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Comparisons and Deflections: Indian Nationalists in the Political Economy of Japanese Imperialism, 1931–1938

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Abstract

With the onset of the Great Depression in 1929 and the 1931 Manchurian Incident, Japanese intellectuals and business leaders appealed to the language of self-determination and Pan-Asianism to advocate for domestic reform and imperial expansion. At the same time, Indian nationalists in Japan, such as Rash Behari Bose, Anand Mohan Sahay, Aiyappan-Pillai Madhavan Nair, and others, viewed the creation of Manchukuo in 1932 as evidence of Japanese sincerity toward Asian nationalism, as well as a model of development that India and Asia should follow. These invocations were used to legitimize their own nation-building projects and critique trends within the mainstream Indian nationalist movement. This article analyzes the encounters between Japan, India, and the Indian merchant diaspora in East Asia from 1931 to 1938. The author argues that Japanese Pan-Asianists as well as some Indian nationalists sought to legitimize their own national and transnational projects during this period by appealing to a common Asian civilization that was mediated through a politics of comparison and deflection. The article also demonstrates that comparisons often occluded the issue of imperial violence and revealed the limitations of accepting nationalism and the nation-state as the foundation of civilizational discourse and transnational community.

Keywords: Pan-Asianism, Japan, India, Indian diaspora, Manchukuo, politics of comparison, Rash Behari Bose, Anand Mohan Sahay, Aiyappan-Pillai Madhavan Nair, Mahendra Pratap, Ōkawa Shūmei, Nakatani Takeyo, Indian merchants, Kobe, Yokohama, nationalism, imperialism, political economy, comparative colonialism

Introduction

In the wake of the Great Depression, Japan sought to both protect and expand its imperial interests in Asia by appealing to Pan-Asianism and the language of self-determination. The protectionist measures that many countries adopted after 1929 crippled Japan's export-based economy. Simultaneously, Japanese policymakers and military leaders feared that the dual threats of Guomindang China and the Soviet Union

expanding into Manchuria would threaten Japanese investments in the region and its overall position in Asia at a time when Japan was in an economic crisis. Amid these fears and uncertainties, the Kwantung Army moved beyond its namesake peninsular garrison and the South Manchuria Railway Zone and invaded Manchuria in September 1931 during what became known as the Manchurian Incident. By February 1932, Manchuria was declared independent and renamed Manchukuo, a nominally sovereign and independent nation-state with the former Qing Emperor Puyi reigning as a constitutional monarch.

There is now an abundance of literature on Manchukuo and its significance in the history of the Japanese Empire and of Northeast Asia broadly. From studies that highlight popular support for Manchukuo and its influence in formulating policy within the Japanese metropole to scholarship that seeks to understand how Pan-Asianist ideology was used to buttress and ascribe legitimacy to Japan's client state, the work of scholars such as Mark Driscoll (2010), Prasenjit Duara (2003), and Louise Young (1998) have moved beyond earlier scholarship that merely dismissed Manchukuo as a puppet-state. These newer studies recognized the very real exploitation that occurred during Manchukuo's thirteen-year lifespan despite its utopian promises. The significance of Manchukuo lies not only in inaugurating a new phase of Japanese imperialism and the simultaneous transformation of Japanese society along fascist lines but also in underscoring how Japanese policymakers, bureaucrats, business leaders, intellectuals, and religious activists sought to refashion Japan's image as the champion of the colonized world in its rivalries with competing nationalisms and imperialisms.

However, if Manchukuo was celebrated by Japanese Pan-Asianists as the inauguration of a new order that promised the overthrow of Western imperialism and would usher Asia into an era of peace and modernity, what did leaders in various parts of the colonized world make of such claims? Moreover, what were the linkages between culturalist invocations of Pan-Asian unity and the economic imperatives of Japanese imperialism during the 1930s? Masataka Matsuura's work highlights the political economy of Pan-Asianism during this period as Japan sought to expand its economic position in Asia in competition with other imperial powers in the region. Devoting a section to Indian nationalists in Japan in his 2010 book, *"Dai Tōa sensō" wa naze okita no ka? Han-Ajjashugi no seijikeizaishi* (Why did the "Greater East Asia War" occur? A political and economic history of Pan-Asianism), Matsuura places the activities of Indian nationalists such as Rash Behari Bose, Anand Mohan Sahay, Mahendra Pratap, and Aiyappan-Pillai Madhavan Nair in the political economy of Japanese imperialism in the interwar years and masterfully explicates the triangular relationship among Indian nationalist activists, Japanese business associations, and Buddhist leaders. This relationship was especially important for Japanese policymakers and business owners as Japan began to lose Chinese merchant support during the 1920s and 1930s and sought to cultivate economic links with the extensive Indian merchant networks in East and Southeast Asia (Matsuura 2010, 234–272).

Some scholarly attention has focused on the career of Rash Behari Bose, a Bengali revolutionary who fled to Tokyo in 1915 due to his involvement in an assassination attempt on the British Viceroy and became the face of Indian nationalism in Japan through his involvement with Pan-Asianist leaders and organizations such as Tōyama Mitsuru of Gen'yōsha 玄洋社 (Dark ocean society). Takeshi Nakajima's biography of Bose, translated by Prem Motwani, remains the most comprehensive account of Bose's life available in the English language. However, it is limited by Nakajima's hagiographical portrayal of Bose, which hinders his analysis when discussing Bose's problematic views regarding Japanese imperialism and Hindu nationalism (Nakajima 2009).

More recently, Joseph McQuade makes the important observation that Bose's activities in Japan and his championing of a Hindu-Buddhist alliance in Asia constituted an alternate geography that challenged the liberal internationalist order articulated and maintained by the Euro-American empires after the First World War. Yet McQuade does not appear to thoroughly interrogate Bose's alternate geography in the context of the Japanese Empire. He claims that "Bose's imagined national community did not fit the rigid 'nationstate logic' that formed the basis of the international system established by the European powers at Versailles" (McQuade 2016, 667); however, this statement is not entirely convincing. I would argue that Bose's own internationalist vision and that of other Indian nationalists in Japan were very much embedded in the logic of the nation-state. This connection between Bose's internationalism and his commitment to the nation-state ideal is evident in his views of national revival for India, which emphasized fidelity to India's "authentic" spiritual traditions rooted in Hinduism and cooperation with Japan in a community of independent nation-states in Asia.

Bose was neither the first nor the last Indian nationalist to take refuge in Japan. Mahendra Pratap, an Indian prince-turned-revolutionary, carried out his activities in Japan during the 1920s and into the 1940s to gain support for his proposal to create a World Federation, a utopian world order that would transcend empire and the nation-state. Carolien Stolte's work on Pratap provides important insight into his career as an anti-imperialist whose internationalism was shaped by his journeys and the people he met. Stolte shows how internationalist visions are neither uniform nor static and are often entangled in imperial politics. This entanglement was evident in Pratap's valorization of Japan during the interwar years and his subsequent disillusionment with Japan over the Asia-Pacific War (Stolte 2014). In 1923, Anand Mohan Sahay, a former medical student and activist for the Indian National Congress, arrived in Kobe to represent the interests of the Congress in Japan and to gain supporters for the independence struggle. Sahay was initially encouraged by Rajendra Prasad and Jawaharlal Nehru, who would become the first president and prime minister of India after independence. Aiyappan-Pillai Madhavan Nair was another Indian nationalist based in the Kansai region. In 1928, Nair arrived in Kyoto as an engineering student at Kyoto Imperial University. He quickly became involved with Bose's activities and developed a close relationship with the Kwantung Army in Manchukuo.

It is important to situate the encounters between Indian nationalists and Japanese Pan-Asianists during this period in the wider context of the Japanese Empire, as well as nationalist and internationalist politics in India and the South Asian diaspora. Such encounters should not be regulated as mere footnotes in either Japanese imperial history or South Asian history but should be understood through the politics of comparison and deflection. Here I draw on the work of Ann Laura Stoler and Satoshi Mizutani. Whereas Stoler (2001) focuses on how colonizers deployed the politics of comparison in relation to other empires, Mizutani shows how colonized groups also engaged in a politics of comparison. Crucially, Mizutani (2015) shows that comparisons between the colonized did not always produce anti-imperial solidarities; rather, activism against one empire was often used to reinforce the legitimacy of another empire.

Drawing on all these insights, I seek to understand how Japanese Pan-Asianist activists, Buddhist scholars, and a host of other commentators deployed a politics of comparison as they encountered and situated India within an imperial worldview that placed Japan in competition with the British Empire. We can grasp how the politics of comparison was mobilized by Indian nationalists in Japan by understanding how they placed their engagement with the Japanese Empire within their anti-British activism and their nationalist imaginings. I thus argue that the comparisons drawn by Japanese Pan-Asianists as well as Indian nationalists mutually reinforced their respective imperial and national projects. However, it is equally important to not overstate the appeal that Japanese Pan-Asianism and its Indian supporters held. Bose, Sahay, Nair, and Pratap had no shortage of critics in India and in Indian communities in Japan and elsewhere. This was especially true as more Indians became aware of the growing connections between Japanese Pan-Asianists and the Hindu nationalist movement, which also included conservative elements within the Indian National Congress (INC).

