

# Okakura Kakuzo's Cultural Appeal in America<sup>1</sup>

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The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was an age in which non-Western intellectuals brought East and West together in meaningful and sustained dialogue for perhaps the first time in the history of world civilization. My paper deals with Okakura Kakuzo (1863-1913), a Japanese art critic and intellectual, and his attempts to “make the West understand the East” in 1904, the year of the outbreak of war between Japan and Russia. From his base in Boston, Okakura tried to enlighten the Western world about Japan, its past, present, and future.

Okakura is well-known for his writings in English such as *The Ideals of the East with Special Reference to the Art of Japan* (London: John Murray, 1903) which began with the symbolic manifesto “Asia is one,” and *The Book of Tea* (New York: Fox, Duffield & Company, 1906) which is still, after these many years, in print and translated into many different languages. In their works, Okakura and other Asian intellectuals writing in English, pictured the “East” or “Asia” as a

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civilization with universal value and attempted to place it and the West on equal terms. Two major trends that can be seen directing the activities of these non-Western intellectuals: First, they began to cross borders and attempted to pursue national goals, including anti-colonial struggles and cultural “revival” movements.<sup>2</sup> Second, intellectuals who acquired a Western education alongside training in their own native traditions were able to write and speak in Western languages, mostly English. Okakura entered the international intellectual arena along these lines.

The new dialogue, composed of a thick-layered accumulation of cultural exchange, made it possible for the non-Western world, the East, to make appeals to the West. For example, charismatic spiritualists such as Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) and Anagarika Dharmapala (1864-1933) drew great attention at the World’s Parliament of Religions at the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Moreover, authors such as Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) and Gu Hongming (1857-1928) could not act as they did without the invisible support of complicated historical forces bringing together their domestic sociopolitical situation, their national position in the international society, transnational intellectual networks and new Western interest in Eastern philosophies caused by the changes in the Christian world at the turn of the century.

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<sup>2</sup> In fact, these cultural “revival” movements often involved the reinterpretation and reorganization of native religions or arts in a modern context.

While the reality was indeed complicated, the simple dichotomy of “East” and “West,” that today might seem a hackneyed stereotype, functioned then as the basic framework for looking at global cultural and political affairs. However, this framework was not fixed. It could and did undergo significant metamorphosis according to the historical context and political purposes it represented. The “East” or “Asia” advocated by the intellectuals varied according to the thinker. In the case of Okakura, his remarks on “East” and “West” given to an American audience during his one-year visit in 1904-05 necessarily reflected discourse on the “clash of civilizations” that followed the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese war.

### **Okakura Kakuzo’s Activities in the United States in 1904**

Okakura had a long-standing connection with the United States, having studied and worked with Ernest Francisco Fenollosa (1853-1908) in the 1880s and traveled to the United States in 1886 and 1887 on the way to and from Europe. His real work as art critic and spokesman for Japan, however, came during his second visit in 1904. He desired to do paid research in the Japanese and Chinese art collections at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (MFA) and departed for the United States accompanied by his disciples, Yokoyama Taikan (1868-1958), Hishida Shunso (1874-1911) and Rokkaku Shisui (1866-1950). The three artists held exhibitions in New York, Cambridge and Washington D.C. In September,

Okakura gave a lecture at the Congress of Arts and Science at the Universal Exposition in St. Louis. And in November, he published *The Awakening of Japan* (New York: The Century Co., 1904), his second book in English. The book attracted much favorable attention.

Okakura's departure date from Yokohama coincided with the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War: February 10th, 1904. An increase of interest in Japan brought their visit and activities to the attention of American journalists. An article in *The New York Times* reported on their exhibition and described with admiration that Japan was able to achieve artistic excellence in the ancient arts at the same time as it mastered the modern art and technology of war. The headline read: "New and Old Japan. She Has Victories in the Art as Well as Triumphs in War."<sup>3</sup>

*The Awakening of Japan* was a book in which Okakura tried to show his interpretation of "the sudden development"<sup>4</sup> of modern Japan. He asserted the existence of an "inner" movement that had begun in the late Edo period before the coming of the American black ships. This demonstrated Okakura's reaction against the general tendency of Western people to consider the "development" of Japan as something owed exclusively to intensive adoption of Western civilization.

