

Aydin, Cemil: *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia. Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian thought*. New York: Columbia University Press 2007. ISBN: 978-0-231-13778-2; 320 S.

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With „The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia“, Cemil Aydin makes an important contribution to a growing body of research on Pan-Asianism and Pan-Islamism. In his rich intellectual history he traces the development of Japanese Pan-Asianism and Ottoman Pan-Islamism from the 1840s to the Second World War. He does not stop, however, at a comparison of Pan-Asian and Pan-Islamic ideas but employs the comparative approach to gather new insights on how the unfolding global dominance of the West was received, conceived and contested in different parts of the world. Pan-Asianism and Pan-Islamism ultimately gained relevance, he argues, because they provided a means for articulating alternative visions of world order vis-à-vis Western imperialism.

Aydin identifies six phases in the development of Pan-Asianism and Pan-Islamism. Correspondingly, the book is made up of six main chapters. Below the chapter level, the book follows a thematic approach instead of a chronological, switching back and forth between the Japanese and Ottoman setting. At this point it should be noted that the title of the book is slightly misleading, as Aydin concentrated on these two settings and mentions other instances of Pan-Asianism, such as Chinese or Indian ones, only in passing. Overall this appears like a sensible approach, however, since the focus of the book is on the emerging global discourse of world order and not on a comprehensive comparison of different instances of „Pan“ movements.

The chapter following the introduction deals with the prehistory of Pan-Asian and Pan-Islamic thought. In the course of the 19th century the concept of civilization that accompanied Western imperialist politics was adopted by non-Western elites, who transformed it into what Aydin calls the idea of the „universal West“. As long as it held

sway, it offered a huge leverage for reform. Chapter Three argues that it was only around the 1880s, when the widening gap between the promise of civilization and the practice of imperialism became evident to Ottoman and Japanese intellectuals, that Pan-Asian and Pan-Islamic thought gained momentum. The Japanese and Ottoman elites realized that their efforts to become civilized were not honored, but met with apprehension and outright hostility in the form of new racist and culturalist mechanisms of exclusion.

Chapter Four describes how the „global moment“ of the Russo-Japanese war in 1905 marked a turning point in the development of Pan-Asian and Pan-Islamic thought. The first military victory over a Western power by an Asian army was perceived as the beginning of a „rise of the East“ in many parts of the world. Pan-Asianism became a truly internationalist movement and was perceived as a viable alternative to a Western-dominated world order. At the same time, countries as diverse as Iran, Turkey and China set in motion nationalist reform programs after the Japanese model. The First World War in turn had different effects on Pan-Asian and Pan-Islamic thought which are discussed in Chapter Five. Pan-Islamism was employed strategically by the Ottoman empire during the war but consequently faced political irrelevance once the war was lost. Japanese Pan-Asianism on the other hand increasingly connected with other Pan-Asian movements on the continent, especially with Indian Pan-Asianism. At the same time, nationalist tendencies and the call for regional hegemony in East Asia became more influential.

The post-war period of the 1920s saw the rise of two new „visions of world order“ – Wilsonianism and socialism. While the idealism of Wilsonianism was soon caught up with by the reality of the League of Nations, which still disadvantaged non-Western nations, socialism became an alternative to and a competitor of Pan-Asian and Pan-Islamic thought. As the title of Chapter Six, „The triumph of nationalism?“ suggests, Aydin sees the increasing nationalism of the postwar years and the accompanying lack of state support as a main factor in the demise of Pan-Asian and Pan-Islamic thought. In the case of Japan,

this was to change again in the 1930s, as is described in chapter seven. Pan-Asianism offered itself as an alternative to the then discredited „benevolent imperialism“ for the Japanese right to legitimize Japan’s expansionist politics.

In the last chapter, the book’s weaker points can be observed. Strikingly, the fate of Pan-Islamism in the 1930s is not addressed at all. This is indirectly explained in the previous chapter with the end of the caliphate and its political irrelevance. Still, the Japanese case is closed in a similarly sudden move with the end of the Second World War. One is left wondering whether the death of these—at times so influential—ideas really was as abrupt as the narrative leads one to believe. A recent article by Urs Matthias Zachmann which explores the transition from Japanese Pan-Asianism to a UN-led internationalism suggests otherwise for the Japanese case¹, and one wishes Aydin had included another chapter on this theme. Moreover, while it might be true that Pan-Islamism’s star was waning in the 1920s, the matter of Pan-Arabism is not touched at all. Some thoughts on how the two movements were related would have been insightful. Both issues appear to be related to the fact that Aydin does not make explicit what he subsumes under the labels „Pan-Asianism“ and „Pan-Islamism“, and seemingly settles for a nominalist approach. Without this self-limitation, he could have shed more light on how and why the movements evolved in a quite similar direction from universalism and internationalism (Pan-Islamism and „Asian“ Pan-Asianism) towards regionalism and nationalism (Pan-Arabism and „Japanese“ Pan-Asianism).

These limitations notwithstanding, Aydin’s book offers a thorough and nuanced portrayal of Pan-Asian and Pan-Islamic thought. Without glossing over the negative aspects of their political and ideological applications, Aydin rightly emphasizes that Pan-Asian and Pan-Islamic thought also contained and realized an emancipatory potential. The book’s focus on the interconnection of Anti-Western thought and world order will make it appeal

not just to scholars of Ottoman and Japanese history but to every historian with an interest in the workings of late 19th and early 20th century global politics.

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¹ Urs Matthias Zachmann, Asianismus und Völkerrecht. Japans sanfter Übergang von der Großasiatischen Wohlstandssphäre zu den Vereinten Nationen, 1944-1956, in: *Comparativ* 18 (2008) 6, S. 53-68.