

## JAPANESE KNOWLEDGE ABOUT MUSLIMS FROM THE MEIJI RESTORATION TO TODAY: ISLAMIC WORLD IN THE CONTEXT OF A TRANS-NATIONAL SPACE

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### Abstract

In this study, interaction/relationship of Japanese people with Muslims from Meiji period to the present day will be illustrated. Japan in modern time, which became a regional power, began to have direct relations with Muslims and obtained more accurate information about Islam in a way quite different from its premodern practices. The victory in the 1904-05 the Russo-Japanese War caused Japan to be an imperial power and to expand its sphere of influence in East and Southeast Asia. So, Muslims were assumed as tributary assets of this expansionist policy, especially those in China and Russia until 1945. It is worth noting that a pool of knowledge blended with political arguments against Muslims was formed in Japan before World War II. Japanese, who built the country from scratch after the heavy defeat in World War II, used the prewar data and human resources on Muslims in the Middle East to advance scientific studies and to restore peaceful official diplomatic relations with them in postwar time. However, all religious and political terms used against Muslims such as “Kaikyō” or “Kaikyōto” before and during the war were rejected in this respect due to the war trauma left in state memory.

**Keywords:** Japan; Muslim World; Asia; Knowledge of Islam

### Meiji Restorasyonu’ndan Günümüze Japonya’daki Müslümanlar Hakkında Bilgi Birikimi: Sınırlarötesi Alan Bağlamında İslam Dünyası

### Öz

Bu çalışmada, modern dönemden itibaren Japonların Müslümanlar ile tarihsel etkileşimi/münasebeti ve Japonya’da İslam ve Müslümanlar ile ilgili bilimsel alt yapı, anlatılmaktadır. Modern Japonya’nın doğuşu olarak kabul edilen Meiji Dönemi (1868-1912) ile birlikte bölgesel güç halini alan Japonya’da, Müslümanlar ile doğrudan münasebetler kurulmuş ve İslam dini ya da Müslüman nüfus hakkında geçmişe kıyasla daha doğru bilgiler edinilmeye başlanmıştır. 1904-05 Rus-Japon Savaşı’ndan itibaren emperyal bir güç olarak Doğu ve Güneydoğu Asya coğrafyasında yayılcı bir politika gütmeye başlayan Japonya, bilhassa 1930’lardan 1940’ların ilk çeyreğine kadarki vetirede Çin ve Rus tahakkümündeki Müslümanlara karşı “Büyük Doğu Asya

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Ortak Refah Bölgesi”nin inşası için politik propagandalarda bulunmuştur. Bu doğrultuda Müslümanlara yönelik siyasi argümanlarla harmanlanmış bir bilgi havuzunun oluştuğunu belirtmek gerekir. İkinci Dünya Savaşı’nda alınan ağır yenilgi sonrası adeta sıfırdan ülkeyi inşa eden Japonlar, savaş sonrası bu dönemde, Müslümanlar hakkındaki savaş öncesi dönemden gelen bilgi ve insan kaynaklarını, bilimsel çalışmaların ilerletilmesi ve Müslüman ülkelerle barışçıl resmi diplomatik ilişkilerin yeniden kurulmasında kullanmıştır. Savaş öncesi ve sırasında Müslümanlara yönelik kullanılan her türlü dini ve siyasi terimle mefhumlar bu doğrultuda reddedilmiştir. Bunda savaş travmasının devlet hafızasında bıraktığı kalıcı hasar vardır.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Japonya; Müslüman Dünyası; Asya; İslam Bilgisi

## Introduction

In this manuscript, it is discussed how Japan have seen the Muslim World from Meiji period to today. For this examination, official sources as well as previous studies are employed<sup>1</sup>. Concretely, archival sources from the National Archives of Japan, and primary sources such as *Kaikyō Gairon* by Okawa Shumei; *Kansō Ajia Bunka Shiron: Shina no Koete and Chūō Ajiashi* by Matsuda Hisao & Kobayashi Hajime; *Nichido Kōshōshi* by Naitō Chishū for prewar time perception towards Muslims in Japan are utilized. Furthermore, *Nihon to Arabu* by Nakatani Takeyo and *Ajia-Afurika Minzoku Undō no Jittai* by the Middle East Institute of Japan are also useful materials to understand the postwar knowledge concerning Muslims in the comparison of the prewar comprehension.

