


The (Silk) Road Less Travelled: East Asian Studies and National Identity Formation in Modern Turkey

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Abstract

Regional studies in Turkey have long focused on Europe and the Middle East, with which Turkey has traditionally been associated. East Asian studies seem to remain out of the spotlight. This study claims firstly that different phases of Asian studies scholarship in Turkey have all been geared towards confirmation and validation of the process of Turkish national identity formation. Secondly, this process also reflects the Western-centrism of Turkish academic knowledge production.

This paper presents a periodization of Asian Studies in Turkey in three phases to contextualize and demonstrate these claims. During the first phase of the early republican years, the first Sinology departments were expected to actively contribute to writing Turkish national history. Throughout the second phase of the Cold War years, Turkey found itself in both political and intellectual isolation. In the final phase of post-Cold War globalization, the scope of regional studies scholarship expanded to include East Asia. Despite this development, academic scholarship in Turkey still suffers from Western-centrism and it is not able to directly communicate with East Asia. Knowledge production on East Asia in Turkey is still filtered through the theoretical framework of the Western Anglophone academic world.

Keywords

Turkey, area studies, East Asia, Asian Studies, regional studies

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In June 2013, when Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said to Vladimir Putin, “Come on and include us in the Shanghai Five (Shanghai Cooperation Organization), let’s bypass the EU”, this brought to the fore the most serious worries/hopes that “Turkey’s axis might be shifting” since the doctrine of “Strategic Depth” by Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu was propounded. But can a nation’s “axis”, that is, its collective identity, comfortably shift as easily as leaving one regional

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organization and joining another? Since the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is regarded as an Asian organization due to its member countries, if Turkey joined the SCO, would it have become an Asian country? What does it mean to be an Asian country?

This study explores these questions by looking at the development of the discipline of Asian studies in Turkey. There has been a growing interest in Asian studies while regional studies traditionally focuses on regions like Europe and the Middle East of which Turkey is typically accepted as a part. For historical and political reasons, Eurasian Studies has long been developed independently in Turkey. Therefore, Asian studies education and research programs cover North and Southeast Asia, South Asia, and the Pacific region. This work, focusing on East Asia, makes the claim that the knowledge produced about East Asia up until now has reflected the national identity formation process in Turkey. And shimmering in this reflection is a Western-centric perspective.

In order to demonstrate the continuities and ruptures in the study of East Asia in Turkey, this research will periodize (East) Asian studies from the early Republican era to the present day. The early Republican era and the 1930s, Sinology departments aimed to contribute to writing Turkish national history. In the Cold War years that followed, Turkey was confined in the Western bloc even in terms of scholarly production. After the Cold War, in the era of globalization, regional studies in Turkey gradually opened up to include contemporary East Asia. Despite this, knowledge produced in this area is still under the influence of Western-centric modernization; and, East Asian studies in Turkey pass through the institutional filters of the Western and especially English-speaking academic world.

This article will first look at the development and identity crises of the regional studies discipline in Turkey and the world. Against this background, trends in the production of knowledge in East Asian studies will be examined in (i) the early Republican era, (ii) the Cold War years, and (iii) the globalization era. This piece will propose a comparative method and “Asia” as a rhetorical tool to rebuild the nation’s collective identity and for the future of East Asia studies in Turkey.

Area Studies as a Field of Social Science

The earliest roots of area studies are departments of “Eastern/Oriental Studies”, established with the aim of aiding a better administration of European colonies. These departments, established in France in the 1830s and Britain in the 1870s (Andersen, 2002: 43), served the function of collecting ethnographical information as well as teaching modern languages.

Area studies became a part of North American academia around a century later. The area studies centers established in the Cold War era acted as part of the effort to form a ‘Western bloc’ reflecting the ideological divisions of the era. These centers, and area studies disciplines in general, were reorganized following the end of the Cold War. Some departments were split following the political changes. For example, separate departments of Russia, Eastern Europe, and Central Asian Studies born out of former Sovietology departments. Some separate departments, on the other hand, began to work together to overcome academic boundaries. For example, at Indiana University and Australian National University, centers for South Asia, the Middle East and Africa came together in efforts such as the inaugural issue of the journal *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* (Bayat, 2013).

Another contribution to area studies in the Anglo-American academia was the institutionalization of the comparative method in the traditional sense. The traditional comparative method, as a method of comparing two different entities and finding similarities and differences, is again a product of nineteenth century Europe (Esmeir, 2013: 277). This method was used to describe the study of the ‘foreign’ in Anglo-American universities. For example, in the US, comparative politics is a subfield of political science to study the politics of countries and regions outside the US. The comparison was implicit and with the US case.

The acceptance of this broad definition of the term “comparative” in American academia brought along with it a series of cognitive problems. As defined in Carl Pletsch’s article entitled ‘Three Worlds, or the Division of Social Scientific Labor, circa 1950–1975’ (1981), this division of labor was made by the First World, and still the Second and Third Worlds, which are themselves “products” of the First (Dirlik, 2005), are not producers of theories and concepts; they are forced to play the role of mere sources of empirical data. According to this division of labor, “Indians have wisdom and White Man knowledge; Africans have experience and Europeans philosophy; the Third World has cultures and the First World social sciences” (Mignolo, 2013: 268). In this period, the practice of the comparative method lost its relativism and created “others”, who were judged against the normatively upheld ‘origin’. In the words of Samera Esmeir (2013: 277), the First World “produces worlds it fails to discover” and social sciences and the comparative method institutionalize the separation between these worlds. David Vukovich (2012) warns us that this hierarchy of knowledge cannot be broken down easily. In the colonial era, it was manifested in “otherizing” orientalism, and in the neo-liberal globalized age it reinvented itself as a “similarizing” power. That is, while the normative supremacy at the hub of the wheel remains unchanged, the spokes are now connected on the basis of (almost) similarities.

The production of knowledge is forced into a relationship of dependency through a “hub and spokes system” with the West at the center. The Western theory, representing the ‘truth’, is at the center of this hierarchical network; non-Western subjects of the comparison recognize these norms/theories by connecting with the hub – and not with one another. This historical background gives a clue to the theoretical and political tensions inherent in the birth of area studies for us. Responsible for this are two fault lines that have fed into one another throughout the history of area studies.

The first of these tensions is the one between the universal concepts of traditional disciplines and the production of particularistic information by area studies. The methods of producing knowledge that are seen in traditional social science disciplines first create expository tools such as models, categories and theories, and then apply these tools to empirical data. In area studies, various methods and theories are used together, fieldwork and archival work in the local language is the basis, and the purpose is to collect information that can help us understand the region. The social sciences criticize area studies for not producing universal concepts and therefore for being insufficiently scientific; area studies, in return, criticize the social sciences for ignoring the different manifestations of the social realities they are seeking to explain for the sake of reaching generalizations.