Japanese overtures to Indian nationalists in both the diaspora and India proper were part of a wider goal to claim leadership over Asia and the colonized world for Japan and to ensure that Japan itself would be ready to assume the task. Like most empires after the First World War and in the years leading up to and after the Great Depression, Japan faced a crisis of imperial decline. The pressures of nationalist movements in Japan's colonies and the growing urban and rural discontent in the Japanese metropole concerned many intellectuals and policymakers. In order to overcome the crisis of imperial decline, defenders of empire during the interwar years often deployed narrative strategies that deflected from the inherent exploitation and violence of empire that creates crisis in the first place. Jeanne Morefield convincingly argues this point in *Empires without Imperialism*, a book concerning British and American imperial decline during the interwar period and into the early twenty-first century. As she explains, liberal apologists for empire deployed a narrative strategy that espoused a return to original values or "who we are" as the bastions of liberal democratic ideals to deflect charges of their empire's inherent illiberality (Morefield 2014, 3).

I argue here that a similar process took place in the Japanese Empire as Pan-Asianist intellectuals and activists called for a return to original values. However, these values were articulated as a rejection of Anglo-American liberalism and framed within a culturalist discourse of “Asian civilization” and the revival of national authenticity. For many Pan-Asianist thinkers, the crisis that Japan faced in the 1920s and into the early 1930s signaled to them that Japan needed to abandon its participation in an Anglo-American imperial order and return to its spiritual foundations to fulfill its mission of liberating and reviving Asia from Western imperialism and civilizational decay. This perspective did not imply a rejection of scientific modernity but a synthesis of what earlier Tokugawa and Meiji intellectuals described as *wakon yōsai* 和魂洋才 (Japanese spirit, Western techniques). Japanese Pan-Asianists appealed to the claim that Japan mastered the techniques of Western modernity while drawing upon and preserving its national essence to assert moral superiority over the West. They also argued that Japan’s model of development should be exported to the rest of Asia. This comparison—that Japan was distinct and morally superior from the imperial powers of the West—allowed for Pan-Asianist commentators in Japan to not only deflect and gloss over the violence that underpinned Japanese imperialism but to also occlude the implications of Japan’s previous entanglements with the British and American empires.

At a time when the language of internationalism coincided with the creation of economic blocs, Japanese advocates for national regeneration and Pan-Asianist ideals envisioned an alternate international order that stood in opposition to the League of Nations and the Third Communist International (Comintern, also known as the Third International). Yet, as Duara has shown, nationalist agendas often coopted the redemptive and utopian invocations of civilizational revival for Asia to further imperial expansion (Duara 2001, 99–100). Whereas Duara crucially argues that this was not necessarily the case either in Japan or elsewhere, my interest is in elucidating the nationalist appropriations of Pan-Asianist ideals. I explore what these ideals meant for how Ōkawa Shūmei, Nakatani Takeyo, and many other figures understood and interpreted movements for self-determination in Asia, particularly in British India. According to them, it was up to Japan to assume the mantle of leadership over Asia and guide its neighbors toward liberation and development. Just as Japan identified divisive and harmful elements within the nation and sought to harmonize these elements under the goal of national and spiritual revival, Asia had to do the same. During the 1930s, when the fault lines within the Indian nationalist movement became more pronounced, Japanese attempts to court Indian nationalist opinion encountered significant barriers despite appeals to both Pan-Asianism and Pan-Islamism.

Much has been written about Japanese overtures calling for anticolonial solidarity outside the traditional area-studies definition of “East Asia.” The works of Cemil Aydin (2007) and Selçuk Esenbel (2011) are noted for their immense contributions in understanding Japan’s relationship with the Islamic world. Similarly, scholars such as Joseph Calvitt Clarke (2011), Marc Gallicchio (2000), and Gerald Horne (2018) have drawn attention to the fascinating connections between Japan, Africa, and Black

Internationalism in the United States. There is also an extensive body of scholarship on Japan's relationship with the Buddhist world in South and Southeast Asia. Richard Jaffe's *Seeking Sakyamuni: South Asia in the Formation of Modern Japanese Buddhism* (2019) is a highly compelling account that brings together the journeys of Buddhist monks and intellectuals such as Kitabatake Dōryū, Shaku Kōzen, Kawaguchi Ekai, and many others to locate and recuperate an "authentic" and "pure" Buddhism from South Asia. Jaffe underscores the importance of South Asia to the formation of a Japanese Buddhist modernity that, in the view of its proponents, needed to guide social and political reform in Japan as well as economic and imperial expansion abroad.

Such projects to recover the spiritual authenticity of the nation resonated with the Hindu right. Jaffe mentions the connections that developed between Japanese Buddhists and Hindu nationalists in India during the interwar years, though he does not probe these alliance-building activities in depth (Jaffe 2019, 244–246). Understanding this important connection is essential in understanding the appeal as well as the limitations of Japan's Pan-Asian and Pan-Islamist overtures in the context of South Asia. Rash Behari Bose, who was the source of information for many Japanese Pan-Asianist commentators on Indian affairs, openly sympathized with the Hindu Mahasabha, a right-wing Hindu nationalist party, and its advocacy for an undivided Hindu India at the expense of other minorities such as Muslims and Christians. Japanese Pan-Asianists and Buddhist intellectuals of the 1920s and 1930s failed to problematize the idea of "authenticity" itself while consistently interpreting and celebrating Mahatma Gandhi's movement as an anti-British movement rooted in the authentic, spiritual tradition of India. By associating authentic India with Hinduism and privileging a Hindu-Buddhist alliance at a time when Hindu-Muslim tensions and the politics of partition were gaining momentum, Japanese Pan-Asianists undermined their own appeals to Indian Muslims through Pan-Islamism and isolated themselves from the Indian left, which valued secularism and took a critical stance toward fascism.

Yet even while many Indian nationalists became deeply suspicious of Japan during the interwar years, especially due to its actions in China during the 1930s, others were more sympathetic to the Japanese Pan-Asianist vision and its experiment in Manchukuo because of the implications these projects might have in directing the course of the Indian nationalist movement and providing a blueprint for post-independence India. Especially after the Great Depression, Indian nationalist leaders looked to the developmental state as a future model that could protect India from what they saw as the contingencies and exploitation of Western capitalism. However, for those who could not bear the broadly socialist direction of the Indian nationalist movement, let alone stomach the possibility of a communist India, Manchukuo offered an alternate nation-state model. This model promised phenomenal industrial and economic growth while uniting a diverse, multiethnic region based on adherence to spiritual traditions and values that were at once Pan-Asian and local. As Benjamin Zachariah notes in his work on the discourse of development in India, nationalist leaders and economic planners on both the left and the right were preoccupied with national development not only as a

political and economic question but also as a moral and spiritual one. For India's leaders, it was therefore necessary to define a "national morality" or "national values" that would guide India's development as a modern nation-state (Zachariah 2005, 5–6).

In *The Nation and Its Fragments* (1993), Partha Chatterjee argues that a key feature of anticolonial nationalism in the Indian context was the distinction between inner and outer realms. In the view of certain Indian nationalists, the Indian nation needed to acknowledge Western superiority in the outer material realm of technological advancement, economic progress, and military strength and seek to emulate these attributes. However, at the same time these nationalists argued that it would be through adherence to cultural and spiritual authenticity in the inner realm of the Indian nation that the nation could claim mastery over the outer realm and thereby gain moral superiority over the West. In this manner, Indian nationalists could claim India's distinction from the West while obscuring the imperial genealogy from which they derived their nationalist imaginings (Chatterjee 1993, 6).

Although Chatterjee provides important insight into the dynamics of anticolonial nationalism and a necessary critique of Eurocentric understandings of nationalist discourse, we must avoid taking the inner realm of the nation for granted by framing the inner within the confines of the nation-state. In other words, we must not simply reproduce the idea of the inner realm as the authentic domain and repository of a specifically *national* culture even while critiquing the mobilization of cultural/spiritual authenticity in anticolonial nationalism. Instead, this article demonstrates that the inner realm of the nation was itself a construct shaped through transnational processes and exchanges. For certain Indian nationalists, Japan and Manchukuo had already achieved mastery of the material through their fidelity to a shared Pan-Asian cultural/spiritual heritage. Subsequently, this mastery allowed Indian nationalists to ascribe moral legitimacy to Japan and Manchukuo over the West in leading Asia's destiny as well as criticize socialist trends within the broader Indian nationalist movement and the discourse of nation-building. In his work on German-Indian connections, Kris Manjapra identifies how entanglements formed between Indian nationalists and their German supporters. This development resulted in the two groups depending on each other even while they pursued their own national and imperial goals (Manjapra 2014, 5–6). I argue that a similar process was at work as both Indian nationalists and Japanese Pan-Asianists tapped into the discourse of a shared Asiatic civilization while mobilizing each other for their own imperial and national ambitions.

However, the consequences of these entanglements manifested in the failure of many Japanese Pan-Asianists to recognize and understand the multiple voices and visions within the Indian political landscape. They also led certain Indian nationalists to defend Japanese imperialism to varying degrees while articulating their own visions for the Indian nation-state and its place in Asia. Comparisons, therefore, enabled both groups to adopt narrative strategies that were used to deflect issues of imperial violence. This article points to how these entanglements affected Indian merchant groups in

Japan and Asia more broadly as Japanese policymakers and Indian nationalists sought to mobilize their wealth and networks behind their imperial or national goals.