Concerning past scholarship in Turkey, studies are more focused on Turkish-Japanese relations in the context of Ertugrul Frigate Incident at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>2</sup> and Japanese Islam policy in the interwar period from the perspectives of Pan-Asianism<sup>3</sup>.

This manuscript reviews the relations of Japan and the Muslim World in modern times. The subject in this examination is Japanese state, which concretely means government, army and civilian organizations and activists. And the object is the Islamic World, which refers to the Muslim regions only in West Asia and does not include those in South, or Southeast Asia. The Islamic World in West Asia is taken up as a trans-national space, and the relations between Japan and Muslims

<sup>1</sup> Concerning the premodern time perception about Muslims in Japan, apply to Hideaki Sugita (杉田 英明), *Nihonjin no Chūtō Hakken (日本人の中東発見)*, Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1995; Hüseyin Can Erkin. *Geçmişten Günümüze Japonya’dan Türkiye’ye Bakış*, Ankara: Vadi Yayınları, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Komatsu Kaori, *Ertugrul Faciası Bir Dostluğun Doğuşu*, Ankara: Turhan Kitabevi, 1992; F. Şayan Uluhan Şahin, *Türk Japon İlişkileri (1876-1908)*, Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 2001; Nobuo Misawa, *Türk-Japon Ticaret İlişkileri*, İstanbul: İstanbul Ticaret Odası Ekonomik ve Sosyal Tarih Yayınları, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Selçuk Esenbel. *Japon Modernleşmesi ve Osmanlı: Japonya’nın Türk Dünyası ve İslam Politikaları*, İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2015; Ali Merthan Dündar, *Pan İslamizm’den Büyük Asyacılığa: Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, Japonya ve Orta Asya*, İstanbul: Ötüken Yayınları, 2006.

residing in this space are discussed in this context. It aims to examine how Japanese collective consciousness, or understandings about Muslims has been formed and what kind of foreign policy has been exercised accordingly in modern times. It also contributes to one's grasping the overall transitional process of the Japanese diplomacy concerning the Muslim World from the Meiji period to today.

### **Prewar Time (1868-1945)**

Near the end of the Tokugawa period, Sakoku Policy, namely seclusion policy was released and direct negotiations with foreign countries began in Japan. Initially, western nations became Japanese main diplomatic goals. While they travelled to the European nations via the Red Sea and the Suez Canal (opened in 1869), it was customary to pass through Egypt under the Ottoman rule at the time. In other words, Japan actually experienced the Islamic world through Egypt under the Ottoman Empire for the first time<sup>4</sup>. Egypt had a judicial system called a mixed court, or witness court. This judicial system was of great interest to Japan, which did not have jurisdiction over the inequality treaty concluded near the end of the Tokugawa period. Japan began to contact Egypt and investigated this particular judicial system, which contributed to form fundamental knowledge of *Sharia*, Islamic law in Japan<sup>5</sup>.

In 1873 the Iwakura Delegation, who stayed in France, sent Chief Secretary Genichiro Fukuchi, accompanied by Jodo Shinshu Buddhist monk Mokurai Shimaji, to Istanbul, the capital of the Ottoman Empire, for inspecting witness court systems. This is known to be the oldest contact between the two countries. While Fukuchi was inspecting the court system of the Empire, mainly in Egypt, which is the territory of the Ottoman Empire, Shimaji investigated Islam and its followers, Muslims<sup>6</sup>.

Recognizing the existence of the Islamic world in this survey, Japan took a strong interest in building diplomatic relations. In 1876, Hiroshi Nakai, the first secretary of the Japanese Embassy in London, and Hiroki Watanabe, the first secretary of the Japanese Embassy in Vienna, visited Istanbul on his way back to Japan and met with Foreign Minister Rashid Pasha<sup>7</sup>. However, at the time, the Ottoman Empire was in a period of decline and in the midst of a war with Russia, and this contact did not extend to final diplomatic relations. On the other hand, the Japanese government, as a foreign policy prioritized the cancellation of the inequality treaty concluded with the United States, Great Britain, France, Russia and the Netherlands at the end of the Edo period and did not feel the urge to establish diplomatic relations with the Ottoman Empire.

Persia, under Qajar Asahi at the time was also a candidate of diplomatic

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<sup>4</sup> Egypt was occupied in 1882 by the British troops and became a British colony till 1922.