This tension between universality and particularity pins down the aforementioned feeling that ‘the West produces social scientific theories, while the non-Westerner is depicted by them’. Western-originated social sciences attempt to reform their epistemological roots after accusations of orientalism, and there has been a noteworthy increase in the number of efforts to carry out “social science from the ground” (Cohen, 1984) to “provincialize” Western social sciences (Chakrabarty, 2007) or “decolonize” them (Jones, 2006). Area studies has been through a similar self-reflection process, and, in order to prevent the “ghettoization” (Sinha, 2013: 265) of the field. Area studies scholars now increasingly include the global and the transnational scales in their analyses. In Asian Studies in particular, transitive and correlative definitions of the region are made, as in the case of as in the case of Inter-Asia studies (Duara, 2010). One important difference between these two currents is that there is concern that global/transnational studies will lose sight of the power inequalities inherited from the past and take on a role of easing the transition from Vukovich’s *otherizing* orientalism to a *similarizing* orientalism as mentioned above (Dirlik, 2005).

The second tension in area studies is the necessary relationship between the production of scientific and political knowledge. Area studies began in Europe in the first half of the nineteenth century as Eastern/Oriental studies and first served the needs of European colonialism for ethnographic information. Similarly, after the Second World War, when the US was caught

unprepared for leadership in a bipolar world, the government sent anthropologists to all corners of the globe. These researchers, such as Ruth Benedict, the author of *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, later became the founding names of area studies as a scholarly field. A far larger number of comparative political scientists worked at the open intelligence units in the Cold War era intelligence agencies (Cumings, 1997). In short, Europe and the US, the leaders of hegemonic blocs in the Colonial and Cold War eras, respectively, were pressed by the concern to be informed about every region of the world, and therefore, institutionalized area studies for every geographical region (Fletcher, 1985).

Area studies outside of the West was also concentrated on regions according to political and social needs of the country. For example, in India, whilst there is a long history of Asian, European, Russian, and North American studies, the first Latin American studies department was only established in the 1970s with the support of a guest researcher from the US. Consequently, Latin American studies has remained in the shadow of North American studies and a relatively narrow field of study in India. Unlike the hegemonic countries that produce knowledge about almost all parts of the world, developing countries prioritize the development of area studies for the regions they have socio-economic relations. One notable exception to this is the exceptional depth of modern Middle Eastern studies in Japan.

In Turkey, several Eastern and Western philology departments were established in the early Republican era along the lines of European higher education institutes. As the Cold War unfolded, Turkey's foreign policy orientation led to the development of expertise in Europe, the Middle East, and Central Asia. The Cold War alliances prevented Turkey from engaging with certain regions, and, consequently the production of knowledge has become more Western-centric. By way of comparison, India had contact with multiple worlds thanks to its membership to the Non-Alignment Movement. The next section will look in detail at the history of area studies in Turkey, which shows parallels with the development of senses of identity and belonging in the modern era.

The Development of Area Studies in Turkey

Higher education in Turkey was modeled after various Western institutions and developed with the support of Western centers of learning. The French influence upon the Darülfünun was replaced with German influence after the Darülfünun was closed for the establishment of Istanbul University in 1933 (Tekeli, 2003; Arap, 2010). This influence was solidified by scholars fleeing Nazi Germany in the 1930s, who would each spend around ten years in Turkey. The German effect on intellectual life in Turkey opened the way for Turkish universities to emulate the "Humboldt Model". In this model the university was envisaged as an institution supported through public funds yet having its academic independence protected (Tekeli, 2003; Arap, 2010: 10). The Eastern Languages and Western Languages programs at Istanbul University and the School of Languages, History and Geography (DTCF) founded in 1935 at Ankara University were cases in point. Among the departments established by academics from Germany at the DTCF were classical languages, Assyriology, Hittitology, Indology, Slavic Languages, Sinology, Geography, Hungarology, French language, German language, English language, philosophy, and archaeology (Çelebi, 2003: 264). These departments at Istanbul University and Ankara University reproduced German traditions, working heavily on philology; that is, they worked as language and literature centers and did not broach the social sciences apart from history.

In the 1950s, the effects of the Cold War had spread to universities. Besides educational institutes such as Middle East Technical University (METU) which were set up with US funding and consequently reflected the American university system, the majority of guest lecturers who began

to come to Turkey were American (Arap, 2010: 10), and the American “entrepreneurial university” model came to dominate universities in Turkey. An entrepreneurial university (or *multiversity*) was not designed simply as institutions for the production of knowledge; they were also envisaged to produce work that would respond to practical problems, both in public policy and in the private sector (Tekeli, 2003). With this rationale, what would later come to be accepted as Turkey’s first department of International Relations department, the Diplomacy and Foreign Relations Branch (Political Branch), was established at the Ankara University School of Political Sciences. In line with the political climate of the time, this department aimed to support foreign policymaking with its knowledge production. Hence, the knowledge produced in this department remained Turkey-centered rather than contributing to area studies in Turkey.

The departments of International Relations/Studies and area-focused research institutes flourished after the Cold War in Turkey. Because of the decades-long gap in this field, the scholarship remained based on the knowledge produced in the leading countries of the Western bloc. For example, there has been Russian Language and Literature department at DTCF since 1935, scholars were not allowed to go to the USSR to do fieldwork and archival research. Only the literary translations and research of Russian immigrant academics were published during that time. On the contrary, almost all the leading countries of the Western bloc had departments of Russian studies (then known as Sovietology), and social scientific research on modern and contemporary Russia regained pace only after 1989 (Aykut, 2006: 22–23).

Immigrants and refugees, whether as researchers or political activists, provided the clearest contributions to knowledge accumulation in area studies in Turkey during the Cold War. For example, Crimean Tartars contributed as much to Turkish history as to Russian language and literature by writing from Russian sources (Aykut, 2006). Similarly, Kazakh immigrants in the 1960s established the Research Institute for Turkish Culture and continued Central Asian studies even though the institute later turned into an epicenter of anti-communist political advocacy (Güler, 2010: 182).

Another case in point is China Studies. The diplomatic relations with China were cut between the 1949 revolution and the reinstatement of diplomatic relations in 1971. In the mean time, the Chinese language education at the DTCF Sinology Department was given by instructors from Taiwan and Turks who had been educated in Taiwan. Academic relations between Turkey and the PRC was almost nonexistent. In this period, the knowledge produced about China in Turkey was predominantly by Uighurs who had fled China after the revolution. Hence, the knowledge produced about China did not come directly from China; it came either from Taiwan or through the filter of the Uighur diaspora in Turkey. Hasan Kanbolat (2009), who founded one of the first think tanks after the Cold War, makes a similar observation:

During the Cold War years, area studies in Turkish foreign policy were carried out for a long time by emigrant associations (Balkan, Cyprus, Caucasian, Central Asian, Iraqi Turkmens etc.) and the amateur work of certain political parties. (...) [T]hese emigrant associations saw Turkey as part of an anti-communist internal political policy. (...) In a hangover from the Cold War years, experts in area studies are identified with regions that the public are interested in. That is to say, those who are experts on the Caucasus tend to have Caucasian roots, experts on the Balkans have Balkan roots, and experts on the Armenian Problem have Armenian roots...

Another group that filled the gap in area expertise during the ideologically insulated environment of the Cold War years were political parties. For example, while there were no Sovietology departments in Turkish academia, academic and political activist Yalçın Küçük (2008) calls himself Turkey’s first and only Sovietologist:

As you know, I am regarded as Turkey's first Sovietologist, expert on the Soviets. I learnt Russian in Turkey despite neither my mother tongue being Russian nor any relatives speaking it [*sic*]. Then I worked for two years at the Russian and East European Studies department at Birmingham University.

