

## H-NET BOOK REVIEW

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Cemil Aydin. *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought*. Columbia Studies in International and Global History. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007. [xi + 299 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index.] \$XX.XX (cloth), ISBN 9780231137782.

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### Race, Civilization, and International Society

The book covers the emergence, development, and decline of pan-Islamic and pan-Asian visions of international order over a period of more than a century, from 1840 to 1945. Its focus is on intellectual elites, and to a lesser extent on political leaders, in the Ottoman Empire and in Japan, though substantial attention is given to the role of pan-Islamic and pan-Asian ideas elsewhere, particularly in India. The story is not simply an intellectual history but is rather intimately tied to the tides of international politics and, perhaps even more importantly, to the concurrent evolution of international discourses of legitimacy. Neither is this a work of comparative history, though many fascinating comparisons can be drawn from it. Rather, it tells the stories of pan-Islamism and pan-Asianism as an artfully integrated narrative, and is thus a part of the emerging history of international society as a historical subject in its own right.

Aydin posits six turning points in the evolution of pan-Islamism and pan-Asianism as intellectual constructs and as political movements, each anchoring a chapter in the book. The first occurred in the 1840s when the European powers, their military and economic power fortified by centuries of imperialism and decades of industrial revolution, began to penetrate both the Middle East and East Asia more thoroughly and insistently than they had in the past. By then, Aydin points out, the ideas of the Enlightenment had been around for a while, but it was only the display of overwhelming power in the 1840s—the First Opium War of 1839-1842, the increasing pressure on Ottoman territories—that launched a widespread interest of Ottoman and Japanese elites in Western ideas as well as technologies. The Ottomans, after centuries as a leading power in the European order, suddenly found themselves internationally marginalized, branded an “uncivilized” power whose rights were curtailed. And Japanese leaders after 1853 noted that, having been forcibly brought into international society, Japan too occupied an inferior, unequal station in the Eurocentric order.

Both Ottoman and Japanese elites surveyed the landscape of international relations and concluded that only states recognized as “civilized” could survive and thrive in it. This

realization helped launch the “self-civilizing” reforms of the Ottoman Tanzimat (1839) and the Meiji Restoration (1868). In both cases, the reforms aimed to make the state equal to the Western powers in military and economic might, but also, and partly as a result, to earn recognition as “civilized” powers deserving of the full rights and considerations in international society. Taking Enlightenment thinkers at their word, Ottomans and Japanese leaders during this period understood “civilization” as a universal standard, which peoples of all races or creeds could attain. The standard, though imprecise and shifting, appeared to include technologically advanced military forces, industrial development, a public discourse that valued rationality, efficiency, and science, and political and legal structures that approximated the Western norms. Appearances were important, too, in the quest for civilized status. It is no accident that reformers—in Japan especially, but in the Ottoman Empire, too—made drastic changes to the dress and rituals of political leadership, diplomatic exchange, and military units to meet Western standards of “civilized” deportment.

By the 1880s, however—the second turning point in the story—the notion of a universal standard of civilization appeared under siege with the rise in the West of exclusionist notions of civilization that emphasized immutable traits such as religion and race and implied that only white, Christian peoples could be civilized while Muslims and “yellow” peoples were inherently uncivilized. Ottoman intellectuals met claims, such as those of Ernest Renan, that Islam was incompatible with science by highlighting the Islamic traditions of rational discourse and scientific inquiry. But even more than the musings of Orientalists, Ottoman and Japanese reformers grew frustrated with the failure of their reforms to earn them equality in international society. The British occupation of Egypt in 1882 and the peremptory treatment that the European powers meted out to Japan in the wake of its victory over China in 1895 made clear that despite several decades of reforms the Ottomans and the Japanese had not attained full citizenship in international society.