<sup>5</sup> Nakaoka Saneki (中岡三益), "Gaimushō Goyōgakari Yoshida Masaharu Perusha Tokō Ikken", (外務省御用掛吉田正春波斯渡航一件), *Mikasanomiya Denka Kokikinen Orientogaku Ronshū*, Nihon Oriento Gakkai (三笠宮殿下古稀記念オリエント学論集), 1985.

<sup>6</sup> Misawa, *Türk-Japon Ticaret İlişkileri*, p. 33, 34.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p. 35.

negotiations for Japan. In 1880, Masaharu Yoshida from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan and Nobuyoshi Furukawa from the Japanese Imperial Army were dispatched to the Qajar Dynasty and the Ottoman Empire<sup>8</sup>. In both countries, they met the monarchs, but did not manage to build formal diplomatic relations<sup>9</sup>. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that these dispatches were Japan's first diplomatic negotiations with the Islamic world, which was formally considered to promote relations in the 1880s.

Although diplomatic relations had not been established between Japan and the Ottoman Empire, negotiations between the Emperor and the Ottoman based on imperial ceremonies were initiated in 1887 by the visit of Prince Komatsunomiya Akihito to Istanbul. In 1889 Abdulhamid II dispatched the Ertugrul Frigate to Japan to give a medal to Emperor Meiji. In September 1890, the frigate on its way to home encountered a typhoon off the coast of Wakayama Prefecture and sank. The Ertugrul incident resulted in the loss of more than 500 Ottoman sailors. Only 69 navy personnel survived and were subsequently taken to Istanbul by two Japanese warships, *Hiei* and *Kongo*<sup>10</sup>.

Noda Shōtarō, who got on board of *Hiei* as a *Jiji Shinpō*'s news reporter, met both the Foreign and Naval Ministers of the Ottoman Empire and handed over the donation collected by *Jiji Shinpō* News Agency in January 1891, right after he landed in Istanbul. His actions in Istanbul were widely covered by the local print media. He was convinced to stay in Ottoman Turkey with the request of Sultan Abdulhamid II, while *Hiei* and *Kongo* were going back to Japan. Noda remained in Istanbul for almost two years. During his stay in the capital of the Ottoman Empire, he taught Japanese language to Ottoman officers, and learned the Ottoman Turkish and Islamic studies at the Ottoman Military School. He also reported the affairs in the Ottoman Empire to *Jiji Shinpō*, and his writings published in Japan contributed Japanese populace know more about the Ottoman Empire and the Muslim World. Noda has been also assumed to be the first Japanese staying in a Muslim country for more than a year, and the first ever known Japanese to convert to Islam<sup>11</sup>.

Apart from Noda who became a bridge between two countries during his stay in Istanbul, Yamada Torajirō, a merchant based in Osaka also went to Istanbul following Noda and made up his mind to settle down in Ottoman Turkey as well. Nakamura Shōten, a souvenir shop, was established in Istanbul around 1895 by the capital of Nakamura Family in Osaka, and Yamada took charge of its management.

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Naitō Chishū (内藤智秀), *Nichido Koshabshi (日土交渉中)*, Tokyo: Izumi Shoin, 1931, p. 27; Gaimushō Ōakyoku Chūkintōka (外務省欧亜局中近東課), eds. *Kindai Nichido Kankeishi (近代日土関係史)*, Tokyo: Gaimushō Ōakyoku Chūkintōka, 1959, p. 6.

<sup>10</sup> For further reading on Ertugrul Incident, apply to Komatsu, *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Misawa, Nobuo, "The First Japanese Who Resided in the Ottoman Empire: the Young Journalist NODA and the Student Merchant YAMADA", *Mediterranean World XXI*, Mediterranean Studies Group Hitotsubashi University, Tokyo: 2012, p. 55-57.

This was the first trade enterprise by a Japanese national in a Muslim country, which did not have formal diplomatic relations with Japan. Until World War I, Yamada Torajirō and Nakamura family operated a small trade business between the Ottoman Empire and Japan. Besides, they used to guide Japanese customers visiting Istanbul<sup>12</sup>.