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<sup>3</sup> *The New York Times*, January 5, 1905.

<sup>4</sup> *The Awakening of Japan* in *Okakura Kakuzo Collected English Writings* 1, Heibonsha, 1982 [Hereafter cited as *CEW 1 or 2*], p.177.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p.178.

He emphasized that Japan's "innate virility"<sup>5</sup> was the source of Japan's awakening; more crucial than the adoption of foreign things was "the realization of the self within."<sup>6</sup> The "spirit of Old Japan,"<sup>7</sup> he said, was alive in the core of the nation in spite of the new appearance of a modern constitutional state.

Furthermore, he did not fail to state that while Japan owed much to the West, "we must still regard Asia as the true source of our inspirations."<sup>8</sup> Okakura previously planned to publish this book in America before his departure. He brought notes from Japan and revised them in the summer of 1904 for publication in autumn.

In his former book, *The Ideals of the East with Special Reference to the Art of Japan*, Okakura presented his idea of "Asia" not as a mere geographical concept but as a civilization. It held China and India as the two major sources of culture, and included the broad range from Japan to the Middle East that was united in "love for the Ultimate and Universal."<sup>9</sup> His "Asia" was a treasure house of beauty and religion with Buddhism at the core but allied with the Hindu, Islam, Taoism and Confucian traditions. Japan was made "a museum of Asiatic civilisation"<sup>10</sup> which preserved the essence of the legacies of Asian civilization. And thus Japanese art acquired the universal value of "Asia" under the aesthetic

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p.178.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p.208.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p.178.

<sup>9</sup> *The Ideals of the East with Special Reference to the Art of Japan*, CEW I, p.13.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p.16.

unity that matched its Western counterpart. One of the motivations that made him to create this figure of “Asian” civilization was his belief that non-Western peoples needed a reliable standard for self-recognition that was independent of the Western standard. This book was written during his stay in India in 1901-02 when he associated with Bengali intellectuals engaged in nationalist movements. Okakura wrote it not only for the Western readers but also for Indian people who understood English.

In contrast to *The Ideals of the East*, *The Awakening of Japan* was mainly aimed at the American people. In this book, Okakura expressed his gratitude for America’s cooperation for help Japan join the international comity of nations. Although *The Book of Tea*, the next publication, is more famous and widely read at present, *The Awakening of Japan* attracted more attention with more book reviews at the time it was published.

### **Japanese Foreign Propaganda at the Time of the Russo-Japanese War**

The Russo-Japanese War was not only a military conflict between sovereign states but also involved a major debate on civilization and culture. During the war, Japan fought Russia not only on the battlefield but on the pages of newsprint. The newly emerging mass media offered a new space for a battle of words. It was very important for Japan to gain the sympathy of Western Powers

in order to avoid enlargement of hostilities and to gain advantage in postwar settlement.

On one hand, non-Western peoples placed great hopes on Japan as the first non-Western country to fight a big Western power. On the other hand, Japan was annoyed by the spread of ideas such as the “Yellow Peril.” It was a discourse that represented Western distrust and prejudice of the so-called Yellow race and non-Christendom, threatened by an idea that Japanese and Chinese, armed with modern weapons, would make a counterattack on Western civilization.

Furthermore, a fear emerged that colonized Asian peoples might foster anti-colonial solidarity and overthrow control by European suzerain powers. This discourse was simple enough to spread widely in Europe and the United States at the turn of the century, recalling historical events such as Mongol invasion of the 13th century. Russia tried to make use of the “Yellow Peril” to isolate Japan in international politics. Therefore, it was an urgent necessity for the Japanese government to counter the “Yellow Peril” discourse and to foster pro-Japanese public opinion in the Western world. Japan’s protestations of conformity with the “open door” and “equal opportunity” in East Asia was itself not persuasive enough to deny the Yellow peril; to do so required the mobilization of cultural topics.