It is in the context of such rejection, Aydin tells us, that modern ideas of pan-Islamism and pan-Asianism first emerged. If a racist, Orientalist Europe would exclude non-whites permanently from full membership in international society, then the Eurocentric vision of world order was no longer acceptable, and alternatives had to be found. One such notion was what Aydin calls a “defensive Muslim internationalism” (67), as some Muslim intellectuals began emphasizing Ottoman leadership in the Muslim world as an alternative to integration in the European order. At around the same time, some Japanese leaders, dismayed with the growing European penetration in their region, proposed an Asian Monroe Doctrine, which would keep the European powers out of East Asia.

Such anti-Western critiques emerged from an ongoing engagement of Asian thinkers with a global circulation of ideas and exemplified, as Aydin point out, the global character of debates over modernity, culture, and international politics. Indeed, Asian critiques of the materialism of the modern West echoed ideas that were common at the time in the West itself, as were the essentialist notions of a refined Asian spirituality, adopted by Asian thinkers in what Aydin calls “reverse Orientalism.” And in the field of international politics, Asian and Muslim critics of the West did not reject the universal standards of the Enlightenment; rather, they employed those standards to condemn the European powers

of hypocrisy in violating, with their racist, exclusionary, and imperialist practices in international affairs, the very ideals they claimed to uphold in their “civilizing mission.”

Pan-Asianism and pan-Islamism emerged as alternatives to an international order in which the West failed to live up to its own universalist standards, but they were hardly the only possible alternatives. In fact, despite the intellectual attraction and occasional political usefulness of pan-Islamic and pan-Asianist ideas, neither had a significant, long-term impact on Ottoman or on Japanese foreign policies in this period. Instead, decisions were driven by a growing attachment to concepts of national identity and national interests. Ottoman leaders under the Young Turks pursued the interests of the Ottoman state, rather than any broader pan-Islamic agenda, while Japan concluded an alliance with Great Britain—the paradigmatic racist, Orientalist, imperialist Western power—gamely adopting the logic of power politics and chucking aside any notion of Asian solidarity against Western penetration.

Despite Japan’s rise in the ranks of imperial powers, and also, ironically, because of it, the third turning point in the story came with the dramatic Japanese victory over Russia in 1905. The impact of 1905 across Asia and the Middle East has been much asserted but rarely explored in any detail, so Aydin’s thorough treatment here is all the more valuable. The wave of excitement that rippled from Egypt to Persia to India to China in the wake of 1905 reflected the “scope and synchronicity of global intellectual sphere” (72) and generated a broadly shared sense of an “Asian awakening.” But the responses across Asia and the Middle East to the Japanese victory abounded with ironies. First, the very concept of the “East” whose awakening was being celebrated—the notion that Japan, India, Egypt, Turkey, etc. all belonged to a single unit that possessed geographic and even cultural/civilizational coherence—was a “self-Orientalizing” move that assimilated European notions of a unitary “Asian” space that stood in opposition to “Europe.”

Second, and more importantly, Japan was celebrated as an “Asian” icon precisely for having defeated the West at its own game, that is to say, for having become “Western” more successfully than any other “Eastern” nation. The Meiji reformers had centralized the state, modernized the armed forces, and proved that Japan, too, could play the game of international power politics and imperial expansion. Japan was being feted as a champion of the “East” even as it was preparing to nullify the independence of another Asian nation—Korea—and laying the groundwork for future expansion in China. And although Japanese pan-Asianists such as Okawa Shumei—a central character in the book—read the responses to 1905 as evidence of broad support for Japan’s leadership role in Asia, other Japanese were uneasy with the adulation they received as champions of the “East.” For them, the goal of the reforms was not so much to make Japan a leader \*in\* Asia but to take Japan \*out\* of Asia, as the famed Meiji intellectual Fukuzawa Yukichi had proposed decades earlier; to make it, in effect, a “white” power.

The next turning points in the intertwined histories of pan-Islamism and pan-Asianism came with the First World War. The war actually saw two distinct turning points, one occurring with the run-up and outbreak of the war in 1912-1914, and the second came with the conflicts over the postwar settlements that lasted from 1919 to 1923. It is during

this period that the profound disconnect between the consistent attractions that notions of civilizational unity held for cultural and intellectual elites, on the one hand, and feebleness of their ability to mobilize broad popular support or to influence policy, on the other, was most clearly on display.

