BOOK REVIEWS


Pan-Asianism is making a comeback. After the Asia-Pacific War, historians dismissed Pan-Asianist ideas and organizations as the flimsy justifications of Japanese imperialism. In the realm of international relations, the rhetoric of Asian solidarity was initially appropriated by the anti-colonial movement, but under the pressure of the Cold War bifurcation of the international arena, regionalism was eclipsed by superpower bilateralism as the dominant organizing principle. But after the fall of the Soviet Union and the long rise of China, Pan-Asianism re-emerged in both historical scholarship and diplomacy. By the start of the twenty-first century, as Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi Jun’ichirō’s promotion of an East Asian Community met with an enthusiastic regional reception that seemed to ignore echoes of wartime rhetoric, scholars were looking back at those prewar and wartime ideas from a new perspective. In the last decade, several books and articles have explored various aspects of Pan-Asianism from different angles. In this context, the publication of Pan-Asianism: A Documentary History is a welcome addition to an on-going conversation and a substantial resource for both scholars and students.

Edited by Sven Saaler and Christopher W.A. Szpilman, this two-volume collection of documents brings together prominent visions of Asia from across the region and over nearly two centuries, all carefully placed in historical and intellectual context by thoughtful introductions from a long list of contributing scholars. The editors’ introduction, which appears at the beginning of both volumes, traces the history and terminology of Pan-Asianism and explores connections to other ideas about Asian order and supra-national identity. The editors’ discussion of terminology makes sense of a variegated concept used for many purposes by numerous groups and individuals at different times and places. One of their important accomplishments is to place the evolution of the concept in a global context, considering the influence of world events and relations with the Western powers alongside regional developments. The introduction sets the tone for the work as a whole by emphasizing the variety of forms and geographical definitions that fall under the broad heading of Pan-Asianism.
The 74 contributions contained in the two volumes follow a roughly chronological path to present the dominant themes of Pan-Asianist thought as they evolved over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The first volume, divided into four sections, covers the period from the beginnings of Japan’s confrontation with Western hegemony to the end of World War I and the critiques of the international order that emerged. The first two sections trace the development of Pan-Asian ideas in Japan over the course of about a century. This begins with the efforts of late Tokugawa intellectuals to grapple with the Western notion of international order and define their own place within and against it, a process that would shape the evolution of Pan-Asianism for decades to come. The third section ventures outside of Japan for “Asian responses” to both Western imperialism and Japanese Pan-Asianism. The editors explain that Japanese actions ultimately undermined the possibility for strong Korean or Chinese support for Pan-Asianism, but these documents show that the idea did have some appeal early on and among peoples who were not directly threatened by Japanese power and in fact hoped to appropriate it for their own independence movements, such as Indians and pan-Islamists. The final section examines the impact of World War I on Pan-Asianist thought among Japanese and other advocates, such as Chinese revolutionary Sun Yat-sen and Indian independence advocate Taraknath Das. The inclusion in this section of two documents expressing solidarity with Germany as a fellow “oppressed people” struggling against “the status quo powers” demonstrates the historical flexibility of Pan-Asianism as a structural framework for international relations.

The second volume begins in the interwar period and examines the evolution of Pan-Asianism through the war and up to the present day. The contributions are mainly Japanese, though almost all of the six sections contain at least one non-Japanese voice. The first four sections show that in the context of the radicalization of political discourse as a whole in Japan during the years before and into the Asia-Pacific War, Japanese Pan-Asianism followed suit. Contributions dealing with imperialism and war present the well-known slogans supporting Japanese expansion—the New Order in East Asia, the East Asian Community, and of course the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere—as well as less prominent but equally fascinating efforts toward regional integration, such as the Japan Culture League and the Greater East Asia Writers Conference. The last two sections examine two postwar peaks of Pan-Asian rhetoric. In the early postwar period, Pan-Asianism contributed to both the anti-colonial movement and a Japanese rethinking of the legacy of Pan-Asianism. And in recent years, an upsurge of Pan-Asianism has centred on the potential benefits of closer economic integration.

This collection is remarkable in part for its breadth: geographical, chronological and ideological. This follows the works of scholars such as Cemil Aydin and Eri Hotta (both contributors to this volume) in providing a context for and comparison to wartime Japanese imperialism. With the
inclusion of various countries, time periods and political viewpoints, the books add complexity to our understanding of Pan-Asianism, building on works that focus solely on Japan (including Saaler’s earlier collection of essays, which involved several of the contributors to these volumes). In their preface, the editors point out that the wartime history of Pan-Asianism had impeded objective analysis (xi). By chipping away at Japanese hegemony of the concept, these volumes help to correct the possibly skewed vision of hindsight which, distorted by the rearview mirror of historical memory, risks painting all Pan-Asianist ideas as being connected to the endpoint of Japanese imperialism.

Along with its wide geographical representation, the long time frame of this collection facilitates a broader view. It is a particular strength of this collection that it extends strongly into the postwar period and right up to the first decade of the twenty-first century, underlining the long-term significance of Pan-Asianism. Though this line of thinking was certainly tainted by its connection to Japan’s wartime empire (a connection that is thoroughly explored here), the collection highlights the existence of Pan-Asianist ideas that were not directly linked to the war and, indeed, that explicitly grappled with Japanese imperialism in the wake of the empire’s collapse (as in Takeuchi Yoshimi’s “Japan’s Asianism”) or consciously used wartime rhetoric as a counterpoint to advocate a more equitable vision of Pan-Asian cooperation (as in Ishihara Shintarō’s remarks to Mahathir Mohamad).

