

Pan-Asianism: Rabindranath Tagore, Subhas Chandra Bose and Japan's Imperial Quest

Mary L. Hanneman¹

Abstract

Bengali intellectuals, nationalists and independence activists played a prominent role in the Indian independence movement; many shared connections with Japan. This article examines nationalism in the Indian independence movement through the lens of Bengali interaction with Japanese Pan-Asianism, focusing on the contrasting responses of Rabindranath Tagore and Subhas Chandra Bose to Japan's Pan-Asianist claims.

Key Words

Japan; Pan-Asianism; Rabindranath Tagore; Subhas Chandra Bose; Imperialism; Nationalism; Bengali Intellectuals.

Introduction

As Japan pursued military expansion in East Asia in the 1930s and early 1940s, it developed a Pan-Asianist narrative to support its essentially nationalist ambitions in a quest to create an “Asia for the Asiatics,” and to unite all of Asia under “one roof”. Because it was backed by military aggression and brutal colonial policies, this Pan-Asianist narrative failed to win supporters in East Asia, and instead inspired anti-Japanese nationalists throughout China, Korea, Vietnam and other areas subject to Japanese military conquest. The Indian situation, for various reasons which we will explore, offered conditions quite different from those prevailing elsewhere in Asia writ large, and as a result, Japan and Indian enjoy closer and more cordial relationship during WWII and its preceding decades, which included links between Japanese nationalist thought and the Indian independence movement.

¹ Phd, Modern East Asian History, University of Washington, Tacoma, Fulbright –Nehru Visiting Scholar February-May 2019, Department of History, University of North Bengal.

The development and evolution of India's independence movement over the course of the first half of the 20th century saw the significant engagement of Bengali intellectuals and nationalists with Japan. Bengali intellectuals, nationalists and independence activists played a prominent role in the Indian independence movement in the years and decades leading up to Indian independence in 1947 and to a remarkable degree, many of the leading Bengali independence advocates shared an important connection with Japan. This article examines the varieties of nationalist responses in the Indian independence movement through the lens of Bengali interaction with Japanese Pan-Asianism, in particular examining and analysing the differing approaches of Rabindranath Tagore and Subhas Chandra Bose, the "poet and the patriot,"¹ to Japan's Pan-Asianist claims.

Tagore was a man of culture while Bose was a political and military leader. As a result of this, the two men inevitably differed profoundly in their fundamental perspectives. Nevertheless, by comparing the two men's views regarding Japan and Japanese Pan-Asianism, we can bring greater nuance to our understanding of the Indian independence movement and the parameters of Indian nationalism in the pre-WWII period. Looking at the Indian independence movement through the lens of Pan-Asianism also enables us to put the movement into a larger transnational and even trans-continental context. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, people throughout Asia faced similar concerns about Asian weakness and Western strength, questioning how to rally and save their nations while yet preserving their own cultures and traditions. Both Tagore and Bose used Pan-Asianist ideas to counter the British Raj, but they did so from diametrically opposed positions. Tagore's message of restoration to India and Asia was cultural while Bose's message called on military and political efforts. Looking at the Indian independence movement via these figures also provides a broad sense of the evolution of Indian nationalist thought and gives insight into the broad trend from a cultural nationalist approach to an explicitly political and military approach to nationalism. The inclusion of Bose also gives a corrective to the widely held Western popular view that the independence movement was wholly dominated by the Gandhian approach of non-violence.

Tagore and Bose were both deeply connected to Japan and engaged in meaningful ways with Japanese Pan-Asianist thought and in particular, the relationship between Japanese Pan-Asianist thought and Indian independence. Yet the two men differed dramatically in their response to Japanese Pan-Asianism. Both Tagore and Bose embraced Pan-Asianist ideas, in part because of its inherent message of Asian solidarity against Western colonialism. While Tagore embraced Pan-Asianist ideas and admired Japan and Japanese civilization, he was also sharply critical of Japanese nationalism and militarism, key elements in the development of Japan's own imperialist quest. Bose too embraced Pan-Asianism as an element of solidarity against the West, but unlike Tagore, Bose viewed Japanese Pan-Asianism and Japan's military mission in Asia as offering an opportunity to India's effort to oust British colonial rule.