In wartime Japan, pan-Asianism fell into irrelevance as Tokyo capitalized on its British alliance to grab additional territories and bullied China in the best traditions of imperialist realpolitik. The Ottomans, for their part, did make an attempt to enlist pan-Islamic sentiments in the war effort by issuing a call for Jihad, but the call, though it excited much alarm in the British official mind (and some hope in the German one), had little success in mobilizing Muslims either outside of or inside the empire. And later, while the Ankara government under Mustafa Kemal was happy to have the moral support of Indian and other Muslims as it fought to reverse the punitive verdict of Sevres, the new Turkish state quickly chucked pan-Islamism, along with its figurehead, the Ottoman sultan/caliph, once victory was attained, opting instead to found itself on the precise ideological opposite, a militantly secular Turkish nationalism.

In fact, if there is one major theme that runs through this book in its entirety it is that by far the most powerful enemy of the anti-Western pan-ideologies were not the Western powers themselves but rather the enthusiastic adoption among non-European peoples of the competing ideology of nationalism, that Western idea of political, social, cultural organization whose logic undermined the legitimacy of an international order based on empire. Aydin titles his penultimate chapter “The Triumph of Nationalism?” with the question mark perhaps designed to create in the reader a sense of suspense, but it is clear that the book as a whole answers the question in the affirmative.

In the entire period covered in this book, the only time in which a pan-ideology played a significant role in international affairs was when the Japanese empire adopted pan-Asianism as its official ideology in the years between 1933 and 1945, a story to which Aydin devoted his final chapter. Even then, however, Japanese pan-Asianism was little more than a justification for imperial expansion, a useful tool in an era when the old justifications for empire, from survival of the fittest to the “civilizing mission,” were falling into bad odor as the right to self-determination was widely adopted by anticolonial nationalist movements across Asia and reaffirmed by the Western allies in the Atlantic Charter. And lest we see such “anti-imperialist imperialism” as a “peculiarity of the Japanese imperial style,” Aydin archly reminds that other “internationalisms, including liberal and socialist ones, are susceptible to such utilization by imperial projects” (198).

In the end, it appears that neither pan-Asianism nor pan-Islamism were fully anti-Western, at least not in the period covered in this book. Both emerged as the efforts of Ottoman and Japanese reformers to adopt and adapt the West’s “standard of civilization” were undermined by Europe’s insistence on an exclusionary international order, and both were conceived as alternative paths to integration in international society rather than as its rejection. In the ensuing decades, while both ideologies developed intellectual and cultural appeal, their advocates rarely managed to mobilize broad popular sentiments behind them or to gain consistent support from political leaders, whose policies were

instead largely shaped by their perceptions of national (rather than civilizational) interests in the evolving contexts of international power relations and discourses of legitimacy.

Ottoman pan-Islamism, never a potent force in international politics despite its cultural roots and intellectual appeal, was decisively rejected in post-Ottoman Turkey after 1924, while Japanese pan-Asianism evaporated in 1945, where the present book ends. The story, of course, does not end there. Other modern versions of pan-Islamism, in particular that reflected in the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood since the 1930s, have of course become internationally significant in recent years, and while postwar attempts to establish Asian solidarity in international politics, for example at the Bandung Conference in 1955, have been feeble and short-lived, discussions of purported “Asian values” and their relationship to modernity and the “West” have recurred with some regularity in global conversations in recent decades.

Whatever the future holds for pan-Islamic and pan-Asianist ideas, Aydin has done us an important service in writing such a thoroughly researched, carefully conceptualized, and intricately argued book on their modern history. In the originality of its scope, the richness of its sources, and its impressive linguistic range—working extensively with both Turkish and Japanese language sources—it is a model of the emerging “new international history.” *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia* should become required reading in seminars on international history and the history of colonialism. It will be useful to anyone interested in the history of modern international society, in particular in the role of non-European peoples within it, as well as to those intrigued with the potential of new approaches to international history.