India in the Political Economy of Japanese Pan-Asianism

In 1935, Nakatani Takeyo published a pamphlet in English titled, “Asiatic Asia: What Does It Mean?” outlining the principles that informed the vision of Dai Ajia kyōkai 大亜細亜協会 (Greater Asia association). A professor at Hōsei University in Tokyo and a student of the Japanese Pan-Asianist intellectual Ōkawa Shūmei, Nakatani was actively involved in Pan-Asianist circles in Japan and, as secretary of Dai Ajia kyōkai, came into close contact with Indian nationalists such as Rash Behari Bose in Japan. In Nakatani’s view, Manchukuo was “the last barrier against the white invasion” and thus, from its establishment as an independent state, “great efforts should be now directed to unite and reconstruct the whole of Asia” (Nakatani 1935, 1). Nakatani’s program for the reconstruction of Asia required both economic and cultural emancipation from the West, and he found several examples in Asia, most notably India, where he understood the objective of nationalist movements to be “the restoration of their respective cultures.” Commenting on Gandhi and the Indian nationalist movement, Nakatani held that “Gandhi embodies the national will to restore the ancient Indian spiritual culture by denying the Western political and monetary systems as well as the civilization that underlies them” (1935, 12–13).

It was thus Japan’s duty and moral responsibility to not cooperate with the League of Nations in suppressing Asian nationalism and instead adopt an “Asian-consciousness” by reforming its political and economic structure based on its spiritual culture manifested in *nippon seishin* 日本精神 (Japanese spirit) and guide its Asian neighbors toward political, economic, and cultural liberation and prosperity. He encapsulated this vision as the reestablishment in Japan of *sumera mikuni* 皇御国, an appellation for the Japanese Empire translated as the “Emperor’s Country” or the “Imperial Realm.” Nakatani, however, opted for the translation “Moral Empire” (Nakatani 1935, 13).

Nakatani made several significant points in *Asiatic Asia*. His decision to publish the pamphlet in English, and his attempts to convince the reader of Japan’s moral authority over the West and its cultural/spiritual affinity with Asia, suggest that Nakatani had a non-Japanese readership in mind. Moreover, Nakatani makes several references to not only the Indian nationalist movement but also the economic conditions of India under Britain at the time. India was a major supplier of cotton for the Japanese textile industry. By the 1930s, cheap Japanese textile manufactures were flooding the Indian market. Concerned about how Japan’s economic activities would negatively affect Britain’s dominance in the textile trade with India, the British Indian government adopted protectionist measures in 1933 by imposing tariffs on Japanese textile imports and restrictions on the amount of Indian cotton supplied to Japan. Many Japanese Pan-Asianists viewed these measures as evidence of Britain’s exploitation of India, which subsequently hindered the revival of Asia (Nakatani 1935, 10–11).

If the British Empire was a regressive immoral force suppressing the economic and spiritual vitality of Asia and India, Nakatani held that Japanese intervention was a progressive moral force reviving Asia and ushering humanity toward a new plane of development. In presenting Japan as the champion of Indian nationalism based on a shared cultural/spiritual heritage against Britain's political, cultural, and economic exploitation, Nakatani's pamphlet reveals how Japanese Pan-Asianists sought to mobilize Indian opinion in favor of Japan's economic expansion in the region. This was also the case with Japanese business leaders involved in the textile manufacturing industry. In May 1932, Gotō Miyake, the director of the Kanegafuchi Spinning Company, gave a speech that was published in the monthly report of the Japan Cotton Spinners' Association. In it, he expressed Japan's commitment to the cause of Indian independence as beneficial to continued trade between India and Japan:

The Indian independence question is one to which sympathy must be extended....That India should have independence as her main principle excite [*sic*] our heart-felt sympathy and meets with our approval. Japanese cotton goods are much cheaper than English cotton goods, and the supply of them is of great advantage to the people of India. I think it is good for the people of India to accept what is profitable to them. The desire for independence from Britain is a very good thing, but to attain that independence, the strength of the Indian people will certainly have to be relied upon and at the same time sympathizers throughout the world will have to be sought. Especially deep is the sympathy of the Far East whether viewed from the standpoint of history, of religion, or of its relationship with India. To secure Japan as an ally will, I think, be a good step in the direction of attaining independence. Therefore, to exclude Japanese cotton goods from India will not be a good factor, and I think it would be for the good of both Japan and India for the latter to become intimate with the former and draw closer together in her economic relations.¹

Pan-Asianist organizations in Japan took a more radical approach in expressing their opposition toward British imperialism in India. On January 18, 1932, a group of fifteen youths affiliated with an organization called Kenkokukai 建国会 (National founding society) demonstrated in front of the British Embassy in Tokyo and distributed pamphlets calling for the release of Gandhi from prison. Established in 1926, Kenkokukai was an ultra-nationalist and anticommunist organization that had anarchist roots before veering toward the far right. Under the leadership of Akao Bin, Kenkokukai had been involved in the bombing of the Soviet embassy in the spring of 1928. The pamphlets

¹ National Archives (NA), FO 262/1814. Text of a speech made by Mr. Gotō Miyake, a director of the Kanegafuchi Spinning Co. included in Letter from the British Consulate-General, Osaka, June 30, 1932, p. 2.

distributed by Kenkokukai activists reveal how Pan-Asianists mobilized India to legitimize Japan as the champion of the colonized world in contrast to the immorality of the British Empire:

The whole Japanese nation, which loves justice irrespective of nationality, feels a sense of pain and indignation at the tragic arrest and incarceration, on account of his having incurred the displeasure of Great Britain, of the patriot Mahatma Gandhi, who has been going through endless suffering in his effort to rescue his 300 million compatriots from the fetters of tyrannical England. At a time like the present when justice is by way of being trampled upon [*sic*] and humanitarianism disregarded, we the people of Japan at least demand of the British Government that they should immediately set at liberty the champion of justice Mahatma Gandhi.²

Religious leaders in Japan also expressed sympathy toward the Indian nationalist cause. On January 26, 1936, the Higashi Gokuraku temple in Kobe held a memorial service jointly organized by the Kobe Buddhist Association and the Kansai Indo-Japanese Association to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Indian National Congress and to remember those who lost their lives in the struggle for Indian independence. Kobayashi Yoshio, the head priest of the temple, presided over the event, which was attended by sixty Shinto and Buddhist priests along with two hundred Indians and Japanese, including Anand Mohan Sahay. Rash Behari Bose and Tōyama Mitsuru of Gen'yōsha sent speeches to be read on their behalf. In his concluding address, Sahay stated, "We shall grudge no effort and spare no sacrifice to achieve the mission bequeathed to us by those who have gone before. We hope for the support and understanding of Japan, the leading Power among the Eastern Peoples."³

Many Japanese Buddhist scholars and intellectuals who commented on Indian affairs reflected on the disconnect between the India they knew through studying Buddhist and Indian philosophy, and the reality of contemporary India under British colonial subjugation. This is especially evident in the case of Yamagami Sōgen, who studied early Indian Buddhism at Calcutta University and, upon returning to Japan in 1912, took a professorship at Komazawa University run by the Sōtō Zen sect in Saitama, Tokyo. In an article published in the December 1932 issue of the *Journal of the Indo-Japanese Association*, Yamagami takes the reader through the history of early Buddhism to identify what caused the teachings of Buddha to decline in the region of its birth. Yamagami praised Buddhist kings such as Ashoka, who extended royal patronage to the Buddhist community, as wise and enlightened leaders whose support of Buddha's

² NA, FO 262/1814. Translation of pamphlet "Release Gandhi immediately" included in Letter from the British Embassy, Tokyo, January 25, 1932, p. 5.

³ India Office Records (IOR), L/P&J/12/480, Memorandum: Indian Activities in Kobe, British Consulate, Kobe, January 30, 1936.

teachings directly contributed to the power, prosperity, and prestige of their reigns. Conversely, Yamagami observes that when Buddhism was not honored, there was chaos and disorder (Yamagami 1932, 68–70). Ultimately, he identifies two factors that sounded the death knell of Buddhism in India—corruption and schisms within the Buddhist leadership, and the prevalence of incorrect teaching coupled with the importation of foreign ideas—thus weakening India, making it vulnerable in the wake of Muslim invasions, and leading to centuries of foreign rule and spiritual degradation (1932, 71–72).

Yamagami wrote his outline on the decline of Buddhism in India with Japan in mind. The concluding paragraphs of his article use the example of India as a warning to Japan about the perils of abandoning its ancient spiritual civilization and importing foreign ideologies: Should Japan forsake Buddhist teachings, tolerate corrupt leadership, and allow disunity and confusion to spread via foreign influences, it would share the same fate as India and be taken advantage of by predatory powers. Thus, Yamagami held that Japan must guard its Buddhist heritage and assigned Japan a moral obligation to play the leading role in the spiritual rejuvenation of Asia, including India (Yamagami 1932, 73). Yamagami's writings reveal how Pan-Asianist ideologues produced knowledge to compare the Indian past with Japan's present to press for domestic reform within Japan based on adherence to cultural/spiritual authenticity. Simultaneously, Pan-Asianists used such comparisons to justify imperial intervention and expansion abroad under the ostensible goal of reviving and safeguarding the cultural/spiritual authenticity of Asia and its political sovereignty against the West. However, the exclusivist claims of the discourse of civilization as articulated in Japanese Pan-Asianist ideology, namely, that national and transnational community within Asia could only be framed in culturalist terms with Japan as its lodestar, attempted to foreclose and suppress the possibility that Japanese, Indians, and other groups within Asia could form alternative alliances outside a culturalist Pan-Asian vision.