Japanese interaction with the Muslim World evolved in a different form following Russo-Japanese War in 1904-1905, which was cultivated with national policy motivation based on expansionism (or colonialism). With the Japanese victory against Russia in this battle, Japan began to claim the leadership of all peoples in Asia and Russia was naturally considered a menace to the Japanese expansionism, especially in Central Eurasia. Thus, the Japanese General Army Staff looked for secret allies in their effort to weaken the Russian Empire. In this regard, military leaders took action in terms of collaboration with the Russian Muslim minorities. They thought of winning minorities over to their side to enhance the Japanese sphere of influence in Northeast Asia. From their perspectives, Siberia, as far as Lake Baikal, should all be Japanese territory. With this in mind, they got in touch with Abdurresit Ibrahim, who was Tatar by ethnicity and a Pan-Islamic activist in Tsarist Russia, and Alimcan Tagan, Abdulhay Kurbanali etc., who were Bashkir origin White Russian Muslims. This relation was not unilateral. Russian Muslims were also seeking an exile base for their political ambition to free their people from the Russian influence. The association between the Turkic Muslims and the Japanese army authorities especially after the Siberian Intervention, created the Turkic Muslim community in Japan in the second half of the 1920s. It also enabled an Islam policy to be adopted as a component of Japanese expansionism, namely Pan-Asianism by the Japanese army authorities and civil activists following the Manchurian Incident<sup>13</sup>.

The outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War in September 1937 caused Japanese civilian policy makers to co-operate with the army officials in the politics towards Muslims in Asia as well, because it served not only for anti-Russian policy of the Imperial Japan, but also was closely related to Japan's state policy to China. As long as the Japanese military elements were in the mainland to take over lands under the control of Chiang Kai-Shek one after another following the Manchurian Incident (1931), Japanese civilian authorities also felt needing to develop politics towards Muslims in Asia mainland, especially the large numbers of those found in Inner Mongolia and East Turkestan. Thus, the Committee for the Question of

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<sup>12</sup> Nobuo Misawa and Ali Merthan Dündar (三沢伸生・メルトハン デュンダル), "Isutanburu no Nakamura Shōten wo Meguru Ningen Kankei no Jirei Kenkyū: Tokutomi Sohō ni Aterareta Yamada Torajirō no Shokan wo Chūshin ni", (イスタンブルの中村商店をめぐる人間関係の事例研究: 徳富蘇峰に宛てられた山田寅次郎の書簡を中心に), *Tōyō Daigaku Shakai Gakubu Kijō* (東洋大学社会学部紀要), Vol. 46, No. 2, 2009. p. 181-220; Ali Volkan Erdemir, *Japonya'da Türk İmgesinin Oluşumu 1890-1914*, Ankara: Kurgu Kültür Merkezi Yayınları, 2014, p. 83-104.

<sup>13</sup> Sinan Levent, "Japan's Central Eurasian Policy: A Focus on Turkic Muslim Minorities", *Social Science Japan Journal (SSJJ)*, Vol. 22, No.1, 2019. p. 127-149.

Muslim and Jewish people was founded under the supervision of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in cooperation with the Japanese Army in 1938<sup>14</sup>. Then, public organizations, *Greater Japan Muslim League* (大日本回教協会), presided over by former Prime Minister Hayashi Senjūrō, and the Institute of Islamic Studies (回教圏研究所), founded by Ōkubo Kōji were established in the same year<sup>15</sup>. Besides, research journals on Islam and Muslims, too, began to be published from 1938 on. *Kaikyōken* (the Islamic Sphere) from the Institute of Islamic Studies, *Kaikyō Sekai* (the Islamic World), *Kaikyō Jijō* (the Islamic Situation) from Research Department of Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and *Shin Ajia* (New Asia) from East Asia Economic Research Bureau of the South Manchuria Railways Company, chaired by Ōkawa Shūmei are well known among them<sup>16</sup>.

In sum, the Japanese Islam policy was closely related to the Japanese national interests to China since the Meiji era, as well as its rivalry with Russia and thereupon the army's advance on the Chinese mainland in later years. It was aimed to control the Greater East Turkestan region by incorporating Muslim-populated parts of Inner Mongolia, and thereafter, to jump on the Soviet Turkic-Muslims in Central Asia, so that another Japan-backed satellite state could be founded ranging from Northwest China through Caspian Sea, following Manchukuo and Mongolian United Autonomous Government<sup>17</sup>.