Poet, writer, artist and educator, Tagore's universalist, anti-colonialist position has been well-studied as has been his relationship with Japan. Tagore visited Japan five times and was an admirer of Japanese art and culture, particularly what he felt was the Japanese affinity with nature. For Tagore, Pan-Asianist ideas provided a basis for rejecting both British and Japanese colonialism. Tagore's Pan-Asianism was a cultural idea, not a political ideology; it was, in Eri Hotta's formulation, a "Teaist" Pan-Asianism, or we might say a cultural Pan-Asianism, in the same vein as that of cultural critic and tea-master Okakura Tenshin, who famously wrote, "Asia is one." Even from the time of his first contact with Japan in 1916, Tagore sounded an alarm against Japan's colonial expansion. Tagore's view of Pan-Asianism led him to issue the dark warning, in a speech delivered in Japan in 1916, that Japan must, "Never think for a moment, that the hurts you inflict upon other races will not infect you..."²

Subhas Chandra Bose was a founder (after Mohan Singh) of the Indian National Army, organized to fight for India's independence from Britain and to do so through cooperation with the Japanese Imperial Army. Bose's famous cry, "Give me blood and I will give you freedom!" reflects his rejection of Gandhi's tactics of non-violence. Allied with Imperial Japan, Subhas Chandra Bose, in contrast to Tagore, used Pan-Asianist ideas as a way to contest the British Raj while maintaining (like Rash Behari Bose) that

while the British Raj was the oppression of the white man, Japan's colonial rule was being used to "prevent the white race from exploiting" Asia.³

The Pan-Asianist Idea

Pan-Asianism was not a new development that sprang to life only in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Pan-Asianist ideas about the essential and inherent unity in Asian culture and identity had a long history in Asia and in Japan. At the most basic level, Pan-Asianist thinking posited Asian unity based on geographic propinquity and the conceptualization of Asia as a distinct geographical unit. Other factors also played an important role in Pan-Asianist ideas about a common Asian identity, perhaps most importantly, recognition of a common Buddhist heritage: Buddhism emerged out of the Hindu context of the Indian sub-continent in the 6th century BC and spread to China, Korea, Japan and Southeast Asia. The transmission of Buddhist ideas and written texts provided an important intellectual and spiritual link among and between the Asian countries, providing a *lingua franca* (so to speak) that also carried with it the transmission of other cultural and political elements and influences.

By the late 19th century, Pan-Asianism began to develop another important component, something which would in effect, give it new relevance in the modern era, which was the emergence of common cause against Western imperialist encroachment. One element of this was the conceptualization of racial ties across Asia. Despite racialized thinking that denoted the racial differences between Chinese, Japanese, Koreans and Indians, against the backdrop of Western imperialist encroachment – the encroachment of "white" civilization – these racial differences receded into the background in Pan-Asianist thinking.

At the same time, from a more political perspective, Pan-Asianist thinking developed an explicitly anti-Western character. Japanese artist and cultural critic Okakura Kakuzo (Tenshin), a central figure in the early 20th century articulation Pan-Asianism in Japan wrote in *The Awakening of Japan*, (1904) "the glory of the West is the humiliation of Asia."⁴ Jawaharlal Nehru later captured this idea in his *Autobiography*, written while serving in a British prison in 1940, writing, "...we feel as Asiatics a common bond uniting us against the aggression of Europe,"⁵

Japanese Pan-Asianism

Okakura Kakuzo (Tenshin) (1862-1913) was a key early figure in the modern development of Japanese Pan-Asianist thought. His most famous work, *The Book of Tea*, (1906) which examines the spiritual and philosophical underpinnings of Japan's tea culture with its origins in Chinese tea practice, provides a foundation for the later development of Japanese Pan-Asianist ideas. In 1906, Okakura published a fuller development of Pan-Asianist thinking, *Ideals of the East with Special Reference to the Arts of Japan* which famously opened with the statement, "Asia is one."

Asia is one. The Himalayas divide, only to accentuate, two mighty civilisations, the Chinese with its communism of Confucius, and the Indian with its individualism of the Vedas. But not even the snowy barriers can interrupt for one moment that broad expanse of love for the Ultimate and Universal, which is the common thought-inheritance of every Asiatic race, enabling them to produce all the great religions of the world, and distinguishing them from those maritime peoples of the Mediterranean and the Baltic, who love to dwell on the Particular, and to search out the means, not the end, of life...⁶

Okakura's Pan-Asianism was rooted in the *sangoku* ("three country") concept developed by early Japanese Pan-Asianist thinkers of an inherent relationship between Japan, China and India, which he placed in the historical context of the late 19th and early 20th century Western domination in Asia. As Brij Tankha writes in his introduction to *Okakura Tenshin and Pan-Asianism: Shadows of the Past*, "Okakura's writings were a distilled essence of his view that Western domination had cut at the roots of Asian cultures; it had colonized them politically and culturally. Only Japan had managed to resist and it, therefore, had become the repository of the Asian heritage, and could lead the other nations to realize their original principles." Thus Okakura's ideas represented "a serious, and at times profound, attempt to grapple with the havoc of colonization and a way to universalize the Asian experience."⁷ At the same time however, anticipating Tagore's later view of Japan as having betrayed Asia, in his 1904 book, *The Awakening of*

Japan, Okakura recognized that although Japan had escaped Western colonization, it had done so largely at the cost of compromising its own civilization, writing, "We have become so eager to identify ourselves with European civilization instead of Asiatic that our continental neighbors regard us as renegades—nay, even as an embodiment of the White Disaster itself."⁸