During the 1930s, a number of Japanese Pan-Asianist and Buddhist activists traveled to India to establish links with the Indian nationalist movement. Many received a cold reception from members of the INC, who were largely supportive of the Guomindang and hostile toward Japanese expansionism in China. However, Japanese activists met with greater success among members of the Hindu right. In 1933, Fujii Gyōshō (also known as Fujii Nichidatsu) and Ohkitsu Tadao, two Buddhist monks of the Nichiren sect, traveled to India to establish links with Indian nationalists. While Fujii was staying at Gandhi's ashram in Wardha, Maharashtra, he sent Ohkitsu to attend the annual meeting of the Hindu Mahasabha in Ajmer, Rajasthan. The Mahasabha warmly received Ohkitsu, who gave a speech before the assembly calling for a Hindu-Buddhist alliance. In response, the Mahasabha pledged to deepen links with Japanese Pan-Asianist and Buddhist organizations.⁴

⁴ IOR, L/P&J/12/480, Letter from the Director of Public Information, Home Department, Government of India to H. MacGregor Esq., Information Officer, India Office, London, April 9, 1934, p. 11.

Such alliance-building illustrates how fascist projects mobilized each other to ascribe legitimacy to their respective visions. It is well documented that under the leadership of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, the ideological hue of the Hindu Mahasabha became closely affiliated with the far right. Savarkar and others within the Mahasabha openly admired Nazi Germany, and Savarkar's elucidation of Hindutva, which would later become the guiding ideology of Hindu nationalist politics in both colonial and postcolonial India, drew inspiration from fascist paramilitarism and racial theories. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, or "National Volunteer Organization," which achieved notoriety for its role in the assassination of Gandhi and its violence against religious minorities such as Muslims and Christians, began as a radical offshoot of the Mahasabha and was modeled on the "Blackshirts" of Mussolini's Italy and the Nazi *Sturmabteilung*. According to Manjapra, Savarkar took the initiative in building close ties with the international Nazi movement. The Nazis themselves hoped to use the Mahasabha to establish a Hindu-Buddhist alliance between India, China, and Japan (Manjapra 2014, 208).

Savarkar and Bose were in correspondence with each other regarding the establishment of a branch of the Hindu Mahasabha in Japan (McQuade 2016, 658). This growing connection between Japan and the Hindu right was observed with alarm by certain members of the Indian diaspora. During the Asia-Pacific War, Krishnalal Shridharani, an Indian journalist living in the United States and a strong critic of both Japanese imperialism and Hindu nationalism, wrote about the significance of links that developed between the two during the interwar years:

Japan's Pan-Buddhism drive has had a special appeal for the militant India-for-the-Hindus group in India. They appear to have found in Japan an answer to their rivals, the communalist Mohammedans. The extra-territorial allegiance of sundry Muslim leaders has always perturbed those Hindus who desire to maintain the territorial integrity of India when the British have withdrawn....While the Mohammedans were looking across [the] Hindu Kush towards Afghanistan and Arabia, these Hindu leaders were apparently directing their attention across the Indo-Chinese border to Japan. The militant wing of the Hindu Mahasabha wanted to create a Pan-Buddhist bloc as a bulwark against Pan-Islamism. They dreamed of a Pan-Buddhist bloc, composed of Japan, India, China, Siam, Cambodia, Java, Burma, Tibet, and Ceylon, dominating Asia by overwhelming the Islamic bloc of Afghanistan, Persia, Egypt, Arabia, Iraq, and Turkey....Militant Hindu leaders appeared to be ready to pay the price for this dream by granting Asiatic hegemony to Japan. (Shridharani 1942, 99–100)

Shridharani further noted that, from the perspective of Japan, "Pan-Buddhism propaganda was nothing more than a tactical move. The whole Asiatic policy of Japan

has been motivated by her desire to disturb the established balance of power in the East and to take advantage of the Asia-for-Asiatics feeling for its own expansionist aims” (1942, 100). Crucially, Shridharani regarded Japan’s simultaneous backing of Pan-Islamist movements as a “paradox inexplicable except in light of Japan’s opportunism” (1942, 100).

Opportunism might be one way to explain the paradox of Japanese Pan-Asianists simultaneously supporting both Pan-Islamism and a Pan-Buddhist/Hindu movement. It is also important to understand this paradox by considering how Japanese intellectuals understood and interpreted pan-nationalist movements, as well as the political trends that developed in India during the 1930s. Much has been written about how Japanese Pan-Asianists, such as Ōkawa Shūmei, sought to build connections and support anticolonial nationalist movements in the Islamic world (Aydin 2007; Esenbel 2011). However, the situation was more complicated regarding the question of India’s Muslims. In *Fukkō Ajia no shomondai* 復興亜細亜の諸問題 (Various issues of resurgent Asia), Ōkawa interpreted the tensions between the INC and the All-India Muslim League as part of Britain’s long-standing policy of divide and rule (Ōkawa 1922, 101). Ōkawa celebrated the trend toward Hindu-Muslim unity that culminated in the signing of the Lucknow Pact in 1916 during the First World War and Gandhi’s efforts to cultivate a national consciousness to resist British rule that transcended religious and class lines, as is evident in Gandhi’s support for the Khilafat movement calling for the preservation of the Ottoman Empire and its caliph. For Ōkawa, Gandhi was the leading figure who would revive India and free it from British exploitation, and he even elevated Gandhi and Lenin as the two personalities who encapsulated the essence of the anti-Western revolutionary projects sweeping across Asia (Ōkawa 1922, 102, 111–113; Aydin 2007, 148, 243).

However, in the year Ōkawa published *Fukkō Ajia no shomondai*, Hindu-Muslim unity was unraveling. Religious violence escalated throughout the 1920s in the wake of Gandhi’s decision to call off the noncooperation movement, and the abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate. By 1930, the two-nation theory, which called for greater autonomy for India’s Muslims, was being advocated by prominent members of the All-India Muslim League (hereafter, Muslim League), such as Muhammad Iqbal and Muhammad Ali Jinnah. Distrust between the INC and the Muslim League became more pronounced when Gandhi rejected the terms presented by the British Indian government in the Communal Award of 1932, which guaranteed separate representation for Muslims and Dalits. For many Muslims in India, the INC’s claims of upholding secularism and pluralism were betrayed by their concessions to the interests of upper-caste Hindus (Devji 2013, 2).

Ōkawa does not appear to have commented on these developments. Yet Ōkawa and Nakatani’s insistence on Gandhi representing the national will of the anticolonial movement in India was a problematic stance to take, considering the rift that developed in the 1930s between the Muslim League and the INC. Nakatani argued in the Pan-Asianist journal *Dai Ajishugi* 大亜細亜主義 (Greater Asianism) that the failure of the Pan-Islamic movement during and immediately following the First World War was due

to its premature development before individual Muslim countries could consolidate themselves into nation-states (Nakatani 1933, 58–59). According to Nakatani, this was what made the Ottoman Empire’s appeals to Pan-Islamist sentiment pliable toward German imperial interests during the war (Nakatani 1933, 58). Nakatani argued for a “Neo Pan-Islamism” that would be centered on the newly emerging nation-states within the Islamic world, such as Turkey, Persia, Afghanistan, Syria, and Morocco (Nakatani 1933, 59). But if consolidating a nation-state was the critical prerequisite for progressing toward this new incarnation of Pan-Islamism, where did Indian Muslims belong? Nakatani does not address their position in his article. Nor does he address the position of other minorities in the Middle East in his proposed outline for a Pan-Islamic community. If the implication was that minorities had to submit themselves to a discourse of harmony welded together by the national will of a single individual or party, then the paradox identified by Shridharani speaks as well to the limitations that Duara identified in appealing to the nation-state model as the foundational building block of civilizational community (Duara 2001, 107–108).

Indian Nationalists and the Japanese Empire

Much of the knowledge that Japanese Pan-Asianists like Ōkawa Shūmei received about Indian affairs came from and were filtered by their connections with Indian nationalists like Rash Behari Bose. However, activists such as Bose were also producing knowledge about the Japanese Empire in ways that affirmed their own nationalist projects. Japan and Manchukuo represented for Bose possible models of development for India that were not dependent on what he saw as Western ideologies. In critiquing socialist and communist trends within the Indian nationalist movement, Bose argued that even if India achieved political independence from the British and adopted communism, it would remain under the cultural hegemony of the West through the British Communist Party and the Soviet Union. Thus, Bose suggested that the way forward for India was to follow the examples of Japan and Manchukuo, two nations that pursued national development based on and without compromising their cultural/spiritual integrity (Bose 1938, 214–217).

Likewise, D. S. Deshpande, an Indian journalist at the *Asahi Shinbun* involved in Pan-Asianist circles during the 1930s, published a comparative study between Hinduism and Shintoism in the November and December 1936 issues of *Cultural Nippon*, arguing that India and Japan shared the same spiritual heritage. Subsequently, Deshpande argued that Hinduism could and should function as the guiding spiritual ideology that would unite state and society and inform India’s national development, just as Shintoism did for Japan. Deshpande drew attention to what he identified as the collectivist and nationalistic attributes latent in both ideologies and wrote that Hinduism “is nothing but a mere Indian commentary on the concept of nationalism, just as Shinto is the Japanese concept of the same and, therefore, the two are nothing but two analogous quantities in the field of the philosophy of religion.” Deshpande even

concluded that the universalizing imperative expressed in the slogan *hakkō ichiu* 八紘一宇 (“Eight cords, one roof” or “All the world under one roof”) also found expression in the *Bhagavad Gita* and other Hindu scriptures as *wasudhaiwa kutumbakam*, translating both sayings as “world-familyism” (Deshpande 1936, 342–343).

