, ed., *America Unrivaled: The Future of the Balance of Power* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2002), p. 213.
[11] Ikenberry, "Illusions of empire", p. 148.
[12] After 1945, the United States took the lead that "would actively aid Japan in reestablishing a regional economic sphere in Asia, allowing it to prosper and play a regional leadership role within the larger American postwar order." Ikenberry, "American unipolarity", p. 289
[13] Ikenberry, "Illusions of empire", p. 148.
[14] G. John Ikenberry, "Strategic reactions to American preeminence: Great Power politics in the age of unipolarity", (28 July 2003). http://www.cia.gov/nic/confreports_stratreact.html
[15] Anthony DiFilippo, *The Challenges of the U.S.-Japan Military Arrangement: Competing Security Transitions in a Changing International Environment* (New York and London: M.E. Sharpe, 2002), p. 13.
[16] James Auer and Tetsuo Kotani, "Reaffirming the 'Taiwan Clause': Japan's national interest in the Taiwan strait and the U.S.-Japan alliance", in *Japan-Taiwan Interaction: Implications for the United States* NBR Analysis (Seattle, WA: The National Bureau of Asian Research, 2005), pp. 58–82.
[17] Hazel Smith, "Bad, mad, sad or rational actor? Why the 'securitization' paradigm makes for poor policy analysis of North Korea', *International Affairs*, vol. 76, no. 3 (2000), pp. 593–617.
[18] See, Bruce Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun* (New York: Norton, 1998), p. 157.
[19] See, John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Aftermath of World War II* (London and New York,: Penguin Books, 1999), Ch. 12.
[20] Shigeru Yoshida, *The Yoshida Memoirs: The Story of Japan in Crisis*, trans. Kenichi Yoshida (Westport, CO: Greenwood Press, 1962), p. 8.
[21] Thomas R.H. Havens, *Fire across the Sea: The Vietnam War and Japan, 1965–1975* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974).
[22] Gabe Masaaki, "It is high time to wake up: Japanese foreign policy in the twenty-first century", in Glenn D. Hook and Richard Siddle, eds., *Japan and Okinawa: Structure and Subjectivity* (New York and London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), p. 64.
[23] The news of this undemocratic tactic may help those who remember the revision of the US-Japan Security Treaty in 1960 come to grips with a powerful memory that Prime Minister Kishi Nobusuke resigned after signing the treaty.
[24] Ota Masahide, "Beyond *hondo*: Devolution and Okinawa", Hook and Siddle, *op cit.,*p. 124.
[25] Sheila A. Smith, "A place apart: Okinawa and Japan's postwar peace", in Akira Iriye and Robert A. Wampler, eds., *Partnership: The United States and Japan, 1951–2001* (Tokyo, New York and London: Kodansha International, 2001), p. 191.
[26] In December 2005 Governor Imanime continues to resist this relocation plan and demands for the relocation of US bases to mainland Japan.
[27] Partha Chatterjee, "Empire and nation revisited: 50 years after Bandung", *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, vol. 6, no. 4 (2005), p. 496.