Although Okakura's Pan-Asianist thought was primarily cultural, by the late 19th and early 20th century, however, Japanese Pan-Asianism began to paradoxically take on a distinctly nationalist flavour, adopting a political and polemical aspect in opposition to Western imperialism, what Eri Hotta in *Pan-Asianism and Japan's War, 1931-1945* identifies as *Meishuron*, or "Japan as leader" Pan-Asianism⁹. Starting in 1895 with the assertion of colonial control over Taiwan in the wake of its victory in the Sino-Japanese War, Japan started down the path of expansion in East Asia adding a second colony in Korea in 1910:

By the turn of the century the pan-Asian mission was defined in two main ways: one was that Japan should serve as a conduit for the modernization/Westernization of East Asia (for example, the 'Okuma doctrine'); the other was that Japan had a duty to protect its East Asian neighbours from Western takeover by extending its benevolent control over them (for example, the annexation of Korea). The basic assumption underlying the notion of a pan-Asian mission was that Japan shared a common culture (*dobun*), a common ethnicity (*doshu*), or common interests with the Chinese, the Koreans, and the other peoples of East Asia. In the Japanese view, these commonalities could, or perhaps should, bind the peoples of East Asia together against the threat of Western military or territorial intrusion.¹⁰

In the early years of the 20th century, Japanese ultranationalist organizations such as the Gen'yosha and the Kokuryukai advocated Japanese expansion into Korea, Manchuria and the Russian Far East. "Increasingly after the Russo-Japanese War," Prasenjit Duara writes, "...the view that Japan was the only Asian nation capable of rescuing Asia and harmonizing East and West civilizations began to take hold."¹¹ By the

1920s and early 1930s, as the ideology of these sorts of groups became more mainstream, Japanese Pan-Asianist ideologues such as Okawa Shumei further developed the theoretical and intellectual underpinnings of a Pan-Asianist rationale for Japan's pursuit of military expansion in East Asia. In the Manchurian Incident of 1931, Japan took over control of Chinese northeastern territory, extending its colonial expansion into Manchuria and establishing the puppet state of Manchukuo. Japan's 1937 invasion of China, followed by Japanese Prime Minister Konoe's announcement of Japan's "Mission in East Asia," and its goal to oust the West from Asia and carve out the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere cemented Japan's pursuit of what Peter Duus called Japan's anti-imperialist colonialism.¹²

Japanese Pan-Asianism: East Asia/India

Japan's emergence onto the world stage in the late 19th century, and particularly its victory over Russia in the Russo-Japanese War in 1905, provided a source of fantastic hope for nationalists throughout Asia. As Pankaj Mishra wrote, "For many Asians in the late nineteenth century, the proof of Japan's success lay in the extent to which it could demand equality with the West..."¹³ and what stronger proof of equality could there be than military victory over a Western power? But Japan's military expansion in East Asia in the first half of the 20th century, and its recruitment of Pan-Asianism as a rationale for that quest alienated its would-be followers and thoroughly discredited Pan-Asianism in East Asia. As Mishra writes, [Japanese] Military commanders single-mindedly pursuing war objectives treated local [East Asian] populations with great brutality, making a mockery of the popular slogan, 'Asia for Asians.'¹⁴ As a result of Japan's brutal military aggression and its generally brutal colonial policies in the areas it controlled during the first half of the 20th century, Pan-Asianism's utility as a meaningful discursive concept was called into question.

The Indian relationship with pre-WWII Japanese Pan-Asianism however, provides a contrast to the trajectory of Japanese Pan-Asianism in East Asia. Joseph McQuade notes in his examination of Rash Behari Bose's relationship with Japan that by the early 20th century, Japan was emerging as a leader not only economically and politically in East Asia, but as a "center of Asianist thought."¹⁵ As such, Japan emerged

as a “leader among Asian nations with the potential to challenge the hegemony of the West.”¹⁶ In the early decades of the 20th century, among Indian nationalists, British colonial rule in India inevitably drew comparisons with Japan’s expanding colonialism in East Asia, in India, “the Japanese were not perceived as a threat in a region dominated by the Western powers. Consequently, Japanese-directed Pan-Asianism enjoyed great appeal throughout Southeast Asia.”¹⁷ Although by the 1930s, some Indian nationalists became suspicious of Japanese ambitions and its Pan-Asianist claims, many, like Rash Behari Bose, believed that Japan, as a “fellow” Asian nation, would not exploit other Asians. For many in an India under the tight grip of the British Raj, Japan’s emergence as a potential leader of Asia offered a tantalizing hope of Asian restoration and even the possibility of eventual national independence.

As Prasenjit Duara has argued, over the course of the 19th century, the concept of “civilization” was equated with “the values of Christianity and Enlightenment. ‘Civilization’ (with a capital C) was understood to be both singular and universal.”¹⁸ In the aftermath of the barbarity of World War One, the “war to end all wars,” the validity of this moral premise was called in to question, and as a result, “new national movements sought to turn toward their own civilizational traditions.”¹⁹ In the heady atmosphere after World War One, Japan’s Pan-Asianism appeared as a potentially valid alternative – an anti-Western trope -- to the apparent moral failure of Western civilization highlighted by the so-called War to End All Wars.