However, infusing Japan with moral superiority in this manner, in contrast to the materialistic immorality of Western and Soviet imperialism, led many Indian nationalists who were sympathetic toward Japan to gloss over and defend the violence of Japanese imperialism. In an article in *Dai Ajiashugi*, Bose asserted that China’s anti-Japanese policy after the establishment of Manchukuo was harming the cause of Asian unity and strengthening the efforts of Western powers to keep China divided and subjugated. Bose implored China’s politicians to abandon anti-Japanese policies and stressed the urgency of an alliance between Japan, China, and India for the revival of an independent Asia. However, he also warned that, so long as China’s politicians pursued an anti-Japanese policy, Japan would be forced to take a hard-line stance against China and act in self-defense to pave the way for an Asia free from the oppression of the West. Bose acknowledged that he might be misinterpreted by many Chinese as being pro-Japanese but deflected this criticism by saying that he was part of a “pro-Asian independence faction” (*shin Aija dokuritsuha* 親亜細亞獨立派) (Bose 1934, 61). He was convinced that Japan’s violence was guided by the morality of its cause and therefore legitimate, given the threats that Asia faced from the Western powers. Moreover, Bose did not question how “independence” would be interpreted, and by whom, within Japan’s community of nation-states. Consequently, he ignored the fact that China’s plight was due to the exploitation inherent in both Japanese and Euro-American imperialism.

Anand Mohan Sahay shared Bose’s viewpoint. Also a frequent contributor to *Dai Ajiashugi*, Sahay argued that the establishment of Manchukuo presented evidence of Japan’s sincerity toward Asian nationalist movements. Sahay made the comparison that whereas Indian aspirations for self-determination had been met with suppression and delaying tactics by the British authorities, Japan readily gave Manchukuo its independence. Sahay emphasized that India’s future lay with greater cooperation with Japan, and he implored that Japan should actively support the Indian independence movement. Moreover, he attributed the rapid progress and development of Manchukuo to the overall harmonious relationship between Japan and the various ethnicities that made up Manchukuo, bound as they were by a common Asian civilization (Sahay 1935, 30–31).

Sahay’s conviction that Japan was a “moral” empire in contrast to the British was particularly evident in a pamphlet that he wrote during the Second Italo-Ethiopian War (1935–1937), *Coloured Ethiopia* (1936). Curiously, although Sahay begins with a condemnation of Italian aggression against Ethiopia and British indifference toward its plight, he uses the crisis in Ethiopia to defend Japanese economic imperialism in Africa and India. According to Sahay, the root cause of Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia was to forcibly restore the market for Italian manufacturers in Ethiopia and prevent Japan from gaining an economic foothold in the region:

It is reported that recently the market for Italian goods in Ethiopia has greatly dwindled. Italian goods are not much in demand. As in other markets, cheap and superior Japanese goods have ousted other manufactures including that of Italy from Ethiopian markets. Italian manufacturers are consequently greatly embarrassed and have been pressing Mussolini's government very hard to act in such a way as to restore [the] Ethiopian market for them. According to a clause in [the] Italo-Ethiopian agreement, Ethiopians are expected to buy goods from Italy[,] to employ Italian experts in various branches of activities, both civil and military, and so on. For whatever reason it may be, Ethiopians seem to not be in love with the Italians to such an extent as to buy costly Italian products in preference to superior and less costly Japanese goods and to sacrifice efficiency that can be available in the experts from other countries, by employing Italian experts. (Sahay 1936, 5)

Sahay used the claim that Ethiopians preferred Japanese goods because of their superior quality and low cost to make a point about what he believed to be the benevolence of Japan in promoting the development and well-being of the colonized world. Turning to Britain's economic exploitation of Ethiopia and throughout Africa and Asia, Sahay noted that Italian aggression and British deception and political maneuvering were different shades of what he defined as Western imperialism, in contrast to what he viewed as a morally guided Orient (Sahay 1936, 6–10). Sahay contrasts the immorality of British economic exploitation in India with the uplifting effects of Japanese commerce:

Although it is India's individual loss, that India's money is robbed by the British, if we take it collectively, the Orient as a whole is being impoverished to that extent. Even in commerce, if India buys Japanese manufactures, the money remains in the Orient, while in the case of British goods it goes to a country which has been using it for suppressing and enslaving ourselves. In no other country, where masses are so poor, one can find such an expensive and extravagant administration. The British officials in India live the life of princes and draw allowances which even a real prince would envy. (Sahay 1936, 15)

Responding to claims that Italy was doing in Ethiopia the same as what Japan did in Manchuria, Sahay appealed to the morality of Japan to establish a fundamental difference regarding its empire in comparison with the empires of the West:

I do not believe that Japan has actually subjugated Manchuria, although it may apparently look like Japan's dominion. Japan has created its

influence and has in return co-operated with Manchukuo in establishing peace and in making the land prosperous and progressive. A visit to different parts of Manchukuo by one who had known the country before 1931 will convince that the situation in that land is much better than in other parts of China, whatever the reason may be. I may be exposed to contradiction; but I feel that the policy of Japan in Manchukuo is that of “Live and let live,” the principle of co-existence. This code of morality is unknown to the Western imperialists. Mussolini has made it clear through his various declarations that his object is to subjugate the Ethiopians. We have numerous examples of the effect of Western colonial policy on the subject races. In no case can we find a nation under subjugation of the West to be peaceful and prosperous. (Sahay 1936, 18)

According to Sahay, the values that guided Japan and the Orient in general included the “principle of co-existence” evident in Japan’s relationship with Manchukuo. In claiming that Japan’s empire was based on a morality that was absent in the empires of Britain and Italy, Sahay also emphasized that Japan needed to uphold its mission to champion the cause of Ethiopia and the colonized world. Although there was significant support for Ethiopia’s cause among the Japanese public, policymakers in Japan were simultaneously pursuing closer relations with Italy to cultivate an alliance against British imperial hegemony (Clarke 2011; Hofmann 2015). Sahay observed this trend and predicted that an alliance with Italy might be a necessary compromise with what he identified as the “lesser evil” of Italian fascism in comparison with the “greater evil” of British imperialism. Yet, in Sahay’s view, the legitimacy of such an alliance rested on Japan’s commitment to liberating Asia from the tyranny of the West (Sahay 1936, 19).

While Sahay was writing *Coloured Ethiopia*, Aiyappan-Pillai Madhavan Nair’s activities in Manchukuo and Mongolia were also indicative of the intersections between Indian anti-British activism and support for the Japanese Empire. Born in the princely state of Travancore, Nair participated in local boycott movements against British goods, which greatly concerned his family. Worried for his safety, Nair’s brother arranged for him to study engineering at Kyoto Imperial University (Nair 1982, 38–39). Upon his arrival in Kyoto in March 1928, Nair quickly became involved in Pan-Asianist politics, meeting with Rash Behari Bose, Tōyama Mitsuru, and Uchida Ryōhei, the leader of a well-known Pan-Asianist society called Kokuryūkai 黒龍会 (Black dragon society). Nair also participated in the anti-Lytton Commission protests organized by Ōkawa Shūmei in the Kansai region between 1931 and 1933 (Nair 1982, 87). As part of his nationalist activism, Nair developed connections within the Japanese military and lectured on Indian affairs at various military and civilian gatherings (1982, 76). The most notable of Nair’s military connections was Lieutenant General Itagaki Seishirō, then Chief of Intelligence for the Kwantung Army and one of the architects behind the 1931 Manchurian Incident (1982, 96).

During a trip with Mahendra Pratap to Manchukuo and Mongolia in 1933, Nair noticed that Tibetan and Mongolian herders were selling wool to Chinese Muslim caravans. These caravans then traveled to the British concession in Tianjin, which transported the wool to the large textile mills of Manchester and Lancashire (Nair 1982, 106–107). Concerned that Britain was unjustly profiting from this wool trade at the expense of China, Nair received approval from Itagaki to conduct an intelligence operation to hinder British economic interests in the region. With support from the Kwantung Army and several large textile firms in Kansai, Nair, Lieutenant Nagashima of the Army Reserve Corps, and Colonel Kuo of the Manchukuo Imperial Army established a purchase mission in the summer of 1937 at Baotou in Inner Mongolia (see figure 1). Nair, Nagashima, and Kuo convinced Chinese Muslim traders to sell their wool at the purchasing station in Baotou instead of Tianjin, ensuring that the profits of the trade would not go to Britain (1982, 129–135). Nair was also involved in opening negotiations between Itagaki and Prince Demchugdongrub (also known as Prince De or Prince Teh), the Mongol leader who would later head the Japanese client-state of Mengjiang (1982, 110). During another visit to Manchukuo in 1938, Nair helped train Korean exiles from Shanghai and the Soviet Union living in Manchukuo in espionage techniques to create a pro-Japanese Korean client-state in the Soviet Far East. Leading the group was Lee Kai-Ten, a Korean nationalist who, like Nair, had a close relationship with Uchida Ryōhei and the Kokuryūkai. Lee and his agents crossed into the Soviet Union in 1940, but soon lost contact with Nair and their Kwantung Army handlers. After 1945, Nair found out that some of the exiles he had trained occupied prominent positions in the North Korean government. Lee's fate, however, remains unknown. (1982, 140–146).