The collection also benefits from a broad variety of perspectives represented in the different types of materials translated. The sources include excerpts from philosophical texts and statements of principle, policy proposals and political declarations, words of warning and pleas for understanding, hortatory speeches and polemical journal articles, newspaper editorials and official statements from government leaders, scholarly analyses of international relations and the founding charters or official histories of regional organizations. Authors range from late-nineteenth-century adventurers and idealists to early-twentieth-century revolutionaries; and from wartime imperialists to postwar anti-colonialist leaders. They come from many backgrounds, and their goals overlap, complement or contradict each other. The inclusion of intellectuals and activists from across the political spectrum supports a more nuanced understanding of Pan-Asianism as not simply the empty rhetoric of Japanese imperialism but rather an important feature of the international mind in modern Asia.

The structure of the volumes makes them very useful for the classroom. In addition to the editors’ introduction to the collection as a whole, each of the ten sections begins with a brief introduction explaining even the most basic relevant historical context, while another layer of scholarly commentary introduces each “chapter” or set of documents. These layers of explanation make the books potentially useful for students of varying backgrounds with a broad range of interests. And yet, the classroom was
not the main target envisioned by the editors. The goal of this project, as stated in the introduction, was to help scholars look beyond their own areas of specialty and encourage cooperation across national borders (4). While short excerpts from specific documents are perfect for students with a short attention span, especially when they are couched in the helpful analysis of a specialist in the field, they are of only limited usefulness as a research tool, as they can provide only a glimpse of even a particular individual’s ideas, not to mention an entire zeitgeist. Nevertheless, this is no doubt a helpful corrective to a narrow focus on a single nation or historical moment, as it can point the researcher in potentially fruitful directions.

The potential contribution in this respect is somewhat limited by the fact that the preponderance of texts and authors represented are Japanese. (About two-thirds of the chapters deal with Japanese writers or organizations, with a handful each from Indians, Chinese, Koreans, Southeast Asians and pan-Islamists.) This distribution is probably a reflection of a significant reality of the history of Pan-Asian thought: that it was primarily an idea developed and promoted by Japanese thinkers and activists to pursue their particular national and international goals. This fact itself raises some interesting questions that are touched on by some of the contributors and would merit further consideration: Why did the idea of Pan-Asianism, which on its surface implied benefits to all Asians, gain the most widespread support in Japan? What does that suggest about the “other Asians” who advocated similar ideas? How does the appeal of regionalism related to configurations of power within the region? In the final contribution to the second volume, Torsten Weber suggests a strong connection between regional position and advocacy of Pan-Asianism in his discussion of Wang Yi’s “New Asianism.” This is just one of many potentially interesting avenues of exploration suggested by the contributions to this collection.

I have only two minute criticisms of this phenomenal collective effort. First, the reliance on the work of numerous scholars almost inevitably means some unevenness. Some contributors chose snippets from several texts, while others presented fewer but more complete examples. Of course, both styles can be useful in different ways. One odd result of this approach is the use of a single excerpt twice in the space of ten pages: two separate contributions discussing Okakura Tenshin include the opening pages of his 1903 work *Ideals of the East*. While one excerpt is more complete than the other, and Okakura’s famous assertion that “Asia is one” is an essential part of any discussion of Asianism, this seems an odd choice, especially considering that this English-language text is easily accessible at libraries around the world, as well as online. Second, the editors at times oversell the novelty of their undertaking. For instance, to support the claim that other document collections do not include Pan-Asianist texts, the editors cite the original edition of *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, instead of the 2005 edition, which in fact has a section on Pan-Asianism and includes several of the texts
reproduced in these volumes. This is a minor quibble that does not detract from the overall value of the collection. The importance of this collection is not that all of its contents are unattainable elsewhere (in fact, a number of the documents are readily available in English), but rather in the assembly of all of these diverse approaches to the idea of Asia along with commentary by a wide range of scholars.

Saaler and Szpilman end their introduction with a nod to the future: “While Asia will certainly never be ‘one,’ progress will continue to be made in the areas of regional cooperation and integration, and there is no doubt that such developments will contribute to the stability and the prosperity of the region” (38). It seems the editors themselves are Pan-Asianists. (I agree with the sentiment and suspect they are correct.) This, along with the persistence of Pan-Asianist theories, structures and rhetoric toward often opposing ends in vastly different circumstances, speaks to the compelling power of Pan-Asianist ideas, in spite of the potential for harmful and dangerous appropriations of the rhetoric of regional cooperation, mutual assistance and co-prosperity.

Pennsylvania State University, University Park, USA Jessamyn R. Abel


The book’s publication is timely because it coincides with the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) 2011 Summit held in Honolulu, Hawaii from November 8 to 13. At the summit representatives from the member economies deliberated agenda items that centred on enhancing regional cooperation, liberalizing trade and investment flows aimed at increasing income and employment, business facilitation and sharing more scientific and technological knowledge designed to confront economic and environmental problems. The volume’s author points out that as APEC moves into its third decade it remains “lively” in terms of searching for new directions in the scope of the economic activities that it undertakes, the way it undertakes them within its organizational structure and in the number of member economies that it encompasses.

Throughout the book Yamazawa makes thoughtful observations that will be useful to APEC as it rethinks some of its new directions. His volume is more than a superb academic treatise. It also offers explanations, analyses and prescriptions that could be useful to APEC. The author points out to readers that APEC is an organization whose 21 member economies collectively account for 45 percent of global population, land mass, economic product and external trade. He notes that the member economies share predilections...