In addition to serving India as an aspirational model of an Asian nation free of Western presence and domination, in more pragmatic terms, Japan had at various times emerged as a supporter of Indian independence fighters as a restraint on British strength in Asia. Due to the formal diplomatic ties between the two countries (the Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902) this support was not necessarily open and direct but more restrained. In the early decades of the 20th century Japan had provided safe haven for exiled Indian independence movement fighters, including the Bengalis Rashbehari Bose, Taraknath Das and others and by 1941, some 1,000 Indian nationalist fighters were living in exile in Japan, among them Ananda Mohan Sahay and Raja Mahendra Pratdip.²⁰ The British kept an eye on such developments: Tagore’s 1916 visit to Japan, for example, had raised

concerns among British diplomats that the visit “might result in a Japanese-Indian understanding which could eventually take a political and anti-British form.”²¹

Japan, India, Bengal and Pan-Asianism

Bengal, the center of British control over India until 1911, was also the “long-standing heart of anti-British activities.”²² Accordingly, many Bengali intellectuals were drawn first to Pan-Asianist ideas and later more specifically to Japanese Pan-Asianism as they sought to contend with British colonial control and find a path to Indian national independence. Seeing India within the larger context of Asia in turn allowed for the framing of Indian independence on a larger canvas. As Joseph McQuade writes, “If India and Asia were to be understood as the simultaneous sources of world civilization, their subjugation by Europe took on global significance as the oppression of civilization itself.”²³

In the Bengali intellectual culture of the late 19th/early 20th century, three related ideas emerged to form what together served as a foundation for 19th century Bengali thought: “India and the East were synonymous... Eastern civilization was distinguished by spiritual profundity... East and West complemented one another perfectly.”²⁴ These ideas provided an intellectual base which also expanded the discursive context surrounding Indian independence. In addition to Tagore and Bose and their respective responses to Japanese Pan-Asianism, numerous others in Bengal also engaged with Pan-Asianist ideas, including Keshub Chandra Sen and members of the Brahmo Samaj, Chitranda Das, R.C. Mazumdar, Jadunath Sarkar, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo and Rashbehari Bose.

Although he later broke with the organization and founded his own off-shoot, Keshub Chandra Sen was early member of the influential Brahmo Samaj, founded by Debendranath Tagore in 1843 on the basis of Rammohan Roy’s Brahmo Sabha. In his 1883 speech, “Asia’s Message to Europe,” Sen outlined some of the principles that served as an intellectual foundation for Bengali views of Pan-Asianism. “We have indeed learnt a great deal from the West... but Europe too must learn of Asia. Who can

deny the deep idealism and the lofty spirituality of the East?... It is almost un-Asiatic not to know God.”²⁵ The Brahma Samaj promoted similar ideas that also underlined a fundamental Pan-Asian unity: “The genius of Asia was religious.”²⁶

By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, this Bengali outlook on Pan-Asianism received further inspiration by Japan’s emergence as a leading force in Asia and as a result, Bengali nationalists increasingly saw in Japan a potential spiritual if not actual ally in the Indian drive for national independence. Bengali lawyer, editor and nationalist, Chitrandan Das (1869-1925) for example, promoted the idea of India “as part of a greater Asiatic federation,” arguing that while Tagore was correct in his view that India was a leader in the realm of the spiritual and religious, “it was ‘the menace which threatens all alike’ – that of Western domination and racism – that was more important and urgent than the ties of ancient culture.”²⁷ Bengali historian R.C. Mazumdar (1888-1980) wrote of “the Indian influence on the whole of Asia, from religion and government to geographical names and measurement systems and even the fusion of races.”²⁸ Another Bengali, historian Jadunath Sarkar, was president of the Greater India Society. These activities all point to an underlying investment in Pan-Asianist thinking.

Perhaps the most prominent of the Indian nationalists who promoted a relationship with Japan was Rashbehari Bose. While many scholars today view Rashbehari Bose as an apologist for Japanese colonialism he himself advanced the view that Japan’s war in Asia was “a righteous war for Asia’s liberation led by Japan against the Anglo-American status quo powers.”²⁹ He argued, for example, that the Japanese, as fellow Asians, “governed and protected Korea in order to prevent the white race from exploiting it.”³⁰

