

Aircraft Industry, International Debt, Cyber-Democracy: World History through “3G”

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Because of the scale of the word “world,” people tend to think of the study of world history as massive as well. If I were to draw an analogy, I would say that the study of world history is not something that young and middle-aged researchers can handle, but is a large work written by older researchers as the sum of their research on individual topics. However, this is actually not the case.

The subject of the authors’ research is the economic history of Europe and the United States, particularly the rise and fall of the aircraft industry. This can be broadly categorized as industrial history, but is by no means limited to it. From the beginning, the motivation for the development of aircraft was to strengthen the military; in other words, aircraft were weapons. For this reason, it is impossible to separate the aircraft industry from the trends of the time when discussing them, such as the struggle for hegemony between nations, from Pax Britannica to Pax Americana, or the current conflict for dominance between the United States and China. The world history of the arms industry on such a scale is exciting in the context of the individual thematic study of the history of the aircraft industry.

The relationship between the individual and the whole can never be separated, and a study that separates them can never be said to be valid. On the other hand, it is impossible to form a whole (total) by taking up all the individual parts in detail and with great care, for this would amount to repeating the whole story of history over again. World history is essentially a kind of acrobatic study that accomplishes this absurdity, and therein lies its limitation and its appeal.

In this essay, a researcher of the history of the aircraft industry will take on this absurd challenge. The starting point will be the military industry on the axis of the aircraft, and I will try to tell the narrative of world history from the point of view of the control or dominance of the future democracy of cyberspace. It goes without saying that the more detailed the individual subject, the greater the accuracy. However, too much detail can ultimately lead to a lack of clarity in what the author is trying to convey. In research that resonates not only in the circles of researchers in the field in question, but also with the general public, it is necessary to present a hypothesis (or a narrative) named with a certain “vain boasting” that, as I mentioned earlier, is part of the appeal of world history. Today, the word “accountability” in research frightens us, and we are so focused on the usefulness of our research that we seem to have abandoned the “real” appeal of world history or of university research itself. I decided to write this article partly to combat this trend.

“Gewalt”: State violence and the international order: the aircraft industry and the transfer of Anglo-American hegemony.

In “Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides’s Trap?” Allison addresses the possibility of war between the old and new hegemonic powers. In this book, he examines the critical U.S.-China relationship by analyzing 12 of the 16 instances over the past 500 years in which a rising power has caused structural stress (Thucydides’s Trap) that led to war by attempting to displace the dominant power. He argues that the shift in hegemony between Britain and the United States in the 1940s was peaceful and did not involve war, a common thesis in contemporary history scholarship today. But is it true?

True, the switch of the reserve currency from the pound to the dollar was agreed upon in the Bretton Woods Agreement of 1945 to promote the stability of world financial markets in monetary terms. But what happened in the aircraft industry, the industrial base of military hegemony?

The main structure of an aircraft is divided into two parts for development and production, the fuselage part and the engine part. In the 1950s, the United States had the upper hand in the fuselage section. The Boeing 707 beat the British de Havilland Comet, the world’s first jet airliner, to the market. Regarding engines, however, the British Rolls-Royce secured its international competitiveness in the 1980s by mounting its engines in Lockheed (Tristar) and Boeing (757/777) (a British-American co-production) (this was also the background to the Lockheed case in Japan). In other words: If we focus on the military-industrial base and empirically analyze the economic mechanisms of interdependence between Britain and the U.S., we can say that the exchange of hegemony between Britain and the U.S. was accomplished later than is commonly believed (it lasted until the 1960s, not the 1940s as commonly believed).

There is an image of the aircraft industry being part of the "military-industrial complex" tied to the state and enjoying favorable conditions. In reality, however, it is very difficult to maintain dominance in an industry that experiences technological and profit model innovations every decade. By analyzing the rise and fall of this industry and the mechanisms by which it is dominated, we can see the struggle between countries.

Gold (the material that drives the economy) - the substantial underpinning of economic value

The development of the latest and most powerful weapons, which determines the outcome of hegemony requires military spending in excess of the state budget of a country and coordination of international financial relations, and ultimately depends on the amount of gold in the treasury. During the Cold War, this situation led to a shift from 19th century

British-style creditor imperialism to 20th century American-style debtor imperialism, based on Hudson's theory of "super imperialism" as captured in Graeber's "Debt: The First 5000 Years."

