

March 1905

Ahmed Rıza, 'Japanese Lessons'

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Summary:

Written by Young Turk political activist, Ottoman exile in Europe, avowed Positivist, and eventually first President of the Ottoman Chamber of Deputies after the 1908 Young Turk Revolution, Ahmed Rıza (b.1858-d.1930).the author argues that Japan had acquired Great Power status and actually surpassed European civilization by modernizing while preserving their cultural essence, which he called "yellow civilization," as a twist on the West's racist fears of "Yellow Peril" in the early 20th century.

Original Language:

French

Contents:

Translation - English

Increasingly the analogy is becoming closer between our august sovereign [Ottoman Sultan] Abdulhamid and H.M. Nicholas II. Here and there, both reign with irreducible autocracy, whimsically with and morbid nervousness, corruption, spy networks, serfdom and massacres. And now, just like the powerful master of Yildiz Kiosk, the emperor of all Russia is a prisoner in his palace of Tzarskoye-Selo, "a place," says a dispatch, "which the Russian potentate supposes to be the best guarded and the least exposed to revolutionary enterprises". It seems to us that the surest refuge where a monarch can arbitrate is still the love of his people.

And thus while the despots of Turkey and Russia tremble and hide, fearing the anger that they themselves have ignited in the hearts of their subjects, it has come to pass in the Far East among this admirable people that, like the Turks, have been treated and who we dare to continue to treat, as barbarians? The continuation of the war in Manchuria, as a major Parisian paper rightly observes, has neither stopped nor slowed down action, long since inaugurated by the Japanese, who tend to develop their material and moral influence throughout the Far East, "to make themselves the guardians, otherwise the masters, of the yellow world." If the occupation of Korea is emphasized, it is in the form of a prodigious extension of the railway. In China, the activity of the Japanese is no less: the good offices of the viceroys are now and had already been acquired for Japanese infiltration. how would it be otherwise? Everywhere they have founded schools, established commercial centers, sent military instructors. "Everywhere they introduce their ideas, their products and their representatives."

And that is how one has to see this vast intellectual and moral organization, so that putting aside the theory of "yellow peril" as a brutal form of military threat against Europe, one is led to consider "as a *fait accompli* that every day the hand that Japan has placed on the whole of Oriental Asia becomes more worthy of attention."

Behold the work of these barbarians to whom the Tzar was charged with blocking the road and giving the stirrup leathers in the name of Civilization which was believed to be threatened by their Attila-like "hordes"! The Tzar stops these people and gives them a lesson in humanity, progress and political ideals, they whose civilization, accomplished in half a century, has become superior to European civilization, which has fallen into decay, they who do not have to reproach massacres, who do not have to gag any mouths out of which a liberal word came, who do not have to exile or suppress patriots, who do not have to dynamite any human beings under the pretext that their skin was dark and that it constituted a happy pastime!

Indeed, for our part, it is this "yellow" civilization that we wish to see universalized because it is the fruit of a principled, faithful and highly intelligent organization, because it is based on a conception of human destinies that excludes holy icons and false sentimentalities, because, above all, it is the daughter of a constitutional government which Ottoman patriots - all their efforts striving for this goal - will conclude by understanding the absolute necessity for the poor Turkish people that Hamidian terrorism be plunged into the mire.