

Multiple Representations of the Past and Popular Culture: “Ottomania” and “Cool Japan” in Comparative Perspective

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1. Aim

Turkey and Japan have comparable histories of modernization, with both countries experiencing the epitome of their westernization in the nineteenth century, the end of their imperial eras. They produced modernities with a mix of “eastern” and “western.” Over the last decades, they faced the question of what comes after modernity and manufactured their versions of authenticities and cultural exports.

2. Data & Methods

This paper historically locates two symptoms of this process with a sociological comparative perspective.

3. Results

“Ottomania” refers to the increasing cultural consumption of Turkey’s imperial past in Turkey and neighboring countries. “Cool Japan” is initially a government-led project, emphasizing popular products in entertainment, fashion, youth culture, and computer games, and intending to shift Japan's image into a “cool” place. The collapse of traditional hierarchies in the two countries have paved their ways for the promotions and exports of new identity claims rooted in imperial cool. Local and global representations of the two phenomena differ: internally they are fragmented, and externally both are linked to international “soft power” through the modern media and other cultural forms.

4. Conclusion

Turkey and Japan offer alternatives of modernity to their former imperial hinterlands. The main difference is that Ottomania corresponds to declining government intervention in popular culture; whereas, Cool Japan represents an explicit attempt by the government and others to shape Japan’s image. Both claim their new identities, a process fraught with uncertainties and multiple interpretations.

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