Tagore, Japan and Pan-Asianism

Rabindranath Tagore’s association with Japan was deep and long-lasting. Between 1916 and 1930 he travelled five times to Japan. He admired Japan and Japanese culture, and yet levied a harsh critique against Japan. Tagore grew up in the heart of one of India’s most illustrious and creative families; as he described the influences of his early youth, “... the unconventional code of life for our family has been a confluence of three cultures, the Hindu, Mohammedan and British.”³¹ Despite his many talents and

accomplishments, Tagore's most enduring self-identification was as a poet: "*Ami kobi*," ("I am a poet") was his simple and straightforward statement on the issue.³² In 1902, when Okakura Tenshin travelled to Calcutta to meet Swami Vivekanandhe also met Tagore and the two men formed a friendship that lasted until Okakura's early death in 1913. Although they only met once more, in Boston in 1913, shortly before Okakura's death, Tagore credited Okakura as "one of my intimate friends."³³

Tagore and Okakura held shared views about the spiritual greatness of Asia and of its essential Pan-Asian spiritual and cultural unity. Tagore posited a dichotomy between East and West that tagged Eastern civilization as inherently focused on "social harmony and spiritual liberation" while Western civilization was "dedicated to strengthening national sovereignty and political freedom."³⁴ Western civilization, Tagore wrote in 1901, was "'carnivorous and cannibalistic...feed[ing] upon the resources of other peoples..."³⁵ Asia, Tagore believed, was spiritual, and its goal was the "religious liberation of the individual" while the West was political, with the goal of "strengthen[ing] the nation state and its sovereign independence."³⁶

Against this backdrop, Tagore advanced the idea that Asian regeneration had the capacity to "save" humanity from the rapacity of modern civilization.³⁷ But more particularly, amid the crisis of the onslaught of Western imperial domination in Asia, which called into question the very ability of Asia to survive amid the onslaught of Western imperial domination Tagore called on Asia to rally itself: returning from a trip to China in 1924, Tagore announced, "Asia must find her own voice"³⁸

As we saw above, many Indian nationalists in the early 20th century, including Rashbehari Bose and others, believed this voice -- Asia's rallying cry and its renaissance -- could be led by Japan. Tagore on the other hand, despite his Pan-Asianist views, was deeply sceptical of Japan as potential leader of an Asian renaissance. Tagore had long admired what he saw as the artistic and natural character of Japanese culture, and the value it placed on harmony and simplicity. But in his lecture, "Message of India to Japan," delivered at Tokyo Imperial University in June 1916 during his first visit to that country, Tagore expressed the unease he felt over the "divergence that he sensed between those values and the strident patriotism of the new Japan..."³⁹ In his incisive critique of

Japan Tagore argued that Japan, in its all-out effort to modernize, had essentially sold its soul: “The whirlwind of modern civilization has caught Japan like it has the rest of the world... But this is not [the real] Japan.”⁴⁰ In pursuing the “whirlwind of modern civilization,” – Japan by 1916 already had taken colonial control over both Taiwan (1895) and Korea (1910) -- Japan had forfeited its role as potential leader of Asia. Tagore warned Japan that it must

...Never think for a moment that the hurts you inflict upon other races will not infect you, or that the enmities you sow around your homes will be a wall of protection to you for all time to come. To imbue the minds of a whole people with an abnormal vanity of its own superiority, to teach it to take pride in its moral callousness and ill-begotten wealth, to perpetuate humiliation of defeated nations by exhibiting trophies won from war, and using these in schools in order to breed in children's minds contempt for others, is imitating the West where she has a festering sore, whose swelling is a swelling of disease eating into its vitality.⁴¹

His prescription for Japan, and indeed for Asia, then came in the form of a challenge: Japan, he argued, must lead the way in the rejuvenation of Asia and thus a global reformation: Japan, he wrote,

must infuse the sap of a fuller humanity into the heart of modern civilization. She must never allow it to get choked with noxious undergrowth, but lead it up towards light and freedom, towards the pure air and broad space where it can receive, in the dawn of its day and the darkness of its night, heaven's inspiration. Let the greatness of her ideals become visible to all men like her snow-crowned Fuji rising from the heart of the country into the region of the infinite, supremely distinct from its surroundings, beautiful like a maiden in its magnificent sweep of cure, yet firm and strong and supremely majestic.⁴²

With striking prescience, Tagore warned of the danger of Japan's Pan-Asianism: “...nations who sedulously cultivate moral blindness as the cult of patriotism will end their existence in a sudden and violent death.”⁴³

VI. Bose, Japan and Pan-Asianism

Tagore, a cultural nationalist and Pan-Asianist, rejected Japan's version of Pan-Asianism viewing it as Japan's dangerous self-apology for its nationalism and imperialism, and decrying Japan's colonial push and the growth of nationalism in Japan as clear signs of that Japan was merely imitating the West. He warned Japan that it must not "with a light heart accept the modern civilization with all its tendencies, methods and structures, and dream that they are inevitable..."⁴⁴ "Real power," Tagore wrote, "is not in the weapons themselves, but in the man who wields those weapons."⁴⁵ In contrast to Tagore, Subhas Chandra Bose was one who determined that he must in fact wield those weapons, and wield them against Britain, as the only way to gain Indian independence. S.C. Bose, like Tagore, embraced the idea of a Pan-Asian identity: Bose too had read Okakura Tenshin's work, and according to Joyce C. Lebra, "...it was Okakura's writings which had first turned his thoughts toward Japan."⁴⁶ Unlike Tagore however, who rejected Japan's version of Pan-Asianist thinking, Bose accepted it, ultimately allying with WWII Japan in a bid to win India's independence from Britain.