On the other hand, the wartime scholarship on Islam was devoted mainly to support expansionist policy towards the Islamic world, whose primary goal was to gain the loyalty of Muslims to the Japanese Empire, especially those in Russia and China. Organizations such as Greater Japan Muslim League, the Institute of Islamic Studies etc., and Asianist intellectuals and activists such as Ōkawa Shūmei, Ōkubo Kōji, Nohara Shirō, Matsuda Hisao and Kobayashi Hajime<sup>18</sup>, contributed to knowledge of Islam in Japan by promoting the cultural exchange and policy

<sup>14</sup> See Japanese archival document, JACAR (アジア歴史資料センター), Ref.B04012533600. *Honpō ni okeru Shūkyō Oyobi Fukyō Kankei Zakken/Kaikyō Kankei Dai Ni Kan* (本邦における宗教及布教関係雑件/回教関係第二巻) (I-2-1-0-1\_2\_002). Gaimushō Gaikō Shiryōkan.

<sup>15</sup> Tanada Hirofumi (店田廣文), “Senchūki Nihon ni okeru Kaikyō Kenkyū: Dai Nihon Kaikyō Kyōkai Itaku Shiryō no Bunseki wo Chūshin ni”, (戦中期日本における回教研究: 『大日本回教協会寄託資料』の分析を中心に), *Shakaigaku Nenshi* (社会学年誌), Tokyo: Waseda Daigaku Shakai Gakkai, No. 47, 2006. p. 117-131.

<sup>16</sup> Usuki Akira (臼杵陽), *Isuramu wa Naze Teki to Saretanoka* (イスラームはなぜ敵とされたのか), Tokyo: Seidosha, 2009, p. 245.

<sup>17</sup> See Japanese archival document at NIDS, Sugiyama Butai Honbu Senbuhun (杉山部隊本部・宣撫班), “Kaikyō Shina: Sankō Shiryō 23” (回教支那: 参考資料23), in *Kitashi no Shūkyō Krisutokyō-Kaikyō* (北支の宗教: 基督教回教), 1939.

<sup>18</sup> *Chūō Ajiasbi* (中央アジア史, 1935) and *Kansō Ajia Bunka Shiron: Shina wo Koete* (乾燥アジア文化史論: 支那を越えて, 1938) written by Matsuda Hisao and Kobayashi Hajime are pioneer works in prewar Japan concerning the process of conversion into Islam of the Turkic origin people in Central Eurasia.

research<sup>19</sup>.

Ōkawa, who was famous for publishing *Kaikyō Gairon* (*Introduction to Islam*) and introduced Islam and Muslims in detail to the Japanese, stated that Japanese people should be informed much more on Muslims and Islam since there did exist millions of Muslims living in the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere. He pointed out that the knowledge of Muslims and Islam became essential to Japanese people more than ever. He firmly believed that there was no way to establish a new order in Asia without cooperating with Muslims in the continent<sup>20</sup>. Furthermore, even Ōkubo Kōji and Nohara Shirō, who were at the Institute of Islamic Studies and did not keenly share strong Pan-Asianist sentiments like Ōkawa, had a belief that intensification of the knowledge about Muslims and Islamic world in Japan was compulsory for implementing so-called “holy” mission in Asia, which would be to liberate Muslims from the oppression of Western countries<sup>21</sup>.

### **Postwar Time (From 1945 to Today)**

In the postwar international relations, the Soviet Union and China, in the eastern camp, had a “close, but distant existence”, even though they were neighbors to Japan, which was a member of the western camp. Thus, unlike the prewar time, Japan put diplomatic distance to Muslims residing in Central Eurasia. Contrarily, Japan recognized Turkic Muslims in Central Asia as a part of the Soviet Union in its diplomacy, and did not even attempt to have direct relations to these ethno-nations until the early 1990s, when they established sovereign countries in the region. Furthermore, after the defeat in World War II, Japan had neither the leeway nor the opportunity to get involved in Central Asia; the territory of the Soviet Union<sup>22</sup>.

Muslims in northwest China, which tended to be considered within the same ethnic framework as the Turkic Muslim areas of the Soviet Union, namely the Central Asia in prewar Japan, were interpreted as the ethnic problem stimulating China, which was a military threat for Japan’s pacifism after World War II, and causing a diplomatic question between Japan and China. In addition, Japan, in the postwar period, did not establish diplomatic relations with mainland China until the 1970s, and it was placed in a complex and disjointed environment where people were required to reflect on the historical understanding of colonial rule. It was also a diplomatic necessity to avoid having sympathy to Chinese Muslims. Therefore, as a newly born Japan, who had just returned to the international society as a member of the western camp after 1952, it seemed that there was neither the courage nor the

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<sup>19</sup> Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Civilizational Identities: Asia, West and Islam in the Pan-Asianist Thought of Okawa Shūmei*, Ph.D. Dissertation in History and Middle Eastern Studies, Harvard University, 2002, p. 207-209.