Nair regarded his activities in northeast Asia as a continuation of his anti-British activities in India. He connected his participation in burning Lancashire textiles in Tranvancore in 1925 with his activities in hindering the British wool trade in Inner Mongolia, all the while invoking the example of Gandhi's movement to boycott British goods (Nair 1982, 108). However, Nair's position toward the Japanese Empire was in many ways like that of Sahay. As an ardent supporter of Japan's involvement in Manchuria, Nair believed that Japan was a benevolent force in Asia. Comparing British rule in India with Japan's role in Manchukuo, he observed that "British policy was to manipulate any industrial growth of India in such a way that it would remain perpetually dependent on its Colonial base. Japan's effort was to enable Manchukuo's industry to stand on its own legs" (Nair 1982, 97). In contrast to the strategy of divide and rule that Britain followed in India, Nair was also impressed by the emphasis on racial harmony in Manchukuo and the relief programs implemented for underprivileged groups (1982, 97).



Figure 1. Aiyappan-Pillai Madhavan Nair (*center*) with Lieutenant Nagashima (*left*) and an unnamed news reporter in Baotou, 1937. *Source*: Nair (1982, n.p.).

Despite Sahay and Nair's valid criticisms of British imperialism, by creating a moral hierarchy in which Japan occupied an exalted place above other empires, both men were prone to ignoring or glossing over the violence and exploitation behind Japanese imperialism and arguing that British rule over India was far more exploitative, brutal, and less accommodating toward self-determination. Sahay and Nair's favorable views of the Japanese Empire, as well as their claims that they were nationalists working for the cause of India above all else, blunted their occasional criticisms of Japan's imperial violence and deflected attention from their involvement in furthering Japanese interests. When Nair found out that the purchasing mission he established in Baotou had collapsed as a result of the heavy-handed measures adopted by Japanese military commanders in the region to buy the wool of the Chinese Muslim caravans at lower rates, he blamed arrogant officers in the army and stopped short of criticizing the nature of Japanese imperialism itself (Nair 1982, 137–139). Likewise, when Sahay visited Manchukuo and northern China in 1938 on a tour sponsored by Ōkawa and the South Manchurian Railway Company (*Mantetsu*), he portrayed the Japanese administrators and officials he met, such as Yuzawa Michio, as enlightened and sincere. Yuzawa, the

Japanese political adviser to the Provisional Government of the Republic of China, worked closely with the North China Area Army and was a close friend of Sahay's, supporting his activities as governor of Hyōgo Prefecture. Sahay concluded from his travels that Japanese rule would ultimately be beneficial for China and Asia despite initial challenges and resistance (Sahay 2009, 245–259).

If part of Sahay's purpose in writing *Coloured Ethiopia* was to convince an Indian readership that Japan's economic penetration of India was a positive trend, many Indian merchants and business owners strongly disagreed. Vishnu R. Karandikar, writing to the *Times of India* on February 20, 1934, lamented how Japanese trading firms in India were undercutting local textile distributors:

I have seen the keen competition which the Japanese are putting up in the Indian market and the way they have been able to undersell Indian goods to an extent which makes it impossible for any Indian concern to compete with them. I had to consider this question because at every place I visited I came across Japanese hawkers. I have visited Ujjain, Gwalior, Delhi, Lucknow, Allahabad, Patna, Benares, Calcutta, Jagannath, Puri, Ajmer, Indore, and several places along the Narmada river. This list will give the readers an idea of the vast field covered by Japanese hawkers....They have come well equipped with the knowledge of our means of communications, even up to the footpaths that traverse the jungles in Central India. (Karandikar 1934, 16)

Karandikar goes on to describe how the Japanese hawkers he observed in the villages of north and central India were fluent in Hindi and often appealed to the common bond that Indians and Japanese shared as fellow "Asiatics" to dissuade Indian customers from boycotting their products (1934, 16). However, such appeals failed to convince many mill owners and workers that the dumping of Japanese textile goods on the Indian market was ultimately for India's benefit. A month later, forty men representing two thousand workers of the Sassoon and Alliance Silk Mill Company and the Chhoi Silk Mill Company in Bombay approached the managing director of the former mill to press the government of India to impose heavier tariffs on Japanese silk manufactures. Due to the intense competition from Japanese textile firms, the two mills were forced to close in November 1933, leaving the millworkers unemployed for five months. Cotton millworkers were the most affected, and thousands were left without work as cotton mills across the city shut down ("Plight of the Bombay Silk Industry" 1934, 14).

As early as the 1920s, Indian industrialists and labor activists joined together in an uneasy alliance against cheap Japanese manufactures, which they viewed as a threat to local business and the interests of Indian workers. Communist leaders and trade unionists such as Shripad Amrit Dange and Narayan Malhar Joshi criticized the dumping practices of Japanese textile companies in India, such as the Tōyō Podar Cotton Mill, a

prominent example of Japanese investment in the Bombay textile industry. Dange and Joshi simultaneously expressed solidarity with Japanese workers and condemned the tactics employed by the police in Japan to suppress unions and socialist groups (Roy 2008, 40–41). Even Gandhi, much to the disappointment of politicians such as Takaoka Daisuke, who worked for the Indo-Japanese Commercial Museum in Calcutta and hoped to gain Gandhi's support, regarded accepting even a single yard of cheap Japanese cloth as a "poison to us, for it means the starvation of the poor people of India" (Desai 1938, 404).

Yet, for Indian nationalists such as Bose, Sahay, and Nair, their engagement in a politics of comparison that favored Japan against Britain as the more "moral" of the two empires ignored the reality of Japan's economic exploitation of India and Asia, as well as the critical position that the INC took toward Japanese imperialism. Bose dismissed reports condemning Japan in the Indian press as anti-Japanese propaganda that hindered the Indian public from appreciating Japan's intentions in Asia and needed to be corrected (Bose 1934, 60). By 1936, Sahay's views had so diverged from the INC that Nehru wrote to Sahay requesting him to renounce his affiliation with the party (Bhargava 1986, 8–11).

The Indian Merchant Diaspora in Japan and Manchukuo

Indian merchant networks were central to the Japanese textile trade in South Asia and beyond. The history of the Indian merchant community in Japan stretches back to the beginning of the Meiji period (1868–1912). As early as 1872, Parsi and Muslim merchant firms such as J. B. Bhesania and M. Essabhoy & Sons established a presence in Yokohama. They were followed a decade later by Hindu Sindhi firms such as Wassiamull Assomull & Co (Shimizu 2005, 27–28). These early firms were involved in importing jute, indigo, and spices from India to Japan as well as distributing Japanese silk manufactures in India, China, Southeast Asia, and as far as British East and West Africa (Markovits 2000, 123–124). In 1893, the large business conglomerates of Tata and Nippon Yūsen Kaisha established a shipping link connecting the cotton mills of Bombay and Kobe. Cotton soon replaced silk as the main commodity fueling the trade relationship between Japan and India. In the decade between 1921 and 1932, India supplied 50 percent of Japan's requirements for raw cotton (Iqbal 1990, 25). By 1937, Japan had captured 37 percent of the global cotton textile market, a feat due in no small part to the various Indian merchant networks on which Japan's business houses began to increasingly rely after Chinese merchants started to withdraw their support for Japan during the 1920s and 1930s (Beckert 2014, 408).

The community of Indian merchants and students in Japan never numbered more than a few hundred. The 1930 national census recorded 445 Indians living in Japan and

concentrated mainly in Kobe and Yokohama.⁵ Whereas the Yokohama Indian community mostly included Hindu Sindhi merchants, owing to their long-standing involvement in Yokohama's silk trade, Kobe's Indian community was much more diverse, with Muslim, Hindu, Parsi, and Jain merchant firms all involved in the Kansai region's cotton trade (Markovits 2000, 146–147). The size of the Indian merchant community, however, was disproportionate to its importance to the economies of Kobe and Yokohama. When the Great Kanto Earthquake devastated Yokohama in September 1923, many Indian merchants decided to relocate to Kobe (see figure 2). Not wanting to let Kobe benefit from their presence, the Silk Industry Association of Japan attempted to convince the Indian merchants to return to Yokohama by providing incentives and assistance to reconstruct their businesses. Despite a generous combined total of ¥700,000 in aid secured in 1924 and 1925 from the Yokohama city government and the Ministry of Finance, these attempts to bring Indian merchants back to Yokohama met with limited success. Of the sixty Indian merchant firms based in Yokohama, only fourteen returned to the city. By this time, rayon had begun to emerge in Japan as a cheaper alternative to silk, and Kobe's proximity to the major silk- and rayon-producing centers of Fukui, Gifu, and Kanazawa provided another incentive for Indian merchants leaving Yokohama to restart their businesses in Kobe (Shimizu 2005, 30–32).



Figure 2. India Water Tower memorial built in 1939 by the Indian Merchants Association of Yokohama to recognize the Indians who lost their lives in the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923. *Source:* Author's collection.

⁵ Naikaku tōkeikyoku 内閣統計局 [Cabinet statistics bureau], *Shōwa go-nen kokuseichōsa hōkoku* 昭和 5 年国勢調査報告 [1930 national census report], Tokyo, 1930, p. 135.

