

Pan-Asianism in Historical Context

Pan-Asianism as an Ideal of Asian Identity and Solidarity, 1850–Present

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Japan's Pan-Asianism and the Legitimacy of Imperial World Order, 1931–1945

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These two articles examine the formation of Japanese pan-Asian visions from their earliest stirrings in the mid-19th century to the end of the 20th century. Saaler and Szpilman offer a historical account of pan-Asianism that was grounded in assumptions of common culture and language as well as racial ideas imported from the West. They also reveal the powerful antipathy many pan-Asian proponents had toward the West. At the same time, they show that pan-Asianism provided a useful set of tools that the Japanese used to displace centuries-long Chinese authority. Their article, an abridged version of the introduction to a two-volume edited book, also provides important historical context for understanding discussions of East Asian regional and global integration in the 21st century.

Saaler and Szpilman begin by pointing out that pan-Asianism poses a challenge for scholars, not only because of its ambiguity and lack of definition, but also due to the discrediting of the concept through Japan's own actions in the 1930s and 1940s. This is where Aydin's article fits nicely. He analyzes why Japanese political elites embraced pan-Asian ideas in the 1930s after having rejected or ignored them, especially as tools of foreign policy, in earlier periods. Aydin explains that pan-Asianism's malleability, being both ill defined and unsystematic, transcended domestic left/right political ideologies, rendering it useful both as a peaceful tool of Asian unity and as a rhetorical device for Japan's own imperialist endeavours. Internationally, the Manchurian Incident of 1931 and Japan's withdrawal from the League of Nations in 1933 marked a turning point when Japanese foreign policy adopted the radical pan-Asianist rhetoric of racial struggle against the imperialist West. Even here, however, pan-Asianists exhibited little unanimity, with some like Okawa Shumei arguing against war and for greater trade with the United States.

Both articles provide a wealth of primary voices, Japanese and non-Japanese, all united to some degree in their opposition to the West. In addition to Okawa and Ishiwara Kanji, readers are introduced to the ideas of Rabindranath Tagore, Qurban Ali, W. E. B. DuBois, and An Chung-gun – Ito Hirobumi's Korean assassin – who wrote a pan-Asian tract while in prison awaiting his execution. An, along with Chinese revolutionaries like Li Dazhao, are important to this story not only because their pan-Asian visions rejected Japanese leadership but also because they illustrate

the breadth of anti-Western pan-Asian sentiment throughout the entire Asian region.