<sup>20</sup> Okawa Shūmei (大川周明), *Kaikyō Gairon* (回教概論), Tokyo: Keiō Shobō, 1943, p. 6.

<sup>21</sup> Aydin, “The Politics of Civilizational Identities”, p. 210-212.

<sup>22</sup> Uyama Tomohiko et al. (宇山智彦その他), *Nihon no Chūō Ajia Gaikō: Tamesareru Chūki Senryaku* (日本の中央アジア外交：試される地域戦略), Sapporo: Hokkaido Daigaku Shuppankai, 2009.

intention to have a direct relationship with Muslims in China. As a result of this situation, academic studies on Muslims in China were conducted later than in Western Europe, and it began to take place in the latter half of the 1990s.

As for terminology to refer to Islam, or Muslims, “Kaikyō” or “Kaikyōto” were used in pre-war Japan. Basically, “Kaikyō”, written 回教 in Japanese is the cognate word to *huijiao* in Chinese, which can be translated as Hui Teaching. Since the Hui were the largest Muslim group in China, “Kaikyō” came to mean Islam and “Kaikyōto” was somehow generalized for all Muslims even before the Japanese colonialism starting from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. No one denies that these words’ origins in Japanese language go farther back than colonialism. But, it is commonly accepted in Japanese academia that the terms are perceived as concept established for the Japanese colonial ology<sup>23</sup>. In other words, this phenomenon is a historical trauma left to postwar Japan by emperor-centered historiography based on state Shintō (皇国史観, Kōkokushikan). Japan had to wait for the time when the international political situation matured to overcome this trauma, which would be the Islamic Revolution in 1979 in Iran. When Japan began to have cooperative relations with the international community again in the post war time, the use of “Kaikyō” or “Kaikyōto”, which symbolized the justification of the prewar colonialism, was insistently avoided. However, the name, Middle East based on the Western European historical view came to be generally used in Japan around the end of the occupation of GHQ instead of Islam, or Muslims<sup>24</sup>. Basically, it is necessary to focus on three key words to chronologically summarize the postwar relationship between Japan and the Islamic world; 1) nationalism based on ethnic identity, 2) petroleum, 3) Islam.

First of all, the first post-war institute on Muslims is the Middle East Institute of Japan (MEIJ, 中東調査会), it was established in 1956 by Kobayashi Hajime, director of the Research Division of the Institute of Islamic Studies in wartime Japan. The Middle East Institute of Japan was created as a voluntary private organization to prepare an organized collection of materials concerning the Middle East by a group of researchers and intellectuals specializing in Islam and Muslims in prewar Japan<sup>25</sup>.

Two years later, the Japan Arab Association (JAA, 日本アラブ協会) was formed in 1958 by Nakatani Takeyo, a keen nationalist intellectual. Basically, Nakatani was ideologically encouraged by Ōkawa Shūmei in terms of Pan-Asianism. He devoted himself to anti-Western Arab nationalism in postwar Japan, and founded the second private organization related to Muslims in the Middle East. This

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<sup>23</sup> Usuki, *ibid*, p. 243.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p. 244.

<sup>25</sup> The Middle East Institute of Japan (MEIJ) was authorized in 1960 as a juridical body by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. See The Middle East Institute of Japan (中東調査会, MEIJ), Web Access: January 14, 2020.



association was inaugurated to be a bridge between Japan and Arab origin Muslims in the Middle East, and aimed to promote friendly relations and strengthen economic ties between two sides<sup>26</sup>. One of the utopic purposes of the founder, Nakatani, was also to support Japanese politicians to contribute to the establishment of peace in the Palestine conflict between the Arab world and Israel, which would never come true. Nakatani was in favor of the Arab world in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which is considered to be the largest conflict in the Middle East in the post-war time, and supported the anti-western and anti-Israeli rhetoric and movements of Arabs. He personally knew and admired Jamal Abdul Nasser, the president of the Egypt from 1956 to 1970, and introduced his arguments to the Japanese society and politicians by his writings<sup>27</sup>.