Indian merchant communities also moved within the Japanese Empire and benefited from Japanese colonial institutions. The Bank of Taiwan, for example, was a major source of financial support for the activities of Indian merchant firms based in Japan that helped extend their networks in China and Southeast Asia, particularly the Dutch East Indies (Markovits 2000, 141–142). There is little data on the possible presence and activities of Indian merchant communities in Korea, despite the importance of cotton cultivation on the Korean peninsula for the Japanese textile industry. The Korean Cotton Corporation, established in Osaka in 1906, encouraged Korean farmers to grow cotton using American seeds that would then be purchased by Japanese agents. This plan aimed to reduce Japan's dependency on cotton imports from India, which on the eve of the annexation of Korea in 1910 amounted to 62 percent of Japan's imported cotton (Beckert 2014, 341).

However, as Japan tightened its control over Korea, most of the cotton produced in Korea was shipped to textile mills in Kansai. Thus, despite its high productivity in cotton cultivation, Korea under colonial rule was actually a net importer of cotton, which came mainly from the surplus of Indian cotton in Japan and was inferior in quality to the American variety (Eckert 1991, 138–140). It is unclear whether Indian merchants played a role in this exchange. During the 1930s, Japanese economic planners hoped to significantly expand cotton production in Manchukuo. Nair noted that Manchukuo was the residence of about fifteen to twenty Indian families, primarily those of Sindhi merchants associated with firms such as Bhoolchand and Dolathram, as well as Tamil merchants involved in the jewelry trade (Nair 1982, 97–98). When Sahay visited Manchukuo, he also noticed Pathan Muslim watchmen from the frontiers of what is now Afghanistan and Pakistan guarding restaurants and entertainment establishments even in remote towns bordering the Soviet Union (Sahay 2009, 247). Manchukuo was used as a base of operations for Indian merchants involved in the textile trade in northern China.

Despite the importance of Indian merchant networks in selling Japanese textile manufactures in Asia and beyond during the 1930s, the Japanese government and the large textile firms of Kobe, Osaka, and Yokohama made it clear that they needed to hold the reins. They began to exercise tighter control over the activities of Indian merchants. Japanese Pan-Asianist and Indian nationalist appeals to Asiatic solidarity and the morality behind Japan's cause were undermined by the racial discrimination experienced by members of the Indian community in Japan. Indian merchants were indignant at the exclusionary measures taken by Japanese trade associations in Kobe and Yokohama that favored Japanese merchants over their Indian counterparts. The British consulate in Kobe and the government of India also received numerous complaints of racism against Indian merchants and clerks.⁶

⁶ National Archives of India (NAI), Persecution of Indians in Japan-A Brief, Government of India, Commerce Department. Letter no. 24-C (1)/37 to the Indian Government Trade Commissioner in Japan, R. R. Saksena, August 19, 1937. File no. 219-X.

Although such Indian activists as Bose and Sahay received considerable support from several Indian merchants in Japan, others were more critical of their politics. In his autobiography, Sahay admitted that when he first came to Japan in 1923 and began his nationalist activism, he found it difficult to attract Indians to his cause. Part of this difficulty was due to the concern of coming under the surveillance of British intelligence (Sahay 2009, 183). However, some Indians simply did not agree with Sahay's views on Indian nationalism and the Japanese Empire, even though they may have been sympathetic to the cause of independence. In May 1931, Nand Lal Kapur approached the British Consulate in Kobe to ask for assistance in publishing his critiques of Sahay's articles in the *Osaka Mainichi Shinbun*. Kapur, who worked at the Canada Manufacture's Insurance Company in Kobe and was a former soldier in the British Indian Army, favored greater self-government in India, yet disagreed with Sahay's platform for Indian independence. However, when Kapur approached the editor of the newspaper with an article, it was rejected. The editor suggested to Kapur that if he wanted his article to be published, he should write in favor of Indian independence along the lines of Sahay.

Another case involved an Indian Muslim journalist named Abdul Qadir Niaz. Arriving in Kobe in June 1935, Niaz was a correspondent for the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* in Calcutta and the *Tribune* in Lahore. Despite his involvement in socialist movements in India, Niaz maintained a good relationship with Sahay and Bose, and he frequently discussed politics with Japanese acquaintances interested in Indian affairs.⁷ However, shortly after the Second Sino-Japanese War broke out in 1937, the Kobe police arrested Niaz on the suspicion that he was a British spy. He was detained under harsh conditions at the Fukiai police station from October 28 to November 4. Niaz's interrogators alleged that he had contributed anti-Japanese articles to the Indian press, which suggested, among other things, that the Japanese military was concealing the true extent of its casualties in China. Although Niaz did not hide his criticism of British policies in the Middle East, particularly Palestine, his views on British rule in India did not satisfy his interrogators. In the end, Niaz was released based on insufficient evidence that he was engaged in espionage for Britain. Before releasing him, however, the police required Niaz to provide the names of the Japanese acquaintances with whom he had discussed the war. This action indicated a concern on the part of the Kobe police that Niaz may have been in contact with suspected socialists and communists in Japan. Niaz's relationship with Sahay appears to have soured by this point, since it was Sahay who had brought Niaz to the attention of the Kobe police and assured them that he could produce Niaz again if the police found it necessary.⁸ Although Sahay used his considerable influence with the Japanese press and police to push for his specific

⁷ NAI, Draft Telegram to the Ambassador, Tokyo, November 15, 1937. File no. 493-X. In addition to working as a journalist, Niaz was a representative of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in Kobe, an Islamic revivalist movement founded by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad in Ludhiana, Punjab, in 1889.

⁸ NAI, Letter to the British Embassy, Tokyo from the British Consul in Kobe, A. R. Ovens, November 29, 1937, pp. 1–2. File no. 493-X.

nationalist agenda, his views were not universally accepted within the Indian community in Japan.⁹

Much has been written about the establishment of mosques in Kobe and Tokyo as indicative of Japanese appeals to Pan-Islamism to build alliances with the Muslim world (Aydin 2007; Esenbel 2011). However, as the case of Niaz shows, members of the Indian Muslim community in Kobe had to navigate between the activities of the British and Japanese empires as well as those of Bose and Sahay. Mian Abdul Aziz, an Indian Muslim from Peshawar and former president of the Muslim League, was invited to give the inaugural address at the opening ceremony of the Kobe Mosque in October 1935. In his speech, Aziz expressed his hope that the inauguration would promote mutual understanding and solidarity between Japan and the Islamic world. However, Aziz envisioned that this solidarity would be based on Japan's adoption of Islam, rather than a common struggle against Western imperialism. Instead of Japan's spiritual and moral mission to liberate the colonized world serving as the basis of a future utopian order, Aziz held that "the difference between Koba and Kobe will naturally vanish as soon as the Rising Moon and the Rising Sun co-operate in shedding light over the whole Universe under the auspices of the common Faith, in the Unity of The Almighty Master who created this world out of nothing."¹⁰

Maulvi Aftabuddin Ahmed, an Indian Muslim leader from Lahore and the imam of the Woking Mosque in London, was invited to give the first sermon at the Kobe Mosque. His sermon expressed similar sentiments as Aziz. In his sermon, Ahmed was more concerned with advocating for the wide promotion and acceptance of the Islamic faith in Japan than any declarations of anti-imperial solidarity. Interestingly, whereas Hindu nationalists such as Bose and Deshpande and conservative secularists such as Sahay were convinced of the superiority of Japan's fusion of modernity and spiritual morality over the empires of the West, Ahmed's sermon asserted that Japan was spiritually lacking. The sermon expressed both admiration and criticism of what Ahmed saw as Japan's materialistic society, imploring that Japan's spiritual deficiency could be resolved only if Japan embraced Islam. However, unlike Rabindranath Tagore, who famously condemned Japanese imperialism as an acceptance of Western materialism and a betrayal of Asia's spiritual heritage, Ahmed did not go this far in his address.¹¹

⁹ NA, FO 262/1778, Letter from the British Consul-General, Kobe to His Majesty's Chargé d'Affaires, British Embassy, Tokyo, May 6, 1931.

¹⁰ NA, FO 262/1913, Presidential Address at the Opening Ceremony of the Kobe Mosque, October 11, 1935, p. 7. Here, Aziz is referring to the Quba Mosque in Medina, which is reputed to be the oldest mosque in the world.

¹¹ NA, FO 262/1913, The Kobe Muslim Mosque: A Souvenir Booklet Issued in Commemoration of the Opening Ceremony of the Kobe Muslim Mosque, October 1935, p. 7. It is unclear whether Ahmed gave this sermon personally in Kobe or sent it to be read in his name. Although the sermon text strongly hints that Ahmed was in Kobe, his name does not appear in the schedule of the opening ceremony.

A few years later, when the Kobe Mosque Committee, under the leadership of a man named Mr. Rehman, sought to organize a gathering in protest of British policy against Arab Muslims in Palestine in October 1938, the committee explicitly barred Bose, Sahay, and their Japanese supporters from attending. In response to being excluded, Sahay organized his own meeting to protest British policy in Palestine a few days later. Indian Muslim leaders in Kobe such as Rehman were deeply suspicious of the efforts of Bose and Sahay to bring the mosque's activism on Asian and Middle Eastern affairs into closer alignment with their Pan-Asianist views and support for Japan.¹² In the same month as the Kobe Mosque's Palestine protest, Bose announced at the inaugural meeting of the Society of Indian Students in Kansai that he would raise funds to build a Hindu temple in Kobe.¹³ Bose hoped that the proposed temple would serve the needs of Hindus throughout Japan; however, some within the Indian community suspected that Bose's plan was fueled in large part by resentment stemming from the recent election of Abul Kasem Fazlul Huq as Chief Minister in Bengal in India's first provincial elections in 1937.¹⁴ Huq was not only a leading member of the Muslim League, but he was instrumental in presenting the Lahore Resolution calling for the creation of Pakistan as an independent nation-state for India's Muslims. Bose envisioned that the proposed Hindu temple would assert, in a muscular nationalist sense, the Hindu presence on the religious landscape of Kobe, specifically against the Kobe Mosque.

