

Book Review

Raja Adal, *Beauty in the Age of Empire: Japan, Egypt, and the Global History of Aesthetic Education*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2019. Pp. v+268. Bibliography and Index. \$65.00 (paper).

Beauty in the Age of Empire, by Raja Adal, offers an insightful history into the ways that aesthetic education in Egypt and Japan developed in primary schools during the age of European imperial dominance. *Beauty in the Age of Empire* intersects the fields of East Asian, Middle Eastern and World History by prioritizing the study of aesthetics during the late nineteenth century when aesthetics became part of primary school education. Adal's work shifts focus away from the dominant interwar periodization of aesthetics that prioritizes discourse around a fully integrated aesthetic curriculum. Rather, by exploring the genesis of aesthetic primary school education in Egypt and Japan, Adal opens a new avenue to explore global cultural history.

This project provides a global approach to understanding the ways that two vectors of cultural education transferred between the European metropole and (in)formal colonial sites in Egypt and Japan. It shows that education was a global project to create a stronger labor force that generated content through practical studies in aesthetics. Adal uses the cases of Egypt and Japan to provide a nuanced look at the parallels and differences between the ways that art, aesthetics, and culture became academic subjects in a structured school environment during the age of high imperialism. He argues that "aesthetic education was part of primary school education across the globe. Most of the sources in this book come from Japan, Egypt, France, Great Britain or the United States. Educators in all of these societies, and we can safely assume in most every other society with a modern school system, sought to use aesthetic education to inculcate children with attractions towards a nation, an ideology, or any other normative object of attraction... aesthetic education in modern primary schools was part of a larger concern with culture, identity, and community (3)." Adal approaches the typically global narrative of the relationship between empire, modernity and culture by shifting focus towards the way modern education diversified to include aesthetics, while also serving as a vehicle to support nationalistic cultural studies in Egypt and

Japan. Adal's framework and subject work concurrently to inform the way that local nationalisms influence the globalizing ideas around aesthetics as cultural education at the end of the nineteenth century.

Both the content and the text's organization offer major contributions to methodology and world history. The text is divided into two parts, with each including an interlude and a few chapters. This structure allows for both a discussion at the meta-historical level and an in-depth analysis of one aspect of material culture. The first interlude discusses the piano as an object and as a vehicle which disseminated notions of European high culture as an inherent good. It shows that even without the documented movement of pianos, piano players, or piano music into Japan and Egypt, children in both countries heard and often played the piano. The chapters on music and calligraphy that follow provide a holistic approach to aesthetic education. Music education follows the discussion of the piano in chapter two. Adal shows that music education became a topic of discussion between policy makers and educators who debated about "enchantment" and "moral education" to educate children's "inner selves" by tracing the dramatic transformation of music from a private pleasure to a public policy (30). Chapter three focuses on writing as an aesthetic practice with a detailed discussion of Arabic and Japanese calligraphy styles. The second interlude discusses the national anthems of Egypt and Japan. National anthems were "global and representational" but also "national and aesthetic" (17). Adal claims, "this interlude rehearses the entire book's argument about aesthetics and introduces the twin concepts of representation and aesthetics" (18). The second section of the book explores the practice of drawing, as it was a practical and technical skill as well as a way to represent "aesthetic art." Overall, the two parts work in conjunction with one another to illustrate the ways that aesthetic education was a global project.

The interludes provide an innovative way to weave together the history of material culture with the intellectual and aesthetic trends that influenced them. For example, the micro-history of the piano gives the reader insight into an object as a source of dynamic world history by offering its origin, use, and global impact. The second interlude is as rich theoretically as the first, supplemented by historical images and the scores that helped to shape the national anthem. This interlude continues the work of material culture as a historical source and a culturally engaging product. The use of the scores is particularly innovative because their sound can be replicated and played in the present. Overall, the interludes supplement and support the larger case studies within the chapters. Adal's use of aesthetic educational materials brings the concrete use and function of aesthetics in the lives of individual practitioners and students into the discussion of the abstract concept of aesthetics. Like interludes in music, the chapter interludes break up the metanarrative of history and show how countries like Egypt and Japan, with very little contact both had a relationship with the piano and musical score independent of one another.

Chapter two begins with a detailed discussion of the ways that music education became part of the general curriculum in the national modern school systems of Egypt and Japan. The rise of music education is linked to larger conversations about the inner workings of the emotional life of children. Adal traces the discourse about the values of music education to illustrate the ways that educators and intellectuals discussed integrating European music into local education systems. The need for children to learn music education thrust debates about the imposition of European culture and music into the discourse around local instruments and music styles. According to Adal, by the 1920s imperialist ideas about beauty and music gave way to more local and national forms of cultural expression among Egyptian and Japanese music educators as they embraced anthems and other nationalist forms of music.

In chapter three Adal shifts his focus to writing and calligraphy to provide a narrative history of calligraphy styles and trends while simultaneously discussing the implications of artistic writing as a disappearing subject. He showed that calligraphy became secondary to speed and accuracy to cope with the shifting importance toward functional writing rather than aesthetic beauty. Adal's discussion of writing and its dual purpose in modern educational systems in Japan, Egypt, France, Great Britain and the United States purports that aesthetic writing bridged the gap between the functionality of writing and its ability to teach outward expression of the inner self in children. In particular, in Egypt and Japan the tradition of calligraphy coincided with a local application of the global push towards writing as an aesthetic medium.

Adal's project illustrates that both national anthems and drawing functioned as "global and representational mimesis" (120) in chapter four by discussing the ways that drawing taught children how to imitate life through a detailed discussion of the educational process and the influential intellectual trends that shaped art and drawing education. As Adal articulates, representing life through aesthetics (mimesis) gradually transformed over time from a mixture of global influences onto local aesthetic education to nationalist cultural frames. Chapter five places the end of mimesis within the framework of the nationalist movements taking shape throughout Egypt and Japan. Adal shows that "the construction of an indigenous national essence is inherent to modern nationalism" (141) which manifested in the ways that art education differed in method and material. This perspective reflects the ways that aesthetics and aesthetic education became vehicles for political cultural life. Chapter six, the final chapter, shifts to a smaller area and discusses the ways that freehand drawing arose around the world, illustrating the way art represented the ways individual children expressed their inner lives and the world around them.

Adal's *Beauty in the Age of Empire* is an innovative text in its organization, subject matter, and use of primary sources. Images of children's drawings, scores, and photographs of sources compliment the rich text to provide a visual reminder of the argument's frame and subject. Similarly, Adal challenges world historical methodology

by moving seamlessly through discussions of microhistory, material, regional, and comparative histories. This method, difficult to replicate, compliments the richness and texture of the sources and topic under study. Shedding new light on world historical frameworks, Adal's discussion of aesthetic educational systems illustrates the importance of exploring global history in ways that allow for the discussion of parallels or similarities without placing Europe or the United States at the center of the discourse. By showing the ways that aesthetic education emerged with local particularities in Egypt and Japan alongside global influences that accompanied the imperial core, this work serves as a useful resource for educators who seek to look critically at world history historiography. It offers a clear path to avoid positioning "the West" at the center of world historical discourse while also complicating national/ist histories that obscure the significance of global trends in art, culture and nation-building. Adal's book provides a much needed and refreshing perspective to understand the world's history as complex and nuanced with contributions by seemingly unconnected countries like Egypt and Japan making space for a more inclusive World History.

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