The books written by a political party leader, Kemal Okuyan, on the USSR motivated Yalçın Küçük to take on such a mission. Çağdaş Üngör (2013: 178–183) claims that Okuyan was the main source of information for the Maoist parties about China prior to the resumption of diplomatic relations between Turkey and China in 1971.

Area studies in Turkey found an institutional environment conducive to its flourishing after the Cold War. The first area studies research center, the Black Sea and Central Asian Studies Center (BCAC), was established at Middle East Technical University (METU), Ankara. The Middle East Studies Institute established at Marmara University in 1993 was one of the earliest centers specializing on this region. In 2003, a master's program in Middle East Studies began at METU, the first in this field. Similarly, Turkey's first European Studies center opened at METU in 1997. The first Asian Studies masters' program began at METU in 2008 and the first Asian Studies center was established in 2009 at Boğaziçi University. In the late 2000s, Latin and North American Studies masters' programs opened at both Ankara University and METU. These firsts were quickly joined by others as the number of universities increased in the second half of the 2000s.

Besides research institutes based at universities, there has also been an increase in the number of think tanks specializing in regional studies. Among around fifty think tanks established since the 1990s, four of the roughly fifteen long-running ones aim to specialize in a single region (such as the Center for Eurasian Strategic Studies - ASAM). Other institutes such as the International Strategic Research Organization (USAK) and the Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research (SETA) carry out continuous research on various regions through working groups and area committees. In contrast to the area studies centers at universities, the focus of these think tanks does not go far beyond the neighboring regions that form the basis for Turkey's traditional foreign policy. The purpose of these think tanks, both in their relations with lobby groups and their particular focus on Turkey's international relations, is to participate in the foreign policy making.

There are several factors why area studies received attention especially since the 2000s:

- (i) With the relative removal of the fear of ideological stigmatization that prevailed the bipolar era, countries and regions that had been "forbidden" in the past became permissible to conduct research about in the post-Cold War political climate. It became possible to visit these regions for study or language learning, so direct information began to flow increasingly from these countries and regions.
- (ii) In the multipolar world of the post-Cold War era, the political establishment felt the necessity for area experts trained in contemporary regional politics.
- (iii) The number of academics from Turkey who completed their undergraduate and graduate studies outside Turkey increased in the post-Cold War era. A number of them brought new schools of academic thought to Turkish academia, and another group who were educated in the West continued their careers in those countries whilst maintaining a relationship with Turkey and formed an 'intellectual diaspora' community. The Turkish academy got internationalized due to the connections these two groups had with the "core". According to cluster research by Umut Al and his team (2012: 21) eighty percent of international publications made from Turkey since the 1920s are from the period after 1980. The most important increase within this period is seen after the year 2000.

In the year 2000, Turkey produced 6,426 annual publications, and since then that number has continued to increase each year; by 2009, it had quadrupled to 25,370 (Al et al. 2012: 21). According to the same research, Turkey-based scholars have produced the most joint research papers with researchers in America (13,911), Britain (5,038), and Germany (3,997). Although nations like Russia (805) and China (444) have higher than average world publishing rates, they have few partnerships with Turkish researchers. For example, according to the figures in *Essential Science Indicators*, the People's Republic of China, which has the second highest rate of publication in the world, is 23rd on the list of countries of joint publications with Turkey (Al et al., 2012: 31). Al et al. (ibid.) say this of the situation: “*It is our conviction that countries such as the People's Republic of China and Russia are lagging far behind from an academic perspective in a globalizing world*”.

Nonetheless, China, whom these researchers claim has not yet become integrated in the process of global knowledge production, has seen its number of joint publications with the US soar in 12 years from 2,594 (2000) to 20,371 (2012) (Wagner et al., 2015: 204). With this comparison, in contrast to the claims of Al and his team, the reason that countries like China and Russia are rarely cooperating academically with Turkey is not the insufficient globalization of these countries: it is that Turkish academic circles are Western-centric.

The above example displays two parallel developments in Turkish academia particularly well. On the one hand, Turkey has emerged from its isolation in the Cold War era and is fast catching up with global trends in the academic world. For example, while the area studies disciplines that began to be institutionalized in the 1950s and 1960s took around forty years to arrive in Turkey, new areas with critical approaches to mainstream comparative studies like global history studies came to Turkey at more or less the same time as area studies, in the second half of the 2000s. On the other hand, this explosion that followed years of isolated stagnation has not carried with it the necessary intellectual processes; the cutting edge critical global studies that have developed as a reaction to all forms of hidden/open orientalism and Western centrism in Europe and the US have not been brought to Turkey. Global efforts at re-thinking such as provincialization of the social sciences (Burawoy, 2005; Jones, 2006) and the “provincialization” of Europe (Chakrabarty, 2007) cannot find a place in the teaching programs with globalization in their names. There is no question of a holistic methodological critique, even though nation-states are not the sole unit of analysis in the program definitions anymore (see METU, Bilkent, and Ankara Universities' Global Studies program pages).

- (iv) Only a limited number of area specialist were trained prior to the globalization era because the financial inadequacies of the early republican era and the isolation of the Cold War era limited the amount of cooperation in education and research with foreign academic institutions. When Turkey joined the European research area in the 1990s, and allowed private universities, these two sources constituted financial sources to invest in the training of area specialists.

Besides the European funding resources, YÖK (Higher Education Authority), MEB (National Education Ministry), and TÜBİTAK (Scientific and Technical Research Council of Turkey) also began to budget in overseas education and fieldwork funding for academics and students (Aydınlı and Matthews, 2008: 168). EU's *Jean Monnet*, Japan's *Monbusho*, and recently China's *Confucius* fellowships were added to the long-existing international fellowships such as the *Fulbright* (US) and *Chevening* (UK). Moreover, the inter-governmental agreements allowed MEB to offer study abroad opportunities in a growing number of countries. These research funds enabled language training, fieldwork-based research and primary data collection for area specialists.

An increasing number of countries have opened cultural and education centers in Turkey after the Cold War, providing both language education and the chance to study on scholarship in those countries. The cultural and educational centers belonging to countries from Europe and North America were opened straight away in the early years of the Cold War in the haste to consolidate the Western bloc: the British Cultural Association and the American Cultural Association opened in 1951, the French Cultural Association in 1955, the Goethe Institute, in its own words, “around fifty years ago”, were all established together with those of other leading countries in the Western bloc.

Asian countries only opened their cultural centers in Turkey after the end of the Cold War. The Japan Foundation opened in 1993, the China Confucius Institutes at METU in 2008, Boğaziçi University in 2009 and Okan University in 2012, and the Korean Cultural center opened in 2011. As will be explained in the next part, the East Asia specialization process in Turkey follows from these developments.