The foundation of the Japan Arab Association in 1958 by Nakatani Takeyo was essentially a result of the Prime Minister Kishi Nobusuke's formal foreign travel in 1957, which included India, Pakistan, Burma, Thailand, Ceylon (present-day Sri Lanka) and Taiwan<sup>28</sup>. Kishi was the first Japanese prime minister ever to visit a Muslim country in the Japanese political history. He, the prime minister of Japan from 1957 to 1960, started his first international tour in Pakistan; Nakatani also joined Kishi's envoy. Then, Nakatani left them in Pakistan and directly started a visit to the Middle East countries on behalf of Kishi Nobusuke government with Nakasone Yasuhiro, who was a young member of the Japanese Diet, at the time, and later seized the power in 1982. They first entered Iran and then successively visited the Arab countries of Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Egypt. This was Nakatani's first visit to the Middle East, which caused him to interact with Arab Muslims and to devote all his life from then on to the Arab nationalism and Muslims' problems with Israel and the western countries. As soon as he returned from his visit to the Middle East, he founded JAA to build up friendly relations between Japan and the Arab countries and to contribute significantly to the development of Japan's diplomacy towards Muslim countries in the Middle East<sup>29</sup>.

Apart from Nakatani and Kobayashi mentioned above, there existed another non-state actor becoming a bridge between Japan and the Middle East before 1973 oil crisis, which globally triggered an energy shortage all over the world and caused short and long term effects on Japan as well as on the international politics and economy. It was Yamashita Tarō, who was an entrepreneur closely worked with the Japanese army for the construction of the military facilities in China before 1945.

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<sup>26</sup> Japan Arab Association (日本アラブ協会, JAA), Web Access: January 15, 2020.

<sup>27</sup> See Nakatani's book, Nakatani Takeyo (中谷武世), *Arabu to Nihon: Nihon Arabu Kōryūshi (アラブと日本: 日本アラブ交流史)* (Tokyo: Hara Shobō, 1983) for further information about Nakatani Takeyo, his ideological background and his role in the foundation of Japan Arab Association.

<sup>28</sup> Yongseok Kwon (権容奭), *Kishi Seikenki no Ajia Gaikō: Taibei Jishu to Ajiasbyugi no Gyakusetsu (岸政権期の「アジア外交」: 「対米自主」と「アジア主義」の逆説)*, Tokyo: Kokusai Shoin, 2008, p. 42.

<sup>29</sup> Nakatani, *ibid*, p. ii, iii, 271.

Yamashita, who had been looking for a route to recover from the collapse of the war for Japan and himself as an individual, turned his attention to the field of petroleum that was becoming indispensable for the reconstruction of the country. He managed to make long term contracts with Saudis and Kuwaitis to explore the Neutral Zone between their countries and discovered oil for Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Japan. His investment was entirely independent from the international oil major companies and unique for Japan. He established an oil firm, called the Arabian Oil Company (AOC) in 1958, and made a business channel at the dawn of the postwar relations between Arab Muslims and Japan<sup>30</sup>.

In fact, when looking into diplomacy between Japan and the Middle East countries, oil, above all set core of the relations in the postwar period. Japan's most difficult predicament during World War II was oil. It was also the reason for the war in recognition of some politicians. After the war, Japan was highly dependent on foreign oil and most of it was obtained from the Middle East through major companies, but especially since the oil shock of 1973, the necessity came out to have direct and closer relations with the oil-producing countries. In other words, the importance of the Middle East and the need to engage with these countries in order to secure resources and energy has been felt more than ever following the 1973 oil shock<sup>31</sup>.

By the way, the Association for Islamic Studies in Japan (AISJ, 日本イスラム協会) was established as the successor of the prewar Greater Japan Muslim League in 1963 in Japan by Matsuda Hisao and Maejima Shinji, who took active roles in *the Institute of Islamic Studies* and *Greater Japan Muslim League* in prewar Japan. It is the first postwar public association related to the Middle East, which put the word, Islam on its formal name. In fact, it is not known as much as MEIJ and JAA mentioned above in Japanese society, and more restricted to an academic clique, purposing to develop Islamic studies. Izutsu Toshihiko from East Asia Economic Research Bureau of the South Manchuria Railways Company should also be added to this academic clique specializing in Islam and Muslims in postwar Japan, apart from Matsuda, Kobayashi and Maejima<sup>32</sup>.