To advance these culture wars, the Japanese government sent two persons to the West, taking advantage of secret service funds. Kaneko Kentaro

(1853-1942) was sent to the United States and Suyematsu Kencho (1855-1920) was dispatched to Europe. It was especially important for both Japan and Russia to have the United States, a newly rising power, on its side. Kaneko arrived in the United States about two weeks later than Okakura on the pretext of inspecting the Universal Exposition in St. Louis. Kaneko was once a student in the United States, just as Suyematsu had studied in England; both were highly intelligent and fluent in English. Their duty was to defend Japanese war aims and create a positive image of Japan through lecturing, writing, interviews and performing the role of gentlemen from a civilized nation in front of government officials and the press. They sought to rid Westerners of a prejudice that regarded Japan as a “heathen” country with military ambitions and instead emphasize how Japan was making efforts to introduce Western culture to East Asia in order to contribute to the advancement of world civilization.<sup>11</sup>

But it was not only Westernized aspects of Japan that were promoted by them but also Japan’s “traditional” culture and ethical traits peculiar to Japan. At that time, Japan had the world’s attention as a small Eastern country that dared to challenge the giant Russian bear. It was a good opportunity for Japan to assert its significance as an independent nation with “original” characteristics. Kaneko and

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<sup>11</sup> For the details of Kaneko’s and Suyematsu’s activities, see Matusmura Masayoshi, *Nichiro-Senso to Kaneko Kentaro –Koho Gaiko no Kenkyu* (Tokyo: Toshindo, 1980) and *Potsumasu heno Michi –Kokaron to Yoroppa no Suyematus Kencho* (Tokyo: Hara Shobo, 1987).



Suyematsu used their knowledge of Japanese old culture as part of their propaganda campaign.

Simultaneously, several non-government thinkers were enthusiastic to display their cultural nationalism. They sought to interpret and introduce Japanese “traditional” culture to a Western audience as a means to support the Japanese war effort. The most remarkable example is *Bushido: The Soul of Japan* by Nitobe Inazo (1862-1933), first published in 1899 in the United States. It was republished in 1905 during the war when it gained far more attention. In the United States, many Japanese authors such as Amenomori Nobushige (1858-1906), Takamine Jokichi (1854-1922), Hoshi Hajime (1873-1951) and Adachi Kinnosuke contributed articles to leading journals and newspapers and published books on Japanese culture. The appeals by such Japanese authors varied in detail. But most of them shared a common stance on seeking to win international respect and understanding for unique Japanese cultural “traditions” as well as praise current military progress. Japan was pictured as an advanced nation that bore both traditional uniqueness and modern Western civilization, drawing a sharp contrast from arguments that would color Japan with the “Yellow Peril” of barbarism. Indeed, some insisted that the true “peril” was coming from Russia, a country they described as still mired in “uncivilized” despotism.

Okakura appeared in American journalism as an expert of Asian art history.

As a thinker equipped with the broad knowledge of Asian cultures, fluent in English, possessed of a dignified behavior, and always dressed in Japanese costume, Okakura was a commanding presence in the United States. Soon after arriving in New York on March 2, 1904, Okakura contributed an article entitled “Japan and the ‘Yellow Peril’” to *The Evening Post*, which appeared on March 26.<sup>12</sup> He opposed any notion that Japan represented a “Yellow Peril” and insisted that Japan was reluctant to wage war against Russian aggression, referring to the “peaceful” nature of East Asian “civilization.” The tenor of his essay was almost identical to that of Japanese official propaganda. Moreover, his article coincided with the beginning of the official propaganda campaign in America by Kaneko and Takahira Kogoro, the Japanese minister to the United States. Kaneko arrived in New York on March 19, and articles relating his interview with the press appeared in the newspapers on the next day. Other than Okakura, Asakawa Kan’ichi (1873-1948), who was teaching at Dartmouth University, explained the background of the war and defended Japan in his book *The Russo-Japanese Conflict, Its Cause and Issues* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin and Company, 1904), published in November simultaneously with Okakura’s book. Prior to publishing the book, Asakawa contributed a shortened version of the book’s introduction to the May

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<sup>12</sup> I dealt with this newly discovered article in Okamoto Yoshiko, “Nichiro-Senso-ki Eibei Janarizumu ni Miru Okakura Kakuzo Ikko” (Okakura Kakuzo and his Disciples as Seen in the Western Journalism at the Time of the Russo-Japanese War: Some Newly Discovered Newspaper Articles), *Asian Cultural Studies*, no.31, edited by Institute of Asian Cultural Studies, International Christian University, March 2005.

issue of *The Yale Review*.<sup>13</sup> While Asakawa tried to verify the harmful affects of Russian advance into East Asia with empirical analysis of trades, industries and economic situation, Okakura's statements in the newspaper article was more generic, praising Japanese culture and decrying the Russian aggression. Okakura was especially concerned to challenge claims that Japan represented a "Yellow Peril"; instead, he sought to demonstrate that Russia was the real source of peril.

In his article, Okakura expressed without hesitation the following nationalistic statement:

They [Westerners who have little knowledge of Japan] are apt to forget that the same untiring spirit which creates the subtle beauty of the pottery of Satsuma guides us also in the thorough, extreme care we now bestow upon our war equipment. And our love for the cherry blossom, which we cherish as the national problem[sic], is not only for its jewelled efflorescence, but for the freedom with which it gives itself to the winds in glorious self-sacrifice.<sup>14</sup>

However, the statements made by Okakura afterwards came to show some changes in his thinking. After publishing *The Awakening of Japan* in autumn, he wrote an essay entitled "The Cup of Humanity," in early spring of 1905, and included in the April issue of *International Quarterly*<sup>15</sup> published by Fox, Duffield & Company. This essay became the first and the second chapters of *The Book of*

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<sup>13</sup> "Some of the Issues of the Russo-Japanese Conflict," *The Yale Review*, vol.13, May 1904.

<sup>14</sup> "Japan and the 'Yellow Peril'" by Kakuzo Okakura, *The Evening Post*, New York, Saturday, March 26, 1904.

<sup>15</sup> *International Quarterly*, vol.9, no.1, April 1905.

*Tea*, and includes the following passage:

He [the average Westerner] was wont to regard Japan as barbarous while she indulged in the gentle arts of peace: he calls her civilised since she began to commit wholesale slaughter on Manchurian battlefields. . . . Fain would we remain barbarians, if our claim to civilisation were to be based on the gruesome glory of war. Fain would we await the time when due respect shall be paid to our art and ideals. <sup>16</sup>

The contrast with the earlier newspaper citation from March 1904 is obvious. It seems that, within less than a year, a major change occurred in his view of the war. To explore the reason behind this apparent change, it is necessary to examine how he recognized the significance of the war that was often mentioned in the context of arguments on civilizations, referring to *The Awakening of Japan* and some of his earlier writings.

### **The “Yellow Peril” and the “White Disaster”**

The “Yellow Peril” discourse contained a basic contradiction. It decried the military developments of East Asian countries as a threat to Western civilization although such developed was due primarily to the spread of modern Western technology. Russia demanded Western solidarity against Japan as the common enemy of Christendom and used the specter of hordes of barbarians from the East equipped with the modern military technology. In their lectures and

writings, Kaneko and Asakawa attempted to purge the simple “East versus West” rhetoric from the discourse surrounding the war.

Even before the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War, some Western and Japanese journalists and thinkers had come up with a counter-argument to the “Yellow Peril” – the “White Peril.” In a lecture, Kaneko Kentaro stated “ If there is a peril in the East, it is not the ‘Yellow Peril,’ but the ‘White Peril’; the former being a mere myth, while the latter is an actual reality.”<sup>17</sup> However, the aim of his lecture was to declare that Japan’s “national aspirations” were to “introduce to the distant and long-neglected East the blessings of Western civilization.”<sup>18</sup>

Okakura had for some time spoke about a “White Disaster” as a threat to the non-Western world. His criticism against the “White Disaster” was expressed in *The Awakening of Japan*, saying “If the guilty conscience of some European nations has conjured up the specter of a Yellow Peril, may not the suffering soul of Asia wail over the realities of the White Disaster.”<sup>19</sup> What is peculiar to his claim was that his definition of “White Disaster” was not limited to the military and political level, but reached the deeper level of cultural and spiritual makeup. In an unpublished and untitled manuscript, known today as “The Awakening of the East,” written in India for young Bengalese, Okakura referred repeatedly to the

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<sup>16</sup> *The Book of Tea, CEW 1*, pp.270-271.

<sup>17</sup> Baron Kentaro Kaneko, “The Yellow Peril Is the Golden Opportunity for Japan,” *North American Review*, vol.179, no.576, November 1904, p.644.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p.647.

<sup>19</sup> *The Awakening of Japan, CEW 1*, p.214.

“White Disaster” as the major threat to the lives of peoples in the non-Western world.

Industrial conquest is awful, moral subjugation is intolerable. Our ancestral ideals, our family institutions, our ethics, our religions are daily fading away. . . . In spite of ourselves we assist in the general demolition of all that is left to us. We attempt reforms that lead to disintegration. We experiment on society and hasten its ruinous course. The search for foreign knowledge, whereby we intend to combat our downfall, trains our minds to look from the mistaken standpoint of the alien. . . .

The imitation and worship of Europe has at last become our natural regime. The gilded youths of Calcutta or Tokyo who flaunt the newest London fashions with all the sadness of the ridiculous, are only an expression of the prevailing idea. They seek in dress that protective colouring which our fashionable scholars seek in the borrowed phrases of modern philosophy. . . . We have bowed to their armaments, we have surrendered to their merchandise, why not be vanquished by their so-called culture? <sup>20</sup>

Okakura’s arguments against the “Yellow Peril” discourse not only reflected his patriotic concern to defend Japan at a time of war, but also his broader view of the contemporary cultural situation. In the chapter entitled “The White Disaster” in *The Awakening of Japan*, he once again lamented that “the name of the Oriental has become a synonym for the degenerate, and the word ‘native’ and epithet for slaves” under the spread of the modern Western value such as “commercialism and industrialism,” “the universal occidentalization of etiquette

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<sup>20</sup> “The Awakening of the East,” *CEW I*, pp.141-142.

and language” and “the possibility of a cosmopolitan culture.”<sup>21</sup> On top of Western prejudice of the “East,” he described a cultural identity crisis that made non-Western peoples recognize themselves falsely according to a Western cultural scale. Whereas the “Yellow Peril” was a strategic ideology, Okakura’s term, the “White Disaster” had deeper connotations. It warned that Western political and military hegemony was penetrating the domain of culture. Okakura was concerned that the acceptance of a Western civilization that monopolized universality would ultimately pose harm to non-Western cultures around the world. In this sense, the “White Disaster” was a far more profound and longer-term fear, not only for Japan, but for the future of civilization itself. He did not mention this argument in the limited space of his newspaper article.

In contrast to Kaneko who limited his discussion of the “White Peril” to military and political concerns, but in general saw the spread of Western civilization as a “blessing,” Okakura approached the “Disaster” in more comprehensive terms. Okakura’s claim that the spread of the Western civilization contained potential harm was inconvenient, to say the least, to Japanese official propaganda that sought to exclude a monolithic “East” versus “West” rhetoric from the discourse surrounding the war.

Another difference relates to the representation of cultural phenomena.

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<sup>21</sup> *The Awakening of Japan, CEW I*, pp.214-216.

As described above, Kaneko championed the “inherent” nature of Japanese national character and culture alongside recent efforts to construct a modern constitutional state. His attempt was to skillfully introduce two opposite directions of social and cultural change, the maintenance of tradition and the assimilation to the Western civilization. Okakura shared this idea with Kaneko and other Japanese intellectuals who spoke out at the time of the war: Japan had succeeded both in maintaining its traditional spirit and in developing as a modern nation state. But he did not conceal the tremendous confusion and sense of cultural identity crisis that he and earlier generations had experienced underneath this apparent success. He problematized the friction that inevitably accompanied large-scale cross-cultural encounters and drastic changes brought on by westernization. He was well aware of the trauma that non-Western countries must necessarily undergo upon their entry into the modern age. Even non-military factors possessed uncontrollable destructive power as can be seen in his words: “why not be vanquished by their so-called culture?” In his lecture “Modern Problems in Painting” at the 1904 Universal Exposition in St. Louis, he spoke to his Western audience as follows.

You should remember, however, that our wholesale adoption of your methods of life and culture was not purely a matter of choice but necessity. The word “modernization” means the occidentalization of the world. The map of Asia will reveal the dismal fate of the ancient civilizations that have succumbed to the spell of industrialism, commercialism, imperialism,



and what not, which the modern spirit has cast over them. It seems almost imperative that one should mount the car of Juggernaut unless one would be crushed under its wheels.<sup>22</sup>

From this viewpoint, Okakura considered that a Japanese victory over Russia would serve as protest to the imposition of Western cultural supremacy throughout the non-Western world. Russia, in fact, was not an “advanced” country compared to other European powers but a “developing” nation that was trying to import “modernity” from western Europe. However, the war was portrayed as a battle between the “West/White race” and the “East/Yellow race.” When Okakura asserted: “We fought not only for our motherland but for the ideals of the recent reformation, for the noble heritage of classic culture, and for those dreams of peace and harmony in which we saw a glorious rebirth for all Asia,”<sup>23</sup> it was not mere sophistry. For Okakura, the war against Russia represented significant progress toward a breakthrough of the cultural dilemma confronting Asia.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> “Modern Problems in Painting,” *CEW 2*, p.77.

<sup>23</sup> *The Awakening of Japan*, *CEW 1*, pp. 262-263.

<sup>24</sup> Due to limitations of the space, I cannot expand on the other reason of Okakura’s positive attitude toward the war. His support for Japan also derived from his own pattern of thinking to regard wars with foreign countries as “a natural outgrowth of the new national vigour,” [*The Ideals of the East*, *CEW 1*, p.122] which, according to his view, penetrated both political and cultural domains in Japan. These details are argued in Okamoto Yoshiko, “Okakura Kakuzo to Nichiro-Senso: Bunka no Seiji-teki Mondai no Ba,” (Cultural Battles: Okakura Kakuzo and the Russo-Japanese War) in *Lotus* no.26, edited by Nihon Fenollosa Gakkai (The Fenollosa Society of Japan), March 2006.

## **A Tangled Argument**

Okakura's positive attitude toward the war quickly lost its coherency due to two vulnerable points. First, his arguments were complicated by the confusion of short-term current affairs and long-term problems of civilization. Second, his hope that the war would be a solution for the cultural problems of "Asia," which he cherished despite the reality that the war was a display of Japan's military and imperial prowess, had its limitations. Despite initial positive support for the war, Okakura slowly became disillusioned; as the war progressed, he began to express some reservations.

The first point relates to a perceived distortion of the idea of "Asia." In his *Evening Post* article and later in *The Awakening of Japan*, he described the "peaceful" and "tolerant" nature of Chinese civilization and stated Japan had been under its influence for a long period of time. Thus he asserted the image of a peaceful and non-aggressive China, alongside Japan falsely suspected by the West as posing a threat to Western civilization. In contrast, he made the Mongols into the destroyers of "Asian" civilization and clearly differentiated Japan and China from them, despite the fact that in his 1903 book, *The Ideals of the East*, Mongolia was included within the grand design of "Asia." Here we can see Okakura reacting to the legacy of the Mongol conquest in the medieval times that had an enormous effect in the formation of "Yellow Peril" discourse in the Western mind.

Okakura conveniently emphasized similarities and differences between Japanese and its neighbors in order to reject any association with the “Yellow Peril.” And we should note that Okakura was not alone in employing this method; this was a common method to arguments by the Japanese intellectuals who attempted to remove Japan from the “Yellow Peril” rhetoric. Okakura’s attempt to cope with Japanese political situation led him, ironically, to diminish his own idea of “Asia.”<sup>25</sup>

The second point can be seen in the closing remarks in *The Awakening of Japan* that show Okakura beginning to worry about the justifiability of the war. Although this book has often been dismissed as a work of propaganda in which Okakura sought to defend Japan’s war efforts, the final chapter, “Japan and Peace,” shows some emerging doubts about Japan’s war and war in general.

When will wars cease? In the West international morality remains far below the standard to which individual morality has attained. Aggressive nations have no conscience, and all chivalry is forgotten in the persecution of weaker races. He who has not the courage and the strength to defend himself is bound to be enslaved. It is sad for us to contemplate that our truest friend is still the sword. What mean these strange combinations which Europe displays, --- the hospital and the torpedo, the Christian missionary and imperialism, the maintenance of vast armaments as a guarantee of peace? Such contradictions did not exist in the ancient civilization of the East. Such were not the ideals of the Japanese Restoration, such is not the goal of her reformation. The night of the Orient, which had hidden us in its folds, has been lifted, but we find the world still in the dusk of humanity. Europe has taught us war; when

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<sup>25</sup> For the details, see *ibid.*

shall she learn the blessings of peace? <sup>26</sup>

Although his point was obscured because of an argument he developed in defense of Japan right before this last paragraph, what he wanted to say was that Japan was waging war because of its contact with the West. Japan, and other non-Western nations have become simply cogwheels in the vast modern system of international relations that seemed to require every nation to exist in conflict with each other. The phrase, “Europe has taught us war” meant that friction between national interests and the system of modern warfare had been introduced into the non-Western world where sadly it had taken root. Based on his view, the contemporary world structure itself was the “White Disaster” and Japan which had mounted “the car of Juggernaut” could do nothing but follow a course that was full of “contradictions.” He found significance in the war with Russia that was effective to overcome the “White Disaster.” But even when protesting the “White Disaster,” Okakura was aware that the act of waging war itself was part and parcel of this new world structure known as “White Disaster”: this was the inherent contradiction that Okakura was forced to confront.

The citation above was placed together with a very common defense of Japan’s position, and as such it seemed simply to strengthen arguments in favor of war. And Okakura’s target here was “Europe,” represented by Russia (and

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<sup>26</sup> *The Awakening of Japan, CEW I*, p.264.

opportunistically excluding America, the country of the audience of his book). *The Awakening of Japan* shows an uneasiness Okakura caught between typical nationalistic impulses and his own undeniable distrust of structural problems of the world brought on by Western political and cultural hegemony.

The scheme of “war equals modern West” and “peace equals East” which can be seen in the closing paragraph of *The Awakening of Japan*, was repeated in Okakura’s next book, *The Book of Tea*. As the succession of Japanese victories mounted, Okakura painted an ironic portrait of Japan as a “civilised” nation crowned with “the gruesome glory of war.” Although he repeated the claim that Russia’s territorial ambition involved Japan in a war, he no longer sought to bring the problem of “Asia” into the war. The essential character of the Japanese is to be found only in “the gentle arts of peace,” the very opposite to war. This phrase is often used today to argue that Okakura was a pacifist. But it is careless to detach him from the historical context of his age. That phrase was written as a result of the struggle and confusion that he had experienced in confronting the “gruesome” realities of the Russo-Japanese war.

In 1905 Japan started to make Korea an exclusive “protectorate” and go beyond the simple demands of a “defensive war.” Additionally, Japan did not follow the ideals of the “open door” and “equal opportunity” in East Asia after the war and thereby came into conflict with the United States. American suspicions

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toward Japan boiled up quickly after the war and resulted in repeated attempts to exclude Japanese immigrants. Okakura remained silent on this chain of political events, seeing it perhaps as a “tempest in a teacup” while he concerned himself with larger cultural designs.

## **Conclusions**

On one hand, Okakura’s appeal in the United States was similar to Japanese official propaganda in that he responded to a national emergency with strong nationalistic sentiments. Moreover, his argument coincided partly with the strategy of Kaneko and other Japanese intellectuals who mobilized cultural topic for strategic political purposes. On the other hand, from a broader point of view, Okakura found significance in the Russo-Japanese war as an arena for a grand contest for a breakthrough of cultural problems. He protested Western attempts at political and cultural hegemony and called this situation the “White Disaster.” He rejected any notion that Japan represented any sort of “Yellow Peril” and instead claimed that the “White Disaster” was the most serious and fundamental problem confronting non-Western peoples everywhere. In his mind, Japan’s victory over Russia should help to revitalize “all Asia,” the victim of a defective Western-dominated world structure. In this sense, his arguments deviated from the mainstream of official war propaganda.

However, his eagerness to lodge a cultural protest based on broad issues confronting “East” and “West” lacked coherence because of his own more narrow nationalistic impulses. In trying to understand the war, a sort of gray zone emerged in his struggle for culture as he sought to mobilize culture for national political purposes. Okakura was caught in an ambivalent situation as two Japans seemed to be engaged in war: one a powerful Eastern nation that captured the sympathy of the oppressed peoples of the non-Western world; the other a progressive new imperial power.

The claims for “East” and “West” by non-Western intellectuals derived each from a national context and sense of crisis over contemporary realities, making it difficult to locate a politically-neutral discourse on civilization. As seen in Okakura’s appeal, the idea of “Asia/East” as conceived by non-Western intellectuals was not without more narrow ideological concerns while at the same time seeking to dethrone Western hegemonic values and institutions. At the beginning of the twentieth century, non-Western intellectuals spoke with increasing passion to promote both sides of this new world view.