Despite the removal, one by one, of the logistic hurdles on the path to area specialization in Turkey, intellectual and institutional ones continue to inhibit development in this area. Although the financial and ideological limitations for becoming an area expert were somewhat lifted in the post-Cold War era; institutional and intellectual traditions still had a restraining effect. Intellectual and institutional path dependency prevented the philology departments from moving into social sciences and producing knowledge about contemporary Asia. Social science departments, in contrast, continued to refrain from area specializations. Disciplines such as political science and sociology only study Turkey; and, area studies is pushed under the scope of International Relations (IR), yet there is no area specialization in the institutional framework of international relations unlike in the US where comparative politics is a subfield of political science. Besides, most of the IR scholars also work on topics related to Turkey. In other words, international relations in Turkey comprises largely of an analysis of Turkish foreign policy. Other countries or regions may be the subject of research, but largely in terms of their relations with Turkey. Kanbolat (2009), the founder of one of Turkey’s first area studies think tanks complained that focusing on “the ‘Ottoman, Turkic and related geographies’ was still the dominant mindset in academia. However, even he claimed that “what Turkey needs are not European-Atlantic think tanks, but think tanks for Turkish workers in Germany”. The biggest obstacle to area specialization in the social sciences is the Turkey-centrism that forms the institutional identity of academia in Turkey (Aydınli and Matthews, 2008: 170):

Naturally, most of the academics in international relations in Turkey are still most interested in subjects concerning Turkey and Turkish foreign policy. (...) This is normal, as we are largely occupied with national problems and issues. This is why I am sorry to say that I am one of those who writes intensively on Turkish foreign policy. But even whilst working and writing on these topics I try to look from a theoretical perspective at the problem I am working on [translation by the author].

From this excerpt from one of the interviews carried out by Ersel Aydınli and Julie Matthews with academics working in the field of international relations, we can deduce that the “national question” comes before social science matters for academics from Turkey, and that for this reason the main occupation of the social sciences in Turkey is to understand (and probably “save”) Turkey. While this attitude leads to lively public debates, academically speaking, also causes scholars to see Turkey as a “*sui generis*” case.

As explained by a seasoned IR scholar, “international relations in Turkey has never incentivized comparative studies and for this reason has remained weak in studying cases other than Turkey in depth and reaching generalizations by way of comparison. We have only worked on our own affairs. Without making generalizations, however, it is impossible to produce theories. (...) The

expected outcome of being Turkey-centered is the limited potential to produce theories” (Aydınlı and Matthews, 2008: 178, translation by the author).

The “comparative” fields developed in the West may have (re)produced orientalism, but they did allow the possibility of the production of area knowledge. In Turkey there is no tradition of comparison, even with Turkey as one of the subjects of the comparison. There are two reasons for this:

- (1) In the orientalist social science tradition in which academics from Turkey are brought up, they are not allowed even to imagine this (Aydınlı and Matthews, 2008: 172):

As a young Turkish international relations academic claimed, “You will not see an Alexander Wendt in Turkey; because Wendt wrote from Wisconsin.” In other words, even if vigorous theory-building happens in Turkey, its impact would not be the same as those done by the the international relations academics in the core. In the view of this academic, Cox’s famous, supposedly “pure”, theorizing reminded him that a theorist is always affected by the conditions in which they are working. The questions that theorists choose to ponder upon, how they choose and evaluate them are in many ways affected by their experiences and social worlds [translation by the author].

This view, cited by Aydınlı and Matthews, outlines a *problématique* based less around the contextualization of theory than the power relations this context reveals.

- (2) In Turkey’s introversion, the benefits of producing area knowledge are not understood. The claim, generally attributed to the US, that Turkey is “*sui generis*”, bars the possibility of comparative research.

The Development of Asian Studies in Turkey

The development of Asian Studies in Turkey has followed the developmental path parallel to the formation of a collective identity in the country. In this sense, the Sinology studies that represented the first steps in Asian Studies in the early years of the Republic. Sinologists took part in the effort to provide scholarly data to shape the formation of the “new Turkish identity”. Asian Studies lost this active role in politics from the 1950s onwards, because researchers based in Turkey abstained from direct relations with most parts of Asia due to a fear of being stigmatized as a communist in the Cold War years. Likely the sole exception to this was the joint work carried out by Japanese and Ottoman historians.

After the 1990s, in order to catch up with the global area studies scholarship, many universities and think-tanks offered an institutional space to Asian Studies. However, the lack of institutional support for the training of area experts is still reflected in Asian Studies in Turkey. Most of the academics from Turkey who work on Asia only use Western academic resources for the lack of linguistic access to the regional sources. Basing scholarly analysis only on the Anglophone literature reproduces the theoretical and political biases of the source. Therefore, specializing in Asian Studies is seen as a necessity for being a part of the globalized academia. The promising exceptions to this mentality are the younger generations who are trained to adopt the comparative method.

In the following sections, the development of Asian Studies in Turkey in the early Republican era, during the Cold War years and in the era of globalization will be examined. This analysis will constitute the basis for the article’s main premise of using ‘Asia’ as a method for knowledge production.

Development of academic disciplines as a part of modernization

The first philology department in Turkey was established at Istanbul University following the higher education reform in 1933. Professor Erich Auerbach, who had taken asylum from Germany, served as its first chair. Turkey's first Sinology department was established by Professor Annemarie von Gabain at Ankara University's Language and History-Geography Faculty in 1935, then institutionalized by Professor Wolfram Eberhard who taught in Ankara from 1937 to 1948. As a legacy of that period, today, the Western Languages and Eastern Languages departments at Istanbul University and Ankara University are both modeled after their German counterparts. Both Eastern Languages departments are composed of the same seven main departments: Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Indian, Urdu, Arabic, and Farsi. The structuring of these university departments, like their counterparts at the European universities, was a part of the Westernization/modernization project in Turkey's early Republican era: "The reorganization of the humanities placed a central role in the spreading of European ideas and the conceptualization of Turkish citizens as Europeans" (Konuk, 2007: 7). Within this framework, the Eastern Languages faculties had a special role. The Eastern Languages departments, which are the precursors to today's Asian Studies departments, were a focal point of the intellectual and political debates that marked the formation of Turkey's "national identity", taking on the duty of legitimizing the arguments of certain factions in political debates.

Oriental Studies departments in Europe had been established in the nineteenth century primarily in order to meet the needs of colonialism. While the first Oriental Studies departments were established in France in the 1830s and Britain in the 1870s, the US only established these departments in the second half of the twentieth century following the war. As for Turkey, since the Ottoman Empire did not have the same motivation for producing a policy towards Asia, the opening of Asian philology departments came much later than those in Europe. Other than translations from Chinese literature and some archival work on premodern times, no research based on primary data collected through fieldwork was produced.

Asian Studies in Turkey, and more specifically China Studies, in contrast to those in Europe, were not established with colonial intentions. Turkey's first Sinology department was used as a means of (re)writing the Turkish history. The founders of the Republic aimed to deemphasize the Islamic identity and promote the ethnic identity in its stead; therefore, they launched a policy to write a new official Turkish history with an emphasis on the Turks' ethnic and linguistic connections with Eurasia. For this end, research was done on pre-Islamic Turkish history using Chinese sources found in the archives of the mainland China and Taiwan. In this way, Sinology departments played an important role in the construction of a new Turkish identity. Similarly, the history of Central Asian countries, and to a lesser extent Indian history, were studied at the DTCF philology and Turkish history programs in the present day.¹

The Eastern Languages departments at Istanbul University and the DTCF (Ankara University) became a sometimes conflicting, multi-faceted part of the formation of the new Turkish identity. In the 1930s, the intellectuals and political elites of the day had heated debates and power clashes on the subject of what the essential constituent of the Turkish identity should be. In these debates, three factions were dominant: those who believed Turkish identity should be European, those who believed that Turkish identity needed to be built upon Turks' ethnic and linguistic roots in Eurasia, and those who believed that identity formation in the new Turkey needed to benefit from Anatolian civilizations.