Subhas Chandra Bose, born in 1897 in Cuttack, Bengal, was educated in Calcutta and England. Joyce Lebra writes,

Two things began to make Subhas politically aware. One was the behaviour of Britishers in Calcutta, whose insults to Indians in public places were galling and offensive. This was the psychological basis of the revolutionary movement in Bengal. The outbreak of World War I wrought another change in Bose's thinking. Political emancipation was a desirable goal for India, but without military power India could not hope for independence.⁴⁷

Over the course of the 1920s, worked with Jawaharlal Nehru to organize youth in the Independence League. He was elected president of Congress in 1938 and in 1939, but shortly thereafter, Bose broke with the Gandhian influence in Congress and its adherence to necessity of non-violent struggle. Bose rejected the Gandhian (and Congress) ideal of

non-violence and passive resistance, coming to believe that the non-violent approach might “paralyze” the British administration in India, true independence could only be achieved via armed resistance. Unlike Tagore, whom we can call a “cultural nationalist,” Bose believed in the necessary role of the military in the independence struggle: “In every fight a special responsibility devolves on the vanguard of the army.”⁴⁸ Moreover, by the 1930s, he became convinced that “India would never be able to win freedom without calling on foreign help.”⁴⁹

Arrested by the British in 1940, Bose came to the conclusion while imprisoned that “the only path to independence lay through Axis assistance against Britain.”⁵⁰ Released from prison after a “freedom fast” in late November 1940, he escaped India in January 1941 and fled to Nazi Germany where he was met with a tepid response. Making contact with the Japanese Embassy in Berlin, Bose determined to go to Japan, finally arriving after a daring transfer in May, 1943. By July, 1943, he arrived in Singapore, to take lead of the Indian National Army, the *Azad Hind Fauj* (Free India Army) there. “As long as India lays prostrate at the feet of Britain,” Bose maintained, Indians would not be able to “...shape our own destiny. ...therefore the paramount duty .. of nationalists ...[is] to bring about the political emancipation of India as early as possible.”⁵¹

Where Tagore saw the failed potential of Japan as leader of an Asian renaissance, warning it against taking “pride in its moral callousness and ill-begotten wealth, to perpetuate humiliation of defeated nations by exhibiting trophies won from war,”⁵² Bose saw Japan as a bringer of hope to Asia, remarking in a Japanese press conference in 1943 that Japan’s 1905 victory in the Russo-Japanese War was

the first harbinger of Asian resurgence. That victory was hailed with great joy not only to the Japanese but also by the Indians. Therefore, Indians feel that the existence of a strong Japan is essential for the reconstruction of Asia.⁵³

Bose was satisfied with Japan’s promises of assistance, convinced, of “Japan’s ‘Asian consciousness’” and of Japan’s “desire to help other Asian nations to achieve liberation.”⁵⁴ In this he followed Rash Behari Bose, who “Viewed global empire through

a Manichean racial binary, which prohibited the possibility of one Asian nation oppressing another...⁵⁵ India's freedom, Bose believed, was "not merely ... political elimination of the British. It stood for a revolutionary break from the past, with major structural changes in the economic, social and political lives of the people."⁵⁶

Bose's collaboration with Germany and Japan has clouded his historical reputation outside of India. Sugata Bose writes, "Bose's single-minded absorption in the cause of India's independence led him to ignore the ghastly brutalities perpetrated by the forces of Nazism and fascism in Europe. By going to Germany because it happened to be at war with Britain, he ensured that his reputation would long be tarred by the opprobrium that was due the Nazis. A pact with the devil: such was the terrible price of freedom."⁵⁷ And yet, as historians Christopher Bayly and Tim Harper recognized in a piece written in 2004, "Only now, fifty years on has Subhas Chandra Bose begun to claim his still deeply controversial legacy as the greatest military history of India's modern history."⁵⁸

Although he harboured some suspicions of Japan, stating, "If cunning British politicians could neither cajole nor deceive me, no one else can hope to do so...," he remained convinced of Japan's promise as an ally.⁵⁹ Both pragmatic and charismatic however, "He was focused on India, he did not take into consideration the global situation"⁶⁰ Nevertheless, Bose's alliance with imperial Japan remains problematic. Although he cautioned:

We shall have to be awake and alive, on our guard, not only against the enemy British imperialism, against imperialistically inclined Japanese bureaucrats, but against Indians in our own ranks.⁶¹

He was convinced that his alliance with Japan offered

a golden opportunity to all enslaved nations in Asia to emancipate themselves and set up a new order based on freedom, justice, and morality⁶²

Conclusion

Pan-Asianism and was an idea that captivated many including Rabindranath Tagore and Subhas Chandra Bose in the pre-WWII and WWII era. Given Japan's

position and strength in Asia during that period, its version of Pan-Asianism became the dominant paradigm within Pan-Asianism. But its failure as an idea came as a result of Japan's military aggression in East Asia. Within Indian nationalism and the independence movement came a wide variety of responses to Japanese Pan-Asianism – from Tagore's essentially culturalist and critical approach, to Bose's supportive politico-military approach.

Many questions remain as we consider whether Pan-Asianism continues to hold relevance. It is hoped that such a study as this will provide a basis for grappling with these larger questions. As Akira Iriye and Rana Mitter write in the foreword to Hotta's *Pan-Asianism*,⁶³ "...the idea that this region [Asia] has values and aims in common has once more gained currency" but in an ever-changing news cycle dominated by disputes among the Asian powers, the question arises: does Pan-Asianism have historical legs and if so, where and why? Did Japan's use of the concept as an ideology of imperialism put an end to the potential utility of such a concept? Currently in Japan some are seeing "a resurgence of nostalgic Pan Asianism among Japanese conservatives and efforts to beautify the past by revisionist historians."⁶⁴ Is Japan currently reviving Pan-Asianist ideas and if so, how will that revival be met in East Asia? Will a Japanese revival of Pan-Asianist thinking find a more ready audience in India than elsewhere in Asia? What does "Asia" mean in the globalized world of the early 21st century and is it a potentially helpful – or harmful – concept? More particularly, can the unique ties that united Japan and India in the early half of the 20th century be relied upon to bring increased stability to the world of the 21st century?

REFERENCES AND ENDNOTES

- ¹ Quoted in Sugata Bose, *The Nation as Mother and Other Visions of Nationhood*, Penguin Random House, 2017, 207.
- ² Rabindranath Tagore, "The Spirit of Japan, A Lecture," Indo-Japanese Association, Tokyo, 1916.
- ³ Rash Behari Bose quoted in Mizutani Satoshi, "Anti-Colonialism and the Contested Politics of Comparison: Rabindranath Tagore, Rash Behari Bose and Japanese Colonialism in Korea in the Inter-War Period," *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, 16:1, Spring, 2015.

-
- ⁴ Okakura, Kakuzō, *The Awakening of Japan*, New York: The Century Co., 1904, p-107.
- ⁵ Nehru quoted in Pankaj Mishra, *From the Ruins of Empire: The Revolt Against the West and the Remaking of Asia*, Pearson, 2012, p-249.
- ⁶ Okakura Tenshin, *Ideals of the East: The Spirit of Japanese Art*, Dover Publications, 2004; reprint of Dutton 1904 edition, 1. Representative of the special connections between Japan and Bengal, the foreword to the 1904 edition was written by Nibedita, the Irish-born disciple of Bengali spiritual leader Swami Vivekananda.
- ⁷ Brij Tankha, *Okakura Tenshin and Pan-Asianism: Shadows of the Past*, Global Oriental, 2009, p- 2.
- ⁸ Okakura Kakuzō, *The Awakening of Japan*, New York: The Century Co., 1904, p-101.
- ⁹ Eri Hotta, *Pan-Asianism and Japan's War, 1931-1945*, Palgrave, MacMillan 2013.
- ¹⁰ Peter Duus, "Imperialism without colonies: The vision of a greater east Asia co-prosperity sphere," *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 7:1, 1996, p-63.
- ¹¹ Duara, Prasenjit. "The Discourse of Civilization and Pan-Asianism." *Journal of World History* 12:1 (2001), p-110.
- ¹² Peter Duus, *The Rise of Modern Japan*, Houghton Mifflin, 1976, p- 190.
- ¹³ Pankaj Mishra, *From the Ruins of Empire: The Revolt against the West and the Remaking of Asia*, Pearson, 2012, p- 129.
- ¹⁴ Mishra, 248.
- ¹⁵ Joseph McQuade, "The New Asia of Rash Behari Bose: India, Japan, and the Limits of the International, 1912-1945.," *Journal of World History*, 27:4 (Dec., 2016) p-647.
- ¹⁶ McQuade, p- 647.
- ¹⁷ Christopher W.A. Szpilman and Sven Kaaler, eds., *Pan-Asianism: A Documentary History, Volume 2: 1920-Present*, Rowman and Littlefield, 2011, p-24.
- ¹⁸ Duara, p- 66.
- ¹⁹ Duara, p- 67.
- ²⁰ Eri Hotta, "R.B. Bose and His Supporters: An Insight into Anti-Colonial Nationalism and Pan-Asianism," *Interventions*, 8:1 (2006) p-122.
- ²¹ Hay, p-81.
- ²² Satoshi Mizutani, "Anti-Colonialism and the Contested Politics of Comparison: Rabindranath Tagore, Ras Behari Bose and Japanese Colonialism in Korea in the Interwar Period," *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, " 16:1 (Spring, 2015)
- ²³ Joseph McQuade, p- 659
- ²⁴ Stephen N. Hay, *Asian Ideas of East and West: Tagore and His Critics in Japan, China and India*, (Harvard University Press, 1970) p- 21.
- ²⁵ Sen quoted in Carolien Stolte and Harald Fischer-Tine, "Imagining Asia in India: Nationalism and Internationalism (ca. 1905-1940) in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 54:1 (Jan. 2012) p-68.
- ²⁶ Hay, p- 22.

-
- ²⁷ Brij Tankha, “The Greater India Society: Indian Culture and Asian Federation,” in Szpilman and Kaaler, eds., *Pan-Asianism*, p-94.
- ²⁸ Tankha, p-94.
- ²⁹ Hotta, p-122.
- ³⁰ Mizutani Satoshi, “Anti-Colonialism and the Contested Politics of Comparison,” *Journal of Colonialism and Anti-Colonial History* 16:1 (Spring, 2015).
- ³¹ Hay, p-17.
- ³² Tagore quoted in Rustom Barucha, *Another Asia: Rabindranath Tagore and Okakura Tenshin*, Oxford, 2009, p- 10.
- ³³ Rabindranath Tagore, *On Oriental Culture*, pp. 8-10, quoted in Hay, p- 48.
- ³⁴ Mishra, p-224.
- ³⁵ Mishra, p- 225.
- ³⁶ Hay, p-32.
- ³⁷ Hay, p- 63.
- ³⁸ Hay, p-254.
- ³⁹ “Rabindranath Tagore and Japan,” *Japan Times*, September, 2003.
- ⁴⁰ Hay, p- 60.
- ⁴¹ Rabindranath Tagore, *Nationalism*, (Penguin Modern Classics, 2009) 22. “Nationalism in Japan,” in his book, *Nationalism*, was a re-worked version of his 1916 Tokyo speech.
- ⁴² Tagore, *Nationalism*, pp-14-15.
- ⁴³ Tagore, *Nationalism*, p-22.
- ⁴⁴ Tagore, *Nationalism*, p- 6.
- ⁴⁵ Tagore, *Nationalism*, p-20.
- ⁴⁶ Joyce C. Lebra, *The Indian National Army and Japan*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies Yusuf Ishak Institute, 2008, p- 110.
- ⁴⁷ Lebra, p-103.
- ⁴⁸ S.C. Bose quoted in Habib, p- 208.
- ⁴⁹ T.R. Sareen, “Subhas Chandra Bose, Japan and British Imperialism,” *European Journal of East Asian Studies*, 3:1 (2004),p- 71.
- ⁵⁰ Lebra, p-107.
- ⁵¹ S.C. Bose quoted in S. Irfan Habib, ed., *Indian Nationalism, The Essential Writings*, New Delhi: Aleph, 2017, p-209.
- ⁵² Tagore, *Nationalism*, p- 22.
- ⁵³ Hayashida Tatsuo, *Higeki no Eiyu* (“Hero of Tragedy”) Tokyo, 1968, quoted in Lebra, p-117.
- ⁵⁴ Lebra, p-118.
- ⁵⁵ McQuade, p-667.
- ⁵⁶ S. Irfan Habib, ed., p-206.

-
- ⁵⁷ Sugata Bose, *His Majesty's Opponent Subhas Chandra Bose and India's Struggle against Empire*, Harvard University Press, 2011, p- 203. Mahatma Gandhi, for one, remarked that "I see no difference between the Fascist of Nazi power and the Allies. All are exploiters, all resort to ruthlessness to the extent required to compass their end." Gandhi quoted in Sugata Bose, *His Majesty's Opponent*, p- 2.
- ⁵⁸ Christopher Bayly and Tim Harper quoted in Sugata Bose, *His Majesty's Opponent*, Harvard University Press, 2011, p-12.
- ⁵⁹ Bose quoted in Kesar Singh Giani, *Indian Independence Movement in East Asia, The Most Authentic Account of the I.N.A. and the Azad Hind Government*, Part 11, pp-11-18; Lahore, 1947, in Lebra, p-118.
- ⁶⁰ Shriya Sarkar, personal conversation, February 21, 2019.
- ⁶¹ Bose quoted in "A Journalist, *Netaji*," Lahore, 1946, pp- 93-94 in Lebra- 119.
- ⁶² Bose quoted in Kesar Singh Giani, *Indian Independence Movement in East Asia, The Most Authentic Account of the I.N.A. and the Azad Hind Government*, Part 11, pp- 11-18; Lahore, 1947, in Lebra, p- 118.
- ⁶³ Akira Iriye and Rana Mitter, "Foreword," Eri Hotta, *Pan-Asianism and Japan's War, 1931-1945*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2013, p-ix.
- ⁶⁴ Jeffrey Kingston, "The Problem with Pan-Asianism," *Japan Times*, April 29, 2007.