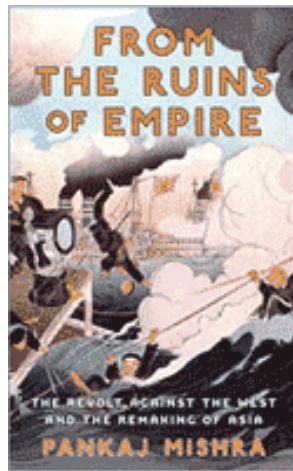


George W. Bush once asked “Why do they hate us?” Unfortunately, his answers were as oversimplistic as the wording of the question itself is. Those of us more curious about the world may nevertheless be asking questions along similar lines: Why is today's Middle East so hostile to “the West,” i.e., the USA and Europe? What role does Islamism play in the development of emerging powers in Asia, such as Indonesia? And, on a note that is only seemingly different, how can China and India lead the world in some areas while still struggling with poverty at a large scale?



At the heart of such questioning lies a welcome curiosity, that of Westerners seeking to understand the foundations of Asian identities and motivations. In his book *From the Ruins of Empire*, British-Indian journalist and novelist Pankaj Mishra aims to give insights that are otherwise hard to find.

A storyteller at heart, the author uses the formats of historical essay and biography to paint a broad picture. Starting with the aftermath of the Russian-Japanese war of 1905, the first moment in modern history in which an Asian nation triumphed over a

Western one, he chooses three leading intellectuals of the time to explain crucial ideas which are rooted into modern Asia and many of its leaders, affecting our world as it is today.

Specifically, Mishra tells the stories of Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani, a pan-Islamic reformer, Liang Qichao, a nationalistic Chinese intellectual, and Rabindranath Tagore, a Bengali poet. Each of them went through his own transformation, from curiously studying ‘Western’ ideas to furiously and critically debating, adapting, even rejecting them, aiming to help remake Asia in its own ways instead. In doing so, these intellectuals responded to the then-continuing threats of Western dominance with vigor and imagination.

The final chapter of the book fast-forwards to today’s world: outlining a timeline from the late Victorian age all the way to the post-Cold War era, Mishra shows the impact al-Afghani, Qichao, Tagore and others had on Asian societies as the continent rose from relative political insignificance to the role it plays today.

Mishra's book is far more than an interesting history of anti-colonial intellectual life in the East. A necessary corrective to the distorted views often found in the West, it shows how nationalist movements of today arose as a reaction to imperialism and colonial exploitation in the 19th century, offering deep insights into the dynamics of contemporary global politics.



Lothar Katz is the founder and principal advisor of Leadership Crossroads. Having worked with numerous organizations in many countries, he has a wealth of experience in achieving productive cooperation across cultures and driving business success on a global scale.

A seasoned former corporate executive, he regularly interacted with employees, customers, outsourcing partners, and third parties in numerous countries around the world, including many parts of Asia. Mr. Katz is the author of “Negotiating International Business” (2007) and “The Global Business Culture Guide” (2014).