Europeanism

In the 1930s, then education minister Reşit Galip made the decision to shape Turkish higher education system in line with the continental European ones. His goal was to integrate Turkey's

universities into Western academia. He also believed that European style universities would act as a means to highlight the Europeaness of the Turkish national identity, which was, in his opinion, already a part of European civilization. Reşit Galip truly believed that Turkey was not Europe's 'other'; he continually expressed that Turkey was a constituent part of Europe. For example, he did not see the academics fleeing Nazi Germany to Turkey as a temporary arrangement in a time of crisis, but as the return of something essentially local, that is, he recognized it as Istanbul - again - becoming the cradle of European civilization and culture (Konuk, 2007: 7–8):

What resulted from this emigration from the heart of Europe was indeed a kind of renaissance in reverse. As humanist scholarship was being destroyed by the Nazi apparatus and Germany's most respected scholars were fleeing Europe, Galip welcomed possibilities for the rebirth of European culture in Turkey. In switching from Arabic to Latin script and closing the Ottoman university, the Darülfünun, Turkey tried to sever its own Ottoman heritage and enter the modern era. By hiring German scholars, so the rationale went, Europe's heritage could be returned to its rightful birthplace. Classical learning would be reborn in the very city it had once deserted.

Reşit Galip dreamed of a future in which Turkey would "not imitate the West but represent it" (Konuk, 2007: 9) but some of the intellectuals among the political opposition feared the reverse, that Turkey's attempt to Westernize would render it an inadequate copy of the West. According to them, in order to prevent this, rather than trying to Westernize by founding Turkish identity on ancient Greece and Rome, this identity should be founded on Eurasian sources and a return to "our essential selves".

The Central Asian roots of Turkism

One of the most influential of these intellectuals was Şemseddin Günaltay, who had challenged Reşit Galip's views. Following the 1933 Higher Education Reform and the institutionalization of universities in the subsequent years, Günaltay gave a speech at the 1937 academic year opening ceremony that directly challenged Reşit Galip's concept of the *école*. This speech, named "Opening Lesson: The Issue of the Homeland and Race of the Turks", was on the risk that what some intellectuals called Westernization might turn into a mere "imitation". Konuk (2007: 13) explains this situation:

Bhabha's insights help us understand the anxieties triggered by the Europeanization of Turkey, for his notion of mimicry highlights the difference between representation and repetition. Translated into the Turkish context, Bhabha's notion of mimicry illustrates the difference between the European who represents Europe and the Europeanized Turk who is thought merely as capable of repeating and imitating Europe. We see evidence of this anxiety about becoming an unsuccessful copy of Europe in Günaltay's speech, when the historian specifically warns his audience against superficial imitation. Nor was Günaltay the only one to express such sentiments; other Turkish reformists, too, warned against the kind of superficial imitation that would result only in hypocrisy.

This fear of ingenuine imitation of the Western identity eventually led to the formulation of the National History Thesis. Günaltay, both in this speech and throughout his tenure as the director of the Turkish History Institute, reiterated the importance of the connection between the roots of the Turks and the civilizations of Central Asia and Anatolia. Günaltay also encouraged the Eastern philology and Turkish history programs at Istanbul University and Ankara University to conduct historical research that would support this thesis. Indeed, the earlier research carried out in the Sinology departments included Central Asian history. Sinology in Turkey contained two groups:

- (i) Sinologists that typically study Chinese history and literature. These scholars were not involved in the political debates about the Turkish national identity. For example, Muhaddere Nabi Özerdim, who lived in China on the eve of the 1949 revolution, did not bother themselves with day-to-day politics, and the Sinologists, who largely confined themselves within the borders of Sinology, would only later begin publishing on Chinese literature and social life (Sezen, 2011: 159).
- (ii) Historians who work on the Turkish history and culture before the Han era and use sources written in Chinese (Sarıtaş, 2009: 100). Among these works were Eberhard's *Chinese History* (1946) "with a special emphasis on Turks", Bahattin Ögel's *The History of the Great Hun Empire* (1981), and Gülçin Çandarlıoğlu's *Uyghurs and the Tribes in the Gansu Region, 9-11th Centuries* (1967).

Anatolian Roots

The Archaeology, Sumerology and Hititology Departments of the (Ankara University) produced scholarship on Anatolian civilizations partially with the Turkish national identity formation in mind. Reşit Galip, Minister of the Education of the period, support these efforts even though he was promoting a Western identity for Turkey. Archaeologists such as Sedat Alp, Jale İnan, and Ekrem Akurgal were sent overseas for training (Yıldırım, 1997: 36). In 1936, the Sumerology department established by a German refugee. Professor Benno Landsberg. The Sumerology department was later developed by Muazzez İlmiye Çığ and Hatice Kızılyay. They both carried out research on ancient Anatolian and Mesopotamian civilizations and published public work that merged the history of the Turks with the history of Anatolia (Frye, 1996).

The Cold War years and the political concerns of the academia

The Cold War years brought new political concerns to the still-institutionalizing academia in Turkey. Scholars were concerned about not falling victim to the increasing anti-communist propaganda, as Turkey was a member of the Western camp amidst the ideological polarization of the Cold War. Asian Studies was one of the disciplines that were most clearly affected by this anxiety.

The pressure to cut off ties with the Eastern bloc countries isolated Turkey from its eastern neighbors. In this context, Turkey's relations with the People's Republic of China and Central Asia in the USSR were also suddenly cut off. The suspension of diplomatic relations also shape the state of scholarship. The flow of information from these countries was interrupted and traveling to these countries to learn a language or to carry out fieldwork and archival studies were rendered almost impossible. Area specialization on these countries were seen as a taboo even when it was possible to collect data from secondary sources.

Nevertheless, the rising wall between Turkey and Asia had a few holes in it. These were the publications of the Maoist parties of the era, the activities of the Uighur diaspora, and the rise of the Asian Tigers.

Asia through the lens of Maoism

The People's Republic of China (PRC) was forced into a diplomatic isolation immediately after its 1949 Revolution until the 1971 Sino-American rapprochement. Particularly in 1956, when relations broke down with the USSR and China's isolation reached its peak, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) sought to become less isolated by starting a proactive overseas propaganda campaign.

This propaganda campaign involved various types of activities abroad. These activities, named “the People’s Diplomacy”, created an environment conducive to a positive reception of the PRC and was ideologically effective throughout the Mao period (1949–1976). For this, the PRC regime used opportunities such as international student exchanges, the visits of delegations, and overseas exhibitions (Üngör, 2012: 19). These activities took place in Turkey through the Turkish language broadcasts of Peking Radio, translations about China by Maoist parties, and politically sympathetic students being educated in China.

The Turkish language broadcasts of Peking Radio, which began in 1957, were part of the institution’s policy of opening up to the Middle Eastern countries. Besides programs introducing the economic system of China, there were other topics that were thought to interest Turkish and Iranian listeners, such as “Muslims in China”. During the Cultural Revolution, radio broadcasts were reduced to simply readouts of the works of Mao Zedong. After the Reform and Opening Up in 1978, Peking Radio was renamed as China Radio International (Üngör, 2012; Karavit, 2013). Çağdaş Üngör’s (2012: 24) archival research on audience letters to Peking Radio reveals that people from rural areas, like farmers were among the audience, but the vast majority came from the members of political movements with a Maoist tendency, such as the Proletarian Revolutionary Enlightenment (PDA).

Another work by Üngör (2013) shows how the PDA movement, and especially those around the leadership, followed Mao Zedong’s writings, their influence both in the USSR and in Europe, and the debates that revolved around them very closely, and translated them into Turkish. According to Üngör (2013: 186–196) different comments on these texts and debates were the reason for the polarizations and splits in the Maoist left in Turkey. Two factors balanced out the effects of this flow of information, most of it official, from the PRC: Turkey’s non-recognition of the PRC until 1972 and the activities of the Uighur diaspora in Turkey.

Asia from the Lens of the Uighur Diaspora

After the Chinese Civil War came to an end in 1949, Turkey, as a member of the Western bloc, recognized the Chinese Republic in Taiwan as representing the Chinese state. This situation continued until the US officially recognized the PRC in 1972. Around that date, countries in the Western bloc accepted the PRC as representing the Chinese state *en bloc*. During that time, there were no bilateral relations between Turkey and the PRC, and so the students of the Sinology departments in Turkey were educated in Taiwan. Thus a generation of Sinologists from Turkey went through an education colored with anti-communist propaganda in the Cold War era.

The other political group that had an effect on Asian Studies in Turkey was the Uighur diaspora. Following the 1949 Revolution, Uighurs fleeing the PRC settled predominantly in Central Asia and Turkey, forming Turkey’s Uighur diaspora. According to the observations of Işık Kuşçu Bonnenfant (2013: 77–8), the Uighurs were a type of diaspora that never broke its direct ties with their homeland, and they carried their activism to the academia in Turkey:

Publication of books and periodicals is one of the oldest and most traditional ways that has been used by different diaspora communities to further their goals. Buğra and Alptekin were actively involved in the publishing realm - the publishing of periodical journals and books - until their deaths in 1962 and 1995, respectively. While problems peculiar to diaspora publishing such as the lack of writing cadre and funding existed for the Uyghur diaspora, under the leadership of Buğra and Alptekin, this group managed to publish journals such as *Türkistan* (Turkestan) *Türkistan’ın Sesi* (Voice of Turkestan) and *Doğu Türkistan’ın Sesi* (Voice of Eastern Turkestan).

Following the first generation of Uighur diaspora leaders mentioned above, later generations were educated at Turkish universities and became academics; and following China's 1978 decision to open up to the world, they did not change their publication styles.² Besides the limited knowledge that was produced about Asia which remained outside the Western bloc in the Cold War years, they also worked on the areas of Asia which were inside the Western bloc.

Asia as “Asian Tigers”

Although there was no obstacle to specializing on the Asian countries which, like Japan and South Korea, were within the Western bloc, the general isolation and Western-centrism of Turkish academic circles prevented the establishment of direct relations for a long time. From the 1960s to the 1980s, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan developed in an alternative way to Western liberal capitalism, through “Asian developmental state”, and East Asia gained prominence as a region outside the polarization of the Cold War that was absorbing world politics. In this way, these countries began to come onto the agenda of Turkish academics in the 1980s.

Turkey's first Japanese Language and Literature department opened in 1987, and its first Korean Language and Literature department opened in 1989. The Japan Foundation opened in 1993 and the Japanese Ministry of Education began to give students from Turkey the *Monbusho* scholarship, ensuring a small but continual increase in the numbers of students from Turkey gaining an education in Japan. In this period, students who had been educated in Japan began to take roles at Turkish universities and take their places among Turkey's small society of Asia experts.

Internationalization after the Cold War

The end of a bipolar world witnessed the growth of Eurasian Studies in Turkey. Central Asia, which had been studied in Turkish history departments in the early years of the republic, was seen as part of Sovietology and mostly not researched in the Cold War era. Conversely, it was the first region to catch the eye after the breakup of the USSR. The Turkish state had high hopes for playing a dominant role in Central Asia in the post-Soviet era, and triggered by this interest, the Black Sea and Central Asia Research Center was established at METU in 1992. In 1994, a group of scholars began publishing the journal titled the Eurasian File, and established the Center for Eurasian Strategic Studies (ASAM) in 1999, the first area studies think-tank established in Turkey.

In the 2000s, in an attempt to internationalize Turkey's higher education, top universities, such as METU, Boğaziçi, Ankara, and Marmara Universities, opened centers for Central Asian, Eurasian, and more recently Asian Studies (Sezen, 2022). Within twenty years, many others followed them, albeit with differing degrees of functionality (fig. 1). Same goes for the graduate programs (fig. 2)

This increase in institutional support for Asian Studies has reduced past deficiencies in the infrastructure required for regional specialization (Esenbel, 2013):

Though perhaps the best university in Turkey, even Boğaziçi University in the early 1980s did not have the budget, did not have the library. In addition, we were sort of isolated from the rest of the world because we were undergoing very difficult political times. There had been coup d'état in 1980, and the atmosphere was very bleak. You couldn't possibly order books from abroad.

Figure 3 reflects the multitude of Asian Studies departments in Turkey in the era of globalization (fig.3):

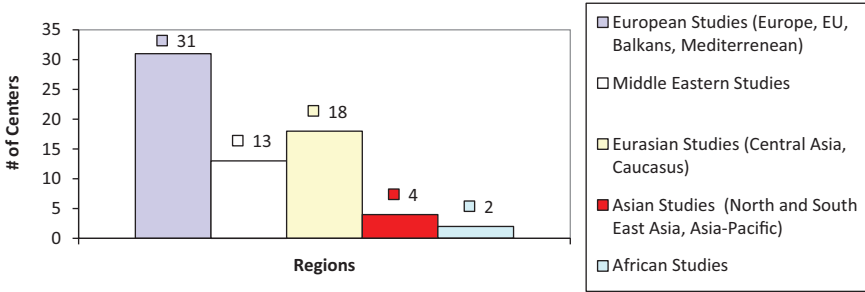


Fig. 1. Area Studies centers in Turkey.

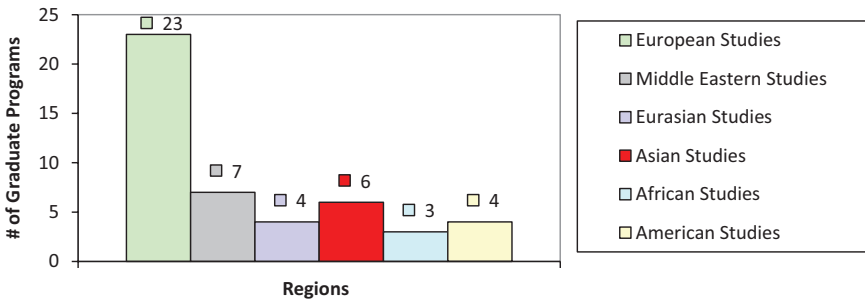


Fig. 2. Postgraduate Programs in Area Studies.

The variety of institutions in Turkey shown in the table above is seen positively by Selçuk Esenbel (2013) one of the top names in Asian Studies:

Turkey – though modest of course in terms of library, background, university experience in teaching Asian studies – has become the best in the Middle East. We are the only country so far, except Israel, which has serious programs in Chinese, Japanese or anything related to Asia. We certainly are the only country with a relative growth in Asian studies if we make the comparison, for example, with countries around the Mediterranean like Spain, Portugal, or Greece (with the exception of Italy, which is very advanced in this respect); and to the countries of Eastern Europe (with the exception of Hungary, where there is a strong tradition of Asian languages, literatures and philology).

However, this institutional or quantitative variety, has still not brought about the strength to tackle structural problems of knowledge production about Asia in Turkey. The next section will explain the reasons behind these protracted issues.

Production of knowledge in today’s East Asian Studies

The field of Asian Studies in Turkey has been stricken by the problems of inadequate specialization and insufficient accumulation of knowledge. These arise both from structural problems in area studies in Turkey and from reasons peculiar to Asian Studies.

University	Program	Place	Founded
Ankara University	Sinology	Ankara	1935
Ankara University	Japanese Language & Literature	Ankara	1986
Ankara University	Korean Language & Literature	Ankara	1989
Çanakkale 18 Mart University	Japanese Language & Literature	Çanakkale	1993
Erciyes University	Japanese Language & Literature	Kayseri	1994
Fatih University	Chinese Language & Literature	Istanbul	1996
Erciyes University	Korean Language & Literature	Kayseri	1998
Erciyes University	Chinese Language & Literature	Kayseri	1998
Okan University	Chinese Translation and Interpretation	Istanbul	2005
Middle East Technical University ¹	Asian Studies (Postgraduate)	Ankara	2008
Boğaziçi University ²	Asian Studies Undergraduate Center & Postgraduate	Istanbul	2012
Gedik University	Asian Studies Undergraduate Center	Istanbul	2013
Ankara University	Asia-Pacific Studies Undergraduate Center	Ankara	2014
Ankara Social Sciences University	Chinese Language & Literature		2013
			2010

Fig. 3. Asian Studies Programs and Centers in Turkey.

¹ Japanese teaching at Middle East Technical University began in 1990.

² Japanese teaching at Boğaziçi University began in 1988.

Lack of communication between philology and social sciences

A structural reason for the creation of these problems is an epistemological gap between philology and social science departments and a lack of communication in practice. Philology departments have an unquestioned superiority in the languages of the region and advantages in accessing primary sources; however, they are deprived of a theoretical and methodological framework to analyze contemporary social, economic and political processes. On the other hand, the social science departments have no problems in mastering the aforementioned theoretical and methodological tools, but they lack the access to local and first-hand knowledge, and even more importantly, they lack the faculty who believe in the importance of these sources.

This disciplinary gap is not unique to Turkey, but the awareness has led to attempts to bridge it. For example, the then President of the *Australian National University's Australian center on China in the World*, Geremie Barmé's (2005), recommended "New Sinology":

“New Sinology” is drawing attention to the ways in which Chinese is written, spoken and seen inside the community where Chinese is spoken, to the powers that shape Chinese texts and visuals in the world, and to the Chinese ways that meaning is produced. As a text “New Sinology” encompasses everything from the classics of the dynasty era to modern everyday linguistic discoveries and to effects on media.

This Australian understanding of “New Sinology”, although it was panned by critical theorists such as David Vukovich (2012) as a form of veiled orientalism, is an approach that has been quickly adopted by the “National Studies” discipline in China. This approach aims to unite the importance given by the discipline of philology to the background of language and classical history and literature, and the methodological and theoretical practices of the social sciences. Thus, China as a subject of study would be comparable and *conceptualizable* without its subjectivity being ignored. Doubtless this approach is not limited to China, and it has validity for the entirety of Asian Studies.³

The few but important works of Asian Studies in Turkey unify regional expertise with the universality of the social sciences. The work of China and Central Asia historian İsenbike Togan and Japanese historian Selçuk Esenbel are cases in point. İsenbike Togan uses Chinese sources to analyze Inner Asian and Turkish history, and employs comparative conceptualization as her theoretical framework. For instance, Togan (2006: 220–221), beginning this work from archive sources, questions the dominance of periodizing in history writing:

Above it has been shown that changes in the dominant concepts in Turkic history are not isolated from Asian history or world history. In this section, we emphasize the relationship between changes in the methods Turks have used to divide and accumulate knowledge within the framework of their internal dynamics and the same dominant concepts. All of these observations lead us to the field of historiography. Every dominant concept contains its own historical understanding and today we have those sources. (...) The question in our minds today is understanding what kind of historiography we are moving towards. Are we today moving towards a new phase, or do we find ourselves in a progression in terms of systems of division and dominant concepts? Today we want the idea that ‘sovereignty belongs to the nation’ to continue, and where it is not found we hope the idea will be developed. But which way will events develop? There is no clear tendency in this subject. Today, changes in historiography are seen more like methodological and content problems [translation by the author].

Selçuk Esenbel, in her comparative doctoral thesis on modernization processes in Turkey and Japan, and later in her compilation of debates that she brought together in the light of critiques of modernization theory, she conceptualized and categorized non-Western modernizations as Westernization, the rejection of the West and modernization through a merging of the local with the Western. Esenbel (2006: 16–17) also addressed theoretical and methodological problems in area studies:

The possibility of productive comparative work has only clearly been shown on one topic through being a means of debating modernity. Area studies research dne in this way averts the “West and the rest” reductionism. (...) New research strategies that have opened the way for a series of new methods and curricula prevent analyses remaining bound to the borders of nation-states. Global history, which brings a new point of view to international history, is exactly in this category. This method, focused on the historical and spatial context of international and intranational connections, will make possible new questions that will allow the discovery of new fields of research that have for methodological or ideological reasons not yet been placed on the map.

Esenbel (2006: 13) in the same analysis remarks that scholars in Turkey were heavily not involved in this global debate and that negatively affects the attempts to internationalize Turkish academia.

The lack of engagement with the critiques of Orientalism in Turkey is related to the practice of internalizing Western-centrism and orientalism and reproducing them against non-Westerners, which has been fed by the isolation of area studies in Turkey.

Asia as an epistemological problem

One of the problems that East Asian Studies has encountered in Turkey is institutional and organizational, the other is ideational. East Asian Studies, since it was developed in Turkey while there were minimal relations with the region, has borrowed the necessary tools to understand the region from the West, and this has reproduced power imbalances between East and West, therefore it attempts to see itself “through the eyes of the West”.

In contrast to Europe, which began to learn about Asia in order to find solutions to administrative crises of its colonial administrations; Turkey, which had no pragmatic reason to create knowledge about Asia, came late to Asian Studies. On top of this, once it began to develop, it became not Asia focused, but Turkey focused. In other words, Asia was a means that Turkey used to establish its own identity. In the Westernizing modernization policies of the Kemalist era, Asia was sometimes coded as “the left behind other” for the understanding of those who saw modernization as Westernization.

Internalized orientalism is a term that was first used to describe Westernizing Japan in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in the process of otherizing East Asia as a historical-cultural region (Bezci and Çiftçi, 2012: 144). According to this historical analysis of the concept, Japan eventually categorized other East Asian societies, using the dualistic mechanism in Europe’s perceptions of the East. On the one hand, while rejecting the non-Western as non-modern and framing them as backwards, lacking and wrong, Japan gave itself the “role” of developing and advancing this backward “other”. Japan’s Pan-Asian colonialism at the turn of the twentieth century was a direct reflection of this mentality. Internalized orientalism, thus, is observed in the national identity formation process of the late-modernizing nation-states (Bezci and Çiftçi, 2012: 153).

As Turkey settled to define its national identity as Western, Asia could only play a complementary role. Being confined in the Western camp soon after the founding of the Republic further consolidated such political and intellectual orientation. Other than the earlier examples such as Togan and Esenbel, Western-centrism is a new debate in area studies in Turkey.

The academic works that moves beyond Western-centrism in Asian Studies in Turkey has increased in the recent decades. The volumes *Thinking of China in Turkey: New Approaches to Economic, Political and Cultural Relations* (2013), published by Boğaziçi University Publishing, and *China and Turkey in Comparative Perspective: A Workshop on Economy, Politics and Society* (2014), which was organized by Marmara University, are the products of an effort to reject the Western theoretical framework in attempts to understand Asia.

These two academic activities also doubtless have a very important place as the start of an effort to extract the West from Asian Studies. Besides, the scholars of the two countries may learn much from one another without using the Western scholarship as an intermediary. The experience of Turkey and China with global economic and historical social structures and processes is very different from that of those developing theories about them in Western institutions. However, even though this volume presents careful and detailed archival and fieldwork to the reader through a new and rich perspective, the work in these volumes were largely limited to bilateral relations between nations. Having completed the analysis of the most up to date work on Asia in Turkey, the conclusion section will finish with recommendations for the future of this discipline as well as area studies and social sciences in Turkey in general.

Conclusion - Asia as a Method

The works that are mentioned in this study have been selected to reflect the spirit of the periods in which they were written. For this reason, this work does not claim to cover a comprehensive bibliography. Instead, these works show the dominant manner in which Asia is studied in Turkey to discover the contributions that this discipline can make to the academic world.

The development of area studies in Turkey coincides with the global debates about the Western-centricism of the field. There are efforts to redefine the concept of area, and while doing this, attempting to go beyond essentialist and otherizing categories. These efforts, pioneered by journals such as *Inter-Asian Studies* and the *Journal of South Asia, Middle East and North Africa*, define areas by historical connections, commerce and processes (Ergenç, 2014a: 57):

Throughout Asia there are regional transnational movements which establish networks of solidarity from common experiences, learn from one another and support one another. These movements establish networks of local and social movements and form a transnational civil society. These social movements or networks are supported by regulatory regimes on a transnational scale through agreements and declarations. Among these movements, we can count labor and environmental movements organized on a national level, gender and sexuality movements that develop their regional networks through workshops and programs of change, and public health movements like the HIV/AIDS volunteers. (...) Aside from these, in terms of cultural interaction, Japanese manga has come to be a symbol of rebellion against the hegemonic culture in China and Southeast Asian countries, and can be said to be a component of “the Asia of the people” (Wang, 2010). We can compare this to the film *Awaara* in the past, which became popular in all Asian countries in different ways. Just like the global capital, technology and human circulation in Asia’s megacities that have become popular references, we can count transnational and regional processes among these inter-Asian networks.

The new generation Asian Studies reject the domination of methodical nationalism. Area studies field, armed with postcolonial and neo-Marxist theories, first delegitimized the normativity of the Western scholarship by introducing the comparative method. Today, the epistemological struggle is to save social sciences from the trap of binary comparisons. Connective comparisons (Bayat, 2013). The ‘difference/similarity’ dichotomy manifested in the concepts such as dependency and integration. This new critical area studies community aims to assemble a methodological toolbox in order to not take the particularities of specific places lightly, and not lose sight of global and historical structures and power relations.

Area studies in Turkey has much to learn from these critical methodological efforts. The area studies literature in Turkey rarely uses the comparative method effectively due to historical introversion. For example, as Sirma Altun (2014: 69) argued in her work which recommended looking at student movements in South Korea in order to understand the Gezi movement:

The aim of this piece, as the title suggests, is to provide a reading recommendation to understand the social movements in East Asia... Learning from East Asia helps us to leave aside essentialism and attempt to conceptualize connections... This conceptual tool provides a productive framework for looking at state-society relations in Asian countries. We hope that the dynamism of Asian societies will be an inspiration for multi-dimensional conceptual debates, and that these debates will form a rich literature in Turkish. At the same time, the lessons that can be taken from Asia gives us a new dimension for political debates in Turkey [translation by the author].

Using this example as a starting point, we can say that area studies in Turkey can (a) understand historical events without falling into the “sui generis” trap, and (b) better understand issues such as

urbanization and financialization that carry regional, transnational, and global associations through research built on explicit or indirect comparisons.

This methodological reform proposal is especially important concerning Asia; because Asia, in the broadest terms, is Europe's primary "historical other". The global dimensions of Europe's adventure in modernity lie on the othering of the Eurasian regional system that preceded it (Jones, 2006; Pomeranz, 2000; Rosenthal and Wong, 2011). Indeed, in Wang's words, "the idea of Asia is historically a Western concept" (Wang, 2010). This is why dismantling the Western-centrism of Asian Studies without falling into particularism is an effort that would open new horizons for social sciences in Turkey. "[This understanding] does not predict entities that create identities and borders for unchanging areas, but sees a relationship as a totality. In this sense, Asia is not an area that will run away when Europe turns its back, it is a rhetorical tool with the potential to defy Western-centrism" (Ergenç, 2014a: 52).

Notes

1. The LHGF Hindology course was set up in 1936 by a refugee from Nazi Germany, Professor Walter Ruben.
2. Among Alptekin's books are *The Forgotten Motherland*, *The Case of East Turkistan*, *The People of East Turkistan Want Help*, and *East Turkistan Rejects Red Autarchy*, and Mehmet Emin Buğra's books include *East Turkistan: History, Geography and Present State*, *The Case for the Freedom of East Turkistan and Chinese Politics*, *The History of East Turkistan* and *The Real Story Behind the Başkent Conference and The Situation of Writers in Communist Areas* (Kuşçu Bonnenfant, 2013: 78).
3. Combining social sciences with area knowledge also aims to 'decolonize' the study of non-Western regions. Aydınlı and Matthews (2008: 173) come to a similar conclusion about the application of international relations theories in Turkey: "The irony of this example is that at the same time while most Middle Eastern theorists are teaching and translating Waltz's theory of the balance of powers, Waltz's own students were heavily using the region in order to develop their own theories". An interview they excerpt from in the same study expresses a similar fear: "I wanted to be someone who united theory and politics. First, I would take the theories produced in the 'core' and use them in my efforts to explain the people in Turkey. But even better, I wanted to be someone who not only explained events from a theoretical perspective, but at the same time create original viewpoints on the international relations or experiences of Turkey. That is my aim. If I could bring out a work that used an original theoretical viewpoint of Turkey or other countries, I would be truly a success. This would be a confirmation that this country had accumulated knowledge and finally produced something" (Aydınlı and Matthews, 2008: 172).

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