The so-called "Nixon Shock" occurred in 1971, when U.S. President Richard Nixon announced the abolition of the gold-dollar exchange rate system. Two years later, the Bretton Woods system was replaced by a system of floating exchange rates, which has now been in place for around 50 years. More recently, the use of electronic money in place of real money has become commonplace, and virtual currencies such as Bitcoin are gaining prominence. With this remarkable development in financial capitalism, most currencies are now exchanged electronically rather than in real currencies such as coins and paper money. However, as a result of international cooperation in the form of zero interest rates and quantitative easing by advanced country central banks to stimulate their economies after the financial crisis, money without a real basis has expanded rapidly, international government and private sector debt problems have become insurmountable, and further expansionary policies under COVID-19 have thrown financial markets into chaos. Since an unlimited amount of money can be printed, it can lose its value in an instant, and the ultimate hard currency of wealth today is still real gold. The United States has the most gold in the world, but Japan, although known as the world's largest creditor, has the least amount of gold in its treasury of any developed country, and its budget deficit, i.e., its debt to future generations, cannot be solved by ordinary fiscal and monetary means.

By the way, "hegemony" does not refer only to the material aspect. For example, when we speak of "American hegemony," we think first of missiles and other military equipment and the privilege of a reserve currency, but beyond that, "democracy," people's sense of value, is an important component of hegemony. With this democracy as a key word, I would like to move on to the next topic.

God (values, bastions in people's minds): democracy as a weapon

After the end of the Iraq War, the United States attempted to transplant American-style democracy, market economy, and society into a group of military and monarchical states in the Middle East (the New Middle East Project). This grand social experiment, accompanied by the Arab Spring, failed miserably, plunging the Middle East into chaos and becoming a minefield on the international political and military map, including the refugee issue.

Democracy in the sense of the word refers to the mode in which the demos (the general public) make social decisions. The word "democracy" is often used as some kind of good idea or ideology, but in reality it is simply a mechanism for exercising power in a democratic form. If we look from the perspective of emphasizing the relationship between democracy and technology as a matter of power or control, we will see world history differently.

At a time when the spectacular innovations of digital technology are dramatically changing the traditional functions and values of society, the relationship between cybertechnology, which is at the center of the hegemonic struggle between China and the United States, and democracy as practiced by individuals, groups, and states cannot be separated. There is general talk that a new dimension linking digital and real space will take hold in the near future. However, it cannot be said that we have fully explored the core norms associated with it, such as the concepts of morality, humanity, and human rights, as well as the nature of democracy and just governance based on these concepts. In other words, the [state] that does this first will be the winner of the “struggle of all against all” (Hobbes, Leviathan).

There is a reason I put the word [state] in square brackets here. It is because a company could easily be put inside the square brackets. IT platform providers (GAFA) are driving digital enclosure (the movement to enclose personal privacy in cyberspace) (the GAFA model). In China, the state is also working with IT platform providers (Tencent, Alibaba, etc.) to collect all sorts of information about citizens (the Beijing model). It is fresh in our memory that in January 2021, Twitter permanently blocked Donald Trump’s account. This was done following the break-in at the Capitol and out of fear of provoking further violence, but it shows a clear case of control of a government administration and the military by a private company. This incident clearly demonstrates Francis Fukuyama’s “End of History” theory, which states that the Cold War will be followed by a U.S.-led “liberal democracy based on market economics and economic growth” that will sweep the entire world.

Democratic Habitus in Digital Panopticon

According to the “end of history” theory, liberal democracy spread in the 1970s and 1980s as political systems in Latin America and elsewhere faltered. The “free market” spread as an economic principle, and Third World countries achieved material prosperity. Thus, Fukuyama argues, “the end of human ideological progress” and “the last form of human rule” has been reached, and liberal democracy itself has become “the end of history.”

According to Kojève’s interpretation of Hegel’s view of world history and the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, on which Fukuyama’s theory of the end of history is based, man is nothing but an organism that desires “recognition” and history is the process of gradual satisfaction of this desire. As for the state of “man” after the point of satisfaction, i.e., after the “end of history,” the disappearance of man is not a cosmic catastrophe, nature will always exist as usual, and man will continue to exist as an animal in harmony with nature or a given existence.

On the other hand, Strauss criticizes Kojève’s theory as the moment when man loses his humanity, the moment when Nietzsche calls him “the last man.” In other words, it is impossible to say that man can be completely satisfied with this. If satisfaction is the goal of “history,” “history” is absolutely “tragic.”

Can the “the last man” be at the end of the “history” of world evolution? Can humanity regain its autonomous democratic habits (habits, structured structures) in a digital prison system (digital panopticon (“all seeing”) under the control of a generally homogenized state, under the censorship of the state and IT platform providers? Or will we really spend our lives as “the last man” or “the beast”?

The self-multiplying value of gold (Marx) is the driving force behind the infinite multiplication of value, and Gewalt demands a more powerful leap of power in the conflict of nations. If God (the conceptual will of the people) cannot control the divergent movements of gold and Gewalt, then the physical limits of the Earth (Globe) will be breached before the Anthropocene is pointed out. At that point, the human spirit (Geist) will be in conflict with God in a “duel between you and the world” (Kafka), or the “5G war.”

Text by Naoki Miyano (editor of Toitotoi)