Basically, Japan's understanding of the Middle East after the war gradually changed in a way strongly linked to the political situation in the same region. In the Middle East the decade from 1950 to 1970s, was a period of de-colonialism and popular nationalist ideologies and movements based on ethnic/racial identity rather than religion. In relation to the Middle East, in which religion was politically absent

<sup>30</sup> Arabia Sekiyū Kabushiki Kaisha Shashi Hensan Purojekuto Chīmu (アラビア石油株式会社社史編纂プロジェクトチーム), eds. *Wangan Kiki no Norikoete: Arabia Sekiyū 35 Nen no Ayumi (湾岸危機を乗り越えて: アラビア石油35年の歩み)*, Tokyo: Arabia Sekiyū Kabushiki Kaisha, 1993, p. 29-31.

<sup>31</sup> Kuroda Yasumasa (黒田安昌), “Chūtō Seisaku to Hinikyoku Moderu” (中東政策と非二極モデル), Miyashita Akitoshi and Satō Yōichirō (宮下明聡・佐藤洋一郎), eds. *Gendai Nihon no Ajia Gaiō (現代日本のアジア外交)*, Kyoto: Mineruva Shobō, 2004, p. 111-134.

<sup>32</sup> Usuki, *ibid.*, p. 261.

in the same period, an organization with ethnic recognition such as the Arab Association was established in Japan. However, as a result of the international increase in the role of religion in the context of a series of Islamic political events in 1979, the degree of recognition for Islam was gradually increased among at least some intellectuals in Japan. Under that impact, there was a tendency to put the viewpoint of political Islam concerning the Middle East in the Japanese society including academia. Its concrete manifestation was the Japan Association for Middle East Studies (日本中東学会, JAMES), which was founded in 1985. The first step in the birth of the Japanese society for the Middle East was the government's "Middle East Mission" in 1978. This was considered to be the point of departure for establishing JAMES<sup>33</sup>.

Concerning the Middle East Mission, Fukuda Takeo, who was the Prime Minister of Japan from 1976 to 1978, visited Muslim countries in September 1978, just twenty years later than Kishi's Pakistan visit. Basically, Fukuda was the first Japanese Prime Minister ever to officially visit the Middle East Muslim countries. Specifically, he visited Iran, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar in order to develop closer relations with these oil-producing countries which directly provided petroleum to Japan. During negotiations with leaders and bureaucrats of these countries, members of the mission including the Prime Minister Fukuda were convinced that cultural and academic exchanges with Muslim countries were also necessary<sup>34</sup>. Thus, right after Fukuda mission, a cultural and academic mission was dispatched to the Middle East to promote the relations in the fields apart from the oil business. To establish JAMES was essentially one of the natural results of this political process. It is the first academic organization in Japan to study Middle East and Islam in the same context as a regional research<sup>35</sup>.

The author considers that the concept of "Middle East = Islam" has been firmly entrenched in the perception of common people of Japan since the terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001. Even if some experts such as Kobayashi Hajime, Maejima Shinji and Izutsu Toshihiko recognized that the Middle East was also an Islamic region, it was after the 9/11 terrorist attacks that the Middle East and Islam were generally equated among the Japanese common people. The author sees that the following events has played crucial roles in the process of establishing post-war Japanese perception of the concept, "Middle East = Islam": 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran; the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991: The international concept of "other" in the liberal capitalist Western Bloc began to turn into the Muslim World, or so-called "Islamic terrorism"; 9/11 terrorist attacks in the

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<sup>33</sup> Nihon Chūtō Gakkai (日本中東学会), eds. *Nihon Chūtō Gakkai Setsuritsu no Koro: 30 Shūnen Kinen Zadankai (2014) no Kiroku (日本中東学会設立の頃: 30周年記念座談会(2014)の記録)*, Tokyo: Nihon Chūtō Gakkai, 2017, p. 10, 11.

<sup>34</sup> Fukuda Takeo (福田赳夫), *Kaiko Kyū Jū Nen (回顧九十年)*, Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2014, p. 286, 287.

<sup>35</sup> Nihon Chūtō Gakkai, *ibid*, p. 12, 13.

United States in 2001; killing of two Japanese journalists, Yukawa Haruna and Gotō Kenji in Syria by DĀ`ISH (or DAESH) terrorist group in 2015.

### **Conclusion**

During the Meiji Restoration, Japan advanced the trend of modern nation-building while accepting various systems of Western Europe. Japan, which exerted its full power to establish international relations mainly in Western countries, eventually embarked on direct diplomