# Orienting India : Interwar Internationalism in an Asian Inflection, 1917-1937

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# Introduction

> In the name of religion the missionaries, and in the name of science the scholars, have been rousing the worst passions of Oriental humanity. They dare do this because they know that Young Asia is unarmed and disarmed. And they can afford to exasperate eight hundred million human beings as long as these peoples remain unrepresented by independent armies, independent navies and independent air-fleets … Only then, in the event of Asia recovering its natural rights from the temporary aggressors and illegitimate usurpers, will sanity prevail in the deliberations of the great Peace-Council convened by the Parliament of Man. The futurists of Young Asia are looking forward to that spiritual re-birth of the world.[1]

With these words, polyglot internationalist and sociologist Benoy Kumar Sarkar (1887–1949) opened his *Futurism of Young Asia*, published in Berlin in 1922. Rejecting both imperialism and cultural nationalism, he appealed to all of Asia to modernize, quickly and completely, in order to play a role in the world that befitted its size and population. He was not alone in his appeal to supranational affinities. In the years between the two world wars, Indian artists, intellectuals, activists, feminists, religious revivalists, trade unionists, and others framed their thoughts and actions on an Asian scale. Their projects for Asian unification ranged from specific causes, such as drawing international attention to the dismal working conditions in Asian industries, to political unification in an Asian federation. This regionalist enthusiasm occurred across the political and religious spectrum. Under the banner of Asia, they wrote texts, started movements, professed solidarity, built networks, crossed borders, and organized conferences.

In order to appeal to Asia, one first had to establish that Asia was a relatively homogenous space, or at least shared certain characteristics. What the Asianist projects analysed in this dissertation had in common, therefore, was the projection onto Asia of collective identities and historical trajectories. These ranged from commonalities in culture or religion to the shared experience of European domination. They also shared visions of a decolonized Asia, even if those visions themselves differed. In this sense, this dissertation follows Manu Goswami's assertion that the temporal referent of internationalist movements must always be the future.[2] Second, if Asia were to be more than an idea or ideal-type, one had to establish what it encompassed geographically. The size and shape of the resulting 'Asia' in these projects differed. It could not be located on a map. Its territory was fluid and its capitals were many.

This dissertation examines different expressions of Asianism that originated on the Indian subcontinent, and asks how they functioned as appeals to translocal solidarities. In doing so, it is emphatically not looking for any specific 'Asia'. Rather, it takes the fluidity of the geographical concept of 'Asia' as a given, seeking to avoid John Steadman's lamentation

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[1] B. Kumar Sarkar, *The Futurism of Young Asia and Other Essays on the Relations Between the East and the West* (Berlin: Julius Springer, 1922), 21–2.

[2] M. Goswami, 'Imaginary Futures and Colonial Internationalisms', *American Historical Review* 117:5 (2012): 1461–85: 1461.

that what plagues 'specialized discussions of Asia is the tyranny of the word and the concept. Because one talks about "Asia", because one has an idea of "Asia", one assumes that it must actually exist. … Many a writer on Asia treats the Orient as though it were a single entity (which it is not) and thus postulates a unity that has no real existence outside his own imagination'.[3] We are dealing here not with geographies but with metageographies: spatial structures that ordered knowledge, justified movements, and visualized the potential shape and role of Asia in a decolonized world. 'Asia' was thus a blank canvas on which meaning could be projected if and when a particular agenda so required.[4]

In dissecting the ways in which the blank canvas of Asia was given meaning, the following questions are kept in mind. Firstly, what were the concrete motives of Indian Asianists to appropriate the concept of Asianism? Why did they chose a continental, rather than a national or local scale? This dissertation seeks to add an 'Asian scale' to the historiography of a period which has been predominantly viewed from local, communal and national perspectives. This is in keeping with larger historiographical trends. A focus on the mobility of people, goods and ideas is no longer the exclusive domain of global or world history, or even of regional approaches such as Atlantic or Indian Ocean history. David Armitage recently phrased this in strong terms: 'if you are not doing an explicitly transnational, international or global project, you now have to explain *why* you are not. There is now sufficient evidence from a sufficiently wide range of historiographies that these transnational connections have been determinative, influential and shaping throughout recorded human history, for about as long as we have known about it. The hegemony of national historiography is over.'[5]

Secondly, this dissertation seeks to illuminate the concrete results of these Indian Asianisms, and how they manifested themselves politically and culturally. In doing so, two interrelated questions are asked, keeping the same question of scale in mind: how were Indian Asianists connected to the larger international networks and organizations of the interwar period? And how were their views and activities shaped by local, communal, and nationalist agendas? Situating Indian Asianists in the mobile environment of interwar internationalism, as well as examining the impact of their activities on their respective local environments, serves to clarify the relative weight of Asianist activities in the interwar years. Were these networks self-referential, the purview of a cosmopolitan elite? Or were they part of a wider Asianist enthusiasm that included the public sphere as well as less elite groups? In other words, was 'Asia' an integral part of anti-colonial activism in interwar South Asia?

Recent scholarship demonstrates an increased interest in the versatile meanings that regions have acquired throughout history in order to lay claim to or contest political, cultural, and economic hegemonies.[6] 'Asia' as a region has arguably seen the most marked surge in

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[3] J. Steadman, *The Myth of Asia* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969), 14–5.

[4] For this point, see also M. Frey and N. Spakowski, 'Asianismen seit dem 19. Jahrhundert. 'Asien' als Gegenstand nationaler und transnationaler Diskurse und Pratiken', *Comparativ* 18:6 (2008): 7–15; M. E. Lewis and K. E. Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), ix.

[5] M. van Ittersum and J. Jacobs, 'Are We All Global Historians Now?', *Itinerario* 36:2 (2012): 7-28: 16.

[6] See P. Duara, 'The Discourse of Civilization and Pan-Asianism', *Journal of World History* 12:1 (2001): 99–130.

studies of regionalist movements. However, many of these studies focus on Asianist initiatives driven by national governments and intended ultimately to serve national interests. The available source corpus is partly responsible: the archive is often nationally structured.[7] If Asianism is stripped of its statist connotations and understood as a set of initiatives inherently meant to cross borders and subvert empires, one is left with actors and projects that do not conform to neat national or linguistic categories, which makes them both harder to track down in the archive and harder to study within the current disciplinary divisions of academia. The multilingual and shifting borderlands where much of this interaction takes place are more often departmental afterthoughts than coveted academic territories.[8] Central Asia is a case in point. Ongoing initiatives seek to overcome these obstacles. One example is the two-volume collection edited by Sven Saaler and Christopher Szpilman, which brings together Asianist texts from various geographical locations and thus greatly facilitates access to multilingual sources on Asian regionalism.[9]

So far, this interest in Asianism has largely bypassed South Asia. South Asian historiography itself may have begun to transcend its formerly narrow nationalist frames, but the study of Asianism as a concept is still largely the purview of East Asian regionalism.[10] If Indian actors are represented at all in the historiography of Asianism, they figure merely as recipients of ideologies that originated in places far removed from the subcontinent. They are presented as (self-)exiled revolutionaries, intellectuals, and academics whose ideas are derivative of Asianist concepts circulating at various moments in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the Ottoman Empire or Japan.[11] A notable exception to this rule is Rabindranath Tagore, whose Asianism might be said to constitute a field of study unto itself.[12] However even in the case of Tagore, his links with Japan, however important, are often emphasized to the point of erasing his many other Asianist engagements.[13]

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[7] See, in particular, Ann Stoler's point of the archive as 'the supreme technology of the late nineteenth century imperial state.' A. L. Stoler, 'Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance', *Archival Science* 2 (2002): 87–109: 87.

[8] See W. van Schendel, 'Geographies of Knowing, Geographies of Ignorance: Jumping Scale in Southeast Asia', in P. Kratoska, R. Raben, and H. Schulte Nordholt, *Locating Southeast Asia: Geographies of Knowledge and Politics of Space* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2005), 275–307: 279.

[9] S. Saaler and C. W. A. Szpilman, *Pan-Asianism: A Documentary History,* 2 vols. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2011).

[10] See, among others, E. Hotta, *Pan-Asianism and Japan's War 1931–1945* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); P. Katzenstein and T. Shiraishi, *Network Power: Japan and Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); P. Duus, 'Imperialism without Colonies: The Vision of a Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere', *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 7:1 (1996): 54–72.

[11] See, in particular, Ç. Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

[12] For example R. Barucha, *Another Asia: Rabindranath Tagore and Okakura Tenshin* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006); M. Frost, '"That Great Ocean of Idealism": Calcutta, the Tagore Circle and the Idea of Asia, 1900–1920', S. Moorthy and A. Jamal, *Indian Ocean Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 251–79; C. Stolte and H. Fischer-Tiné, 'Imagining Asia in India: Nationalism and Internationalism, ca. 1905–1940', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 54:1 (2012): 65–92.

[13] See, for instance, Tagore on Western Asia: *Journey to Persia and Iraq* (Santiniketan: Viśva Bharati, 1994).

The pull of the Khilafat, the impact of the Russo-Japanese War, and the charisma of modernized Japan have been well documented.[14] But this narrative of 'derivative Asianism' is reductive in two ways when applied to South Asia. It leaves no room for Asianist visions that originated on the subcontinent itself and were driven by locally-shaped agendas, and it overlooks visions of Asia that did not focus either on East Asia or on a Muslim world that was conflated with Asia. In fact, viewed from South Asia especially, Asian regionalism could take on many shapes indeed, depending on one's perspective. With the option of looking towards the Arabian Sea, the wider Indian Ocean, the caravan routes into Central Asia, the Soviet Union, or elsewhere, myriad political, cultural, or religious identities could determine a regionalist agenda. And in the first half of the twentieth century, Indian thinkers, revolutionaries, and activists explored all of these.

*(Pan)Asianism*

This dissertation thus seeks to move away from an approach to (Pan)Asianism as the exclusive domain of East Asia, in which Indian actors are only accorded a role as recipients or transmitters of ideas, rather than as their creators. However, the term (Pan)Asianism is still used, which is therefore in need of some qualification. Firstly, its use here does not follow Louis Snyder's concept of Pan-movements as macro-nationalisms. Indian (Pan)Asianism was more than 'nationalism writ large'.[15] Some Indian Asianists were self-consciously antinationalist and sought to establish a single Asian state; others saw Asian solidarity as a means to achieve independence for Asian nations (including India); and still others wanted to abolish states altogether. Second, Indian (Pan)Asianism was not necessarily anti-Western.[16] As is shown in the third chapter, Asianists' relationship to the West, and to Europe in particular, were much more complex. Although all projects in this dissertation were anti-imperialist, there were several who sought to work with continental Europe against the British, or who saw in fascist Italy and the Weimar Republic potential models for fast, state-driven modernization and industrialization. Moreover, although the West was an important point of reference for most Asianisms, especially those with strong anti-imperialist overtones, many Asianist projects challenged traditional orders in Asia as much as outside ones.[17] Third, and more generally, (Pan)Asianism is taken here to be more than an 'anti-movement. While different expressions of Asianism could be anti-Western, anti-imperialist, anti-European, antimodernist, or even anti-Islamic, 'Asia' was more than a term of exclusion. Many Asianists ascribed positive characteristics to Asia, believing strongly in the existence of an Asian 'identity' or an Asian 'culture'. Fourth, Pan-Asianism and Asianism should be distinguished from one another. Though mindful of Saaler and Szpilman's point that variations of the term—including the term 'Greater Asianism' as it is often translated from Chinese or

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[14] M. Hasan and M. Pernau, *Regionalizing Pan-Islamism: Documents on the Khilafat Movement* (Delhi: Manohar, 2005); M. N. Qureshi, *Pan-Islam in British-Indian Politics: A Study of the Khilafat Movement 1918–1924* (Leiden: Brill, 1999).

[15] L. L. Snyder, *Macro-Nationalisms: A History of the Pan-Movements* (Westport: Greenwood, 1984), introduction.

[16] Aydin, 'The Politics of Anti-Westernism'; T. Miyagi, 'Postwar Japan and Asianism', *Asia-Pacific Review* 13:2 (2006): 1–17.

[17] Saaler and Szpilman, 'Introduction', 9.

Japanese—overlap to the point of being essentially synonymous, I have chosen here to use Pan-Asianism for those projects that sought the political unification of Asia, and Asianism for the rest.[18] A few inconsistencies do occur, but these are due to terms employed by the historical actors themselves.

Finally, the choice to qualify the Indian regionalist projects of the interwar years as 'Asianist' is due to the historical use of the term. 'Region' as a concept is rarely encountered in the interwar period, and while this does not necessarily exclude it as a useful term of analysis, the subject of this thesis is specifically the invocation of 'Asia' by Indian men and women from every possible religious and political affiliation. The fact that they all appealed to 'Asia' presupposes a strong belief in the translocal solidarity, and shared sense of belonging, that Asia represented. It presupposes that being 'Asian' meant something to them, and that their audience would immediately understand what it was. This is what struck me when I first started reading newspapers and pamphlets from this period. It is also what inspired the writing of this dissertation. I have chosen to emphasize this by using the term itself in my analysis, and not a substitute. It is in no way intended to refer to or invoke the pejorative British term 'Pan-Asiatic', which, like its cousin 'Pan-Islamic', suggested primarily subversion, deviation, and threat.

*Internationalism*
Despite the use of the term (Pan)Asianism, this dissertation thus seeks to move away from the framing of Indian Asianist projects as a subordinate part of the history of (East Asian) Pan-Asianism. Instead, it views these projects as part of the larger internationalist enthusiasm prevailing in the interwar period. In this way, it seeks to connect with recent histories of what has come to be termed 'interwar internationalism'.[19] This interwar internationalist moment is currently the favoured unit of analysis to describe the emergence and proliferation, in multiple centres around the world, of analogous practices of association and claim making. This period has also been dubbed the 'internationalist moment', and the period in which 'global civil society' took hold.[20] This proliferation of internationalist projects, associations, and societies built on ideas and movements that originated in the period 1880–1914, but intensified during the years between the wars.[21] The First World War, the Bolshevik Revolution, and the

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[18] Idem, 38.

[19] Mrinalini Sinha was arguably the first to apply the term to South Asia. See M. Sinha, 'Suffragism and Internationalism: The Enfranchisement of British and Indian Women under an Imperial State', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 36:4 (1999): 461–84: 478. See also M. Ramnath, *The Haj to Utopia: How the Ghadar Movement Charted Global Radicalism and Attempted to Overthrow the British Empire* (Santa Cruz: University of California Press, 2011). For a more general and somewhat Eurocentric overview, see D. Laqua, ed., *Internationalism Reconfigured: Transnational Ideas and Movements Between the World Wars* (London: IB Taurus, 2011). For an overview less of the internationalist ideas circulating in the interwar period and more on the international connectedness of the period, see H. Liebau et al., *The World in World Wars: Experiences, Perceptions and Perspectives from Africa and Asia (Leiden: Brill, 2010).*

[20] For the internationalist moment, see the essays in A. Raza, F. Roy, and B. Zachariah, *The Internationalist Moment* (New Delhi: Sage, 2013). For the global civil society approach, see A. Arsan, S. L. Lewis and A. Richard, 'The Roots of Global Civil Society and the Interwar Moment', *Journal of Global History* 7:2 (2012): 157–65.

[21] For these earlier engagements, see H. Fischer-Tiné, 'Indian Nationalism and the 'World Forces': Transnational and Diasporic Dimensions of the Indian Freedom Movement on the Eve of the First World War', *Journal of*

establishment of the League of Nations all gave more or less impetus to the internationalist projects of the interwar years that makes this period qualitatively different from the preceding decades. When this period ends is another question entirely. The interwar period in Asia ended before the traditional marker of 1939, with the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war in July 1937, and the internationalist enthusiasm of the interwar years had important afterlives during and after the Second World War, albeit in a changed global environment. This is further problematized in chapter 5.

In placing the ideas, activities and projects of Indian Asianists in the context of interwar internationalism, this project seeks to contribute to the increasingly voluminous scholarship on the internationalist moment by locating a series of internationalist expressions in this period in less likely physical and mental locales. Indian Asianists operated in conversation with, but often removed from, the European metropolitan centres of activism and the halls of the League of Nations at Geneva. This point is elaborated further in chapter 1. The question, then, remains what terms are best used to describe the intensification of traffic between South Asia and the wider world in this period. 'International' is not a favoured term for its lingering associations with the Communist International. 'Transnational', 'global', and 'cosmopolitan' are currently the most popular alternatives. However, 'transnational history' marks the crossing of borders as exceptional, thereby reifying those borders, which is the very thing it claims not to do. And while 'global history' may remedy that particular issue, that term invokes a totality that research projects subsumed under that category rarely realize. It might be more constructive if that term continued to refer to the study of historical globalization and was not employed as a clever way to avoid the use of terms that presuppose the domain of the national. 'Cosmopolitan', even though the versatility of this term has been convincingly demonstrated by Kris Manjapra and Sugata Bose, is usually associated with the projects of highly mobile intellectual elites.[22] Though these do figure prominently in the following pages, the Asianist moment in South Asia was wider than that. In fact, international ideologies, texts, and places became part of the everyday in this period. New York, Berlin, and Paris as well as Tashkent, Shanghai, and Moscow were included in the worldviews of people not necessarily involved in elite discussions or cosmopolitan solidarities. The resulting international networks and routes were travelled as much by scholar-activists such as Benoy Kumar Sarkar as by lascar-revolutionaries such as Amir Haider Khan, who are treated in chapters 3 and 4, respectively. This dissertation uses the term 'international' to refer to these projects, as this is the term privileged by the historical actors involved, who projected no statist connotations onto it. This arguably becomes more problematic during decolonization: non-alignment and its associated groups and movements in the Cold War era must be understood in the context of states acting within the more rigid rules of a post-war 'international' domain—which by that time had come to refer to 'inter-state'. What follows here, however, is a history of Asianism in the interwar period: a part of the internationalist moment in a regionalist inflection.

*Global History* 2L3 (2007): 325–44; Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia*; F. Roy, H. Liebau, and R. Ahuja, *When the War Began, We Heard of Several Kings: South Asian Prisoners in World War I Germany* (New Delhi: Social Science Press, 2010).

[22] K. Manjapra and S. Bose, *Cosmopolitan Thought Zones: South Asia and the Global Circulation of Ideas* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

*Sources*

This dissertation relies on a combination of sources. These can be grouped in, roughly, three categories: archives produced by the state; published and unpublished documents produced by groups; and published articles, private papers, and oral histories produced by individuals. The first category consists primarily of intelligence files produced by regional branches of the British Indian police. It is no surprise that the government of India considered most Asianist projects and ideas subversive and grouped them in much the same category as 'Bolshevik' or 'Pan-Islamic' threats. This means that the groups and individuals involved found themselves under surveillance. It also means that the historian encounters them in categories produced by the colonial state, which projected characteristics (and adjectives) onto them that, in hindsight, are exaggerations in some cases, underestimations in others, and wrong in most.[23] The resources and manpower devoted to the surveillance of these often very small groups speaks to the threat that international affinities were perceived to pose. Richard Popplewell's estimation of many Indian revolutionaries as 'breathtakingly incompetent' is condescending and unkind, but the importance that colonial police attached to the eclectic ideas of often solitary figures does take the present-day historian by surprise.[24]

Other than the 'big fish', reports about whom made it into reports to London and, ultimately, the India Office Records currently held in the British Library, the bulk of information on Indian Asianism is located in reports of day-to-day surveillance found in archives produced by police departments in cities with large number of activists, such as the trade unions of Bombay and the academic associations in Calcutta; or by those in major ports, where harbour police monitored the traffic of texts and people. These documents often include not only the voice of the colonial administration, but also that of the 'subversive' him- or herself, through intercepted letters and telegrams, reports on meetings by informants, or interviews with returning travellers. Of course, all of these voices passed through the filter of the administration that recorded them. Correspondence was selected for censorship or interception; informants report on (or sometimes adapt to) what their paymaster seeks to learn; and interviews with returning travellers are shaped by the fact that the mere act of travelling was suspect. A traveller was always at risk of coming into contact with dangerous ideas and people in the spaces he or she transited. Of course, this perception of danger was danger to the colonial state rather than to the individual in question.[25] A critical engagement with this 'prose of counter-insurgency' is called for, but if these sources are read carefully and supplemented where possible with other materials, they can be informative nevertheless.[26]

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[23] For an elaboration of the categories produced by the colonial archive, see A. L. Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), esp. 35–9.

[24] R. Popplewell, *Intelligence and Imperial Defence: British Intelligence and the Defence of the Indian Empire, 1904–1924* (London: Routledge, 1995), 4.

[25] A. Raza and B. Zachariah, 'To Take Arms Across a Sea of Trouble': The Lascar System, Politics and Agency in the 1920s, *Itinerario* 36:3 (2012): 19–38: 21.

[26] For an elaboration of this point, see R. Guha, 'The Prose of Counter-Insurgency', in N. B. Dirks et al., *Culture, Power, History: A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 336–71.

The second category consists of pamphlets, minutes, telegrams, and periodicals produced by groups that identified themselves as a movement, organization, association, or society with common aims. Examples considered in the following pages are the League against Imperialism, the Asiatic Labour Congress, the Greater India Society, and the Oriental Students' Organization. A certain institutional bias is unavoidable here: individuals involved in these groups might simultaneously be involved in other groups, or they might subscribe to some of a group's tenets, but not all. However, the activities of these groups, and especially the ways in which they presented themselves to the outside world and were perceived in turn, reveals much about the currency of their ideas in their respective locations and contexts.

The last category consists of published works, private papers, and oral histories produced by individuals. For obvious reasons, the first of these was overwhelmingly produced by educated and mobile elites. They had the means to travel, and their texts stood a greater chance of being published outside the British Empire. In addition, many vocal Asianists were branded 'subversive' and had warrants issued against them. Several chose to reside abroad permanently, or moved around regularly, and published in the places in which they stayed. Regardless of the circumstances, their publications are more accessible than their often scattered private writings. However, for a large number of Asianists, India remained their permanent home, and the writings of many are now kept in the National Archives of India or the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library. Others were either deemed ineligible for such a distinction or did not write much at all. However, as is argued in the fourth chapter, there are ways of receiving a glimpse of their stories nevertheless. Finally, the Nehru Memorial Museum has, over the course of the last thirty-odd years, collected the memoires of those involved in various movements in the decades leading up to independence. Drawn from a wide political spectrum, these included not only nationalists but also former *muhajirs*, Indian National Army officials, communists, feminists, and many others. Though an invaluable source, these accounts do suffer from all the problems associated with such histories: recorded several decades after the fact, they reveal as much about the anti-imperialist narratives constructed by the postcolonial state and its historians as about the events they recall.[27] Read with care, however, they reveal important networks of affinity that are difficult to find in other sources: the intersections and overlaps of international Asianist movements through friendships, relationships, meetings, and networks, often over great distances and sometimes in unexpected places.

*Structure*

This dissertation seeks to demonstrate that Indian (Pan)Asianism was a particular expression of interwar internationalism: it had specific concerns but existed in conversation with other internationalisms. In this way, this dissertation adds an 'Asian scale' to local, communal, and national narratives of interwar South Asia, and examines the interactions between these different levels. By looking at the activities of Indian Asianists on both local and international scales, it also assesses the relative weight and importance of the Asianist momentum of the interwar years. Finally, and most importantly, this dissertation seeks to demonstrate that this

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[27] On the instability of perceptions of the past, see P. Thompson, *Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford University Press, 2006), esp. 68.

Asianist enthusiasm in India existed across the political and religious spectrum. This will be illustrated by exploring Indian Asianism through four different lenses: the Asianism of labour activists; of intellectuals; of (self-)exiled revolutionaries; and finally its Nehruvian finale, the post-war Asianism of the New Delhi Asian Relations Conference, held in March–April 1947. This conference marked the last time that many of these groups and individuals met.

Chapter 1 will explore the interwar internationalist moment in a broad sense, and India's place within it. Moving from interwar internationalism in general to the specific Asian inflection that is the subject of this thesis, it asks how the category of 'interwar' should be understood in an Asian context; whether a different chronology applies; and if so, whether it can still be considered part of the same 'moment.' This chapter further seeks to shed light on how this moment of regionalist enthusiasm should be understood, which forces shaped it, and whether and how it related to the simultaneous high point of nationalism in this period. This chapter will further explore the diversity of Indian Asianisms in this period, and clarify which geographical concepts of Asia underlay these different Asianist expressions.

Chapter 2 seeks to highlight the importance of Asianism in the international engagements of the Indian trade union movement, and the solidarities and opportunities, but also challenges and antagonisms that the Asian theatre posed. The All-India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) faced several options for trade union cooperation in Asia, and in 1929 the Congress actually split into two rival federations over the issue of its Asian affiliations. On one side we find the reformist faction of AITUC, which sought to address Asian labour issues through the machinery of the International Labour Organization and cooperated with Japanese Trade Union Federations to convene an Asiatic Labour Congress in the early 1930s. On the other side, the revolutionary faction courted cooperation with the Asian branch of the Red International of Trade Unions, the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat. Both factions consciously sought out Asian platforms to express anti-imperialist solidarities in the context of specific Asian labour issues. This Asianism in a labour inflection became impossible for the revolutionaries when Soviet withdrawal of support for activities in colonial Asia led to the disbanding of the secretariat in 1936. For the reformists, it ended when their primary interlocutor in Asia, Japan, invaded China in 1937.

Chapter 3 explores the Asianism of Indian intellectuals and academics by examining their conceptions of Asia as a unitary civilization based on shared spiritual, religious or cultural identities. It also considers the 'India Magna' or 'Greater India' thesis. This latter discourse, which came to occupy an important place in the Indian public sphere of the interwar period, refers to the historical spread of cultures and religions from the Indian subcontinent to the rest of Asia, with a focus on Southeast Asia. It celebrated the historical links between Asian regions, and believed that decolonization would re-forge those severed ties. While acting as a catalyst for a variety of archaeological and cultural missions, Greater India thought had far-reaching implications through the networks it generated. This 'academic Asianism' was strongly tied to Bengal's Viśva Bharati University, founded by poet and Asianist Rabindranath Tagore, which functioned as a nodal point of not only academic but also Asian revolutionary networks. Finally, Greater India thought grew from an idea that held particular appeal for Bengal, to a Pan-Indian and even transcontinental movement, and the Greater India Society became a hub for Asia scholars with a variety of agendas. Like the labour Asianism discussed in chapter 2, this Asianism as expressed through academic

networks was eclipsed in the late 1930s thanks in part to its links to several European academic networks that were caught in the maelstrom of politics in fascist Italy. Here, too, the Sino-Japanese war inhibited both physical and intellectual operation in Asia, but its European interlocutors also lost their internationalist enthusiasm as war loomed on the horizon and the League of Nations project failed. The Italo-Indian networks dissolved with Italy's invasion of Abyssinia, which exposed it as an imperialist power.

Chapter 4 considers the Asianist engagements of Indian (self-)exiled revolutionaries, primarily in Central and East Asia. Roughly, the individuals and groups considered here fall into two categories: political exiles, who could not return to India because of Asianist politics and made a temporary or permanent home elsewhere in Asia; and expatriates, members of the sizeable Indian mercantile and student communities that could be found throughout Asia. Both categories were fluid and overlapping; one might pass from one to the other or temporarily be both. The chapter explores the varied activities of these exiles. Two main networks of revolutionary Asianism are examined, one across the Asian landmass and one connected by shipping routes. The first network was held together by Asian continental caravan and trade routes, and connected, among others, Tashkent, Baku, and Moscow. These three cities saw considerable Asianist engagement following the Bolshevik Revolution and thanks to the Soviet Union's Asian policies in the 1920s. In Southeast and East Asia, by contrast, revolutionary networks were held together by shipping routes. Port cities such as Kobe, Yokohama, and Singapore were the site of a variety of Indian Pan-Asianist projects— the former two in collaboration with, and more often in opposition to, Japan's own Asianist policies. Both the Central Asian and East Asian centres were informed by explicitly anti-imperialist ideologies, but their visions for a decolonized Asia were radically different. But however much their goals were opposed, it is shown that Indian revolutionaries often moved between different Asianist centres and different ideological expressions of Asianism with great ease. As anti-imperialists and Asianists first, they were not at all impressed with borders, whether physical and ideological. Two sections seek to shed light on itinerant Asianists who connected the various Asianist centres across the continent and linked them to larger networks: Mahendra Pratap, a colourful revolutionary exile from a privileged background who traversed Asia several times over land; and Indian mariners who acted as couriers across the seas but could also be Asianists themselves, demonstrating that both elites and non-elites were involved in Asianist projects.

Chapter 5, finally, explores the afterlives of the networks discussed in the previous chapters through the lens of the Asian Relations Conference held at New Delhi in March 1947. In current historiography, this was the first of a series of Asian Relations Conferences that would eventually culminate in the foundation of the non-aligned movement at Belgrade in 1961. It is argued here, however, that this conference was the product of the connections made by Nehru and other Asianists during the interwar years. Among the conferences held between 1947 and 1955, the New Delhi gathering was unique in two ways. It convened academic and cultural organizations representing the nations of Asia, rather than political representatives. And it was the only conference to invite all of Asia, including not only Soviet Russia and the Central Asian Soviet Republics, but also US-occupied Japan. It is therefore argued that in its set-up, the conference answered to the internationalist spirit of the interwar years rather than to the newly emerging constellations of decolonization and the Cold War.

Nevertheless, those new constellations did have an impact on the proceedings. These changes form the backdrop to this chapter. Finally, the years from the Asian Relations Conference up to the Bandung conference of 1955 will be treated. Bandung, too, is often viewed as the finale of a period of internationalist enthusiasm. It is argued here, however, that the continuity of the internationalist moment of the interwar period should not be located in the inter-state Asianism of Bandung. Rather, the afterlife of interwar Asianism is found in non-state movements such as the Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Committee, whose activities heralded a new form of regionalist cooperation and conclude this dissertation.