Bose gained considerable financial backing for the temple from within the Indian merchant and student communities as well as his Japanese supporters. Eventually, however, due to protests both from Sahay who felt that Bose was encroaching on his territory and from members of the Indian community in Kobe, the plan to construct the temple was abandoned on the grounds that it would incite religious tension. Bose used the money he received to inaugurate a new Hindu temple—the Bharat Mandir (India temple)—which British intelligence described as being housed in “unimpressive premises.”¹⁵ The temple's ceremonies reflected the close ties between Hindu nationalism and Japanese Pan-Asian ideals, as evident in a ceremony held in the temple on January 22, 1939 to honor and pray for the spirits of Japanese soldiers who died during the Marco Polo Bridge Incident of 1937.¹⁶ For many Indian Muslims in Japan, Japanese appeals to Pan-Islamist sentiment therefore seemed disingenuous when Pan-Asianists in Japan were simultaneously supporting activists affiliated with the Hindu Mahasabha and the INC, especially at a time when both organizations were hostile to the Muslim League.

¹² NA, FO 262/1969, Letter from the British Consulate-General, Osaka to His Excellency the Right Honorable Sir Robert Craigie, Tokyo, October 18, 1938, pp. 10–11.

¹³ NA, FO 262/1969, Letter from the British Consulate-General, Osaka to His Excellency the Right Honorable Sir Robert Craigie, Tokyo, October 18, 1938, p. 9.

¹⁴ NA, FO 262/1969, Minutes, September 12, 1938.

¹⁵ IOR, L/P&J/12/480, Letter from the British Consulate, Kobe, January 30, 1939, p. 241.

¹⁶ IOR, L/P&J/12/480, Letter from the British Consulate, Kobe, January 30, 1939, pp. 239–241.

Members of the Indian community in Japan were wary about Bose and Sahay for not only their politics but also their use of their connections with the Japanese police to harass and, in a few cases, deport Indian merchants who were unwilling to support their nationalist activism or otherwise wronged them personally. Take, for example, the case of Sahay and an Indian merchant named Attar Sain Jain. When Jain arrived in Japan in 1926, he was employed by the Tokyo School of Foreign Languages as a Hindi instructor. In the spring of 1929, Jain moved to Kobe where he took up a position at the Osaka School of Foreign Languages and opened a grocery business. He even donated ten cases of Indian curry powder to Kwantung Army soldiers stationed in Manchukuo.¹⁷ Jain ran the grocery with his Japanese mistress, Okamoto Hisako.

When Jain's Indian wife arrived in Japan along with their three children in the spring of 1935 and found out about her husband's relationship with Okamoto, she was livid. She sought assistance from the Sannomiya police, who suggested that Sahay act as a mediator to settle the dispute. This was not the first time that Jain encountered Sahay. At some point, Sahay had borrowed money from Jain, but when Jain pressed for repayment of the loan, Sahay was recalcitrant. Now that Jain was caught up in a marital dispute, Sahay saw this as a chance to settle an old score. Using his connections with the Japanese police and press, Sahay organized a smear campaign against Jain, portraying him as a womanizing and unscrupulous businessman who frequently defaulted on his rent. By September 1936, Jain, his wife, and their children were arrested and deported.¹⁸ Sahay also orchestrated the deportation of Nand Lal Kapur, the Indian resident of Kobe who tried to publish his critiques of Sahay's nationalist views in the *Osaka Mainichi Shinbun* in 1931, by convincing the Japanese police that Kapur earned his living through "habitual malpractice" and was secretly engaged in espionage as a British spy.¹⁹ Reduced to destitution, Kapur was forced to leave behind his pregnant Japanese wife.²⁰

According to Jain, there were numerous instances of Indians being harassed by the Japanese police. However, many Indians were unwilling to report these cases, partly because they had little confidence that the British Indian government would stand up for them and partly because they feared that the Japanese police would suspect them further if they approached the British consulate.²¹ In a tragic case of violence directed against Indian merchants, the Japanese consular police arrested Ibrahim Abdullah Hussain, an Indian Muslim merchant dealing in precious stones from Bombay, on June 17, 1936 in Hsinking, Manchukuo, along with his Sudanese wife and son under suspicion

¹⁷ NAI, Statement of A. S. Jain, March 15, 1937, p. 7. File no. 219-X.

¹⁸ NAI, Statement of A. S. Jain, March 15, 1937, pp. 1–7. File no. 219-X.

¹⁹ NAI, Letter from A. R. Ovens, British Consulate, Kobe to J. L. Dodds, Esquire, Chargé d'Affaires ad Interim, May 22, 1937, p. 2. File no. 219-X.

²⁰ NAI, Letter from A. S. Jain to K. P. S. Menon, Esquire, Additional Deputy Secretary (Foreign), Foreign and Political Department, Government of India, April 1, 1937, p. 1. File no. 219-X.

²¹ NAI, Letter from A. S. Jain to K. P. S. Menon, Esquire, Additional Deputy Secretary (Foreign), Foreign and Political Department, Government of India, April 1, 1937, p. 1. File no. 219-X.

of defrauding three Japanese shops. The family was brutally tortured in custody. When British consular authorities in Mukden intervened, they confirmed that the family had indeed been tortured and expressed disbelief when Japanese police officials claimed that Hussain had received his injuries in a motor accident in Harbin.²² Although the British consul-general in Mukden concluded that the family's reasons for being in Manchukuo may have been unsatisfactory, it was clear that they were forced to sign statements in Japanese, which none of the family members understood, and admit to their guilt under duress.²³ This case reveals that the celebration of Manchukuo as a model of racial harmony and the way forward for Asia by both Japanese Pan-Asianists and some Indian nationalists rang false against the reality of Japanese imperial violence. A 1940 report from the research division of the Manchukuo Central Bank reveals that Japanese attempts to appeal to Indian merchants in East Asia were largely a failure. Indian sympathies remained firmly with the Chinese and the Guomindang. The report suggested that unless Japanese policy underwent a significant change toward Indian merchants, a combined Chinese and Indian boycott of Japanese goods would be devastating to Japanese economic interests in the region (Manshūkoku chūō ginkō chōsaka 1940, 12–15).

Conclusion

The attempts of Pan-Asianist and Buddhist leaders to promote solidarity between Japan and the Indian nationalist movement during the 1930s were part of an effort to create a new political economic order in Asia that would challenge both the liberal internationalism of the League of Nations and the socialist internationalism of the Comintern. These efforts would later come to form in official discourse during the Asia-Pacific War as the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere, Japan's empire of client states that began with the creation of Manchukuo in February 1932. Japanese commentators utilized readings and misreadings of the Indian past and its independence struggle, filtered through a politics of comparison with the British Empire, to advocate for domestic reform so that Japan would be spiritually and morally equipped to assume political and economic leadership over Asia and the colonized world. Indian nationalists sympathetic to Japan also used the politics of comparison to read and misread the Japanese Empire as morally superior to the British Empire in elucidating their own visions for a postcolonial India and, more broadly, Asia, as well as critiquing socialist trends within the mainstream nationalist movement in India.

However, such misreadings and comparisons proved to be disastrous for Japanese Pan-Asianists as well as their Indian supporters. The insistence of Japanese Pan-Asianist and Buddhist commentators in locating "authentic" Indian nationalism in movements that they interpreted as being dependent on Hindu spirituality, such as the noncooperation movement of Gandhi and the militant nationalism of the Hindu

²² NA, FO 262/1942, Telegram from Mukden to Tokyo, June 27, 1936.

²³ NA, FO 262/1942, Telegram from Mukden to Tokyo, July 6, 1936.

Mahasabha, undermined their appeals to Indian Muslims through Pan-Islamism at a time when Hindu-Muslim tensions were at an all-time high. The willingness of Indian nationalists such as Bose, Sahay, and Nair to ignore or gloss over the reality of Japanese imperialism in Asia and its own economic exploitation of India isolated them from the mainstream Indian nationalist movement, which moved sharply toward the left during the 1930s and adopted a critical stance toward fascism. Members of the Indian community in Japan, whose networks and wealth Japanese Pan-Asianists and Indian nationalists hoped to mobilize, found themselves in a conflicted and tenuous position. As much as Indian merchants and other members of the diaspora benefited from the support and mobility provided by the Japanese Empire, they were also its victims, as their place within the political economy envisioned by Japan's Pan-Asian ideologues and Indian activists depended on their acquiescence to a particular articulation of national and transnational community.

Through an analysis of the encounters between Japanese Pan-Asianists, Indian nationalists, and the Indian diaspora, the discourse of civilization and comparisons—whether invoked by the colonizer or the colonized—can be used to ascribe moral legitimacy to specific imperial and national projects. When such comparisons are drawn, they can produce entanglements and deflections that obscure the violence committed in the name of empire and nation. This is not to suggest that all comparisons produce problematic entanglements, for some comparisons can give birth to genuine and constructive solidarities. However, in highlighting the case of the interactions between Japan and the Indian diaspora during the 1930s, this article draws attention to the limitations of civilizational discourse invoked through the lens of authenticity and the nation-state, as well as the importance of being conscious of the politics behind comparison and aware of the perils that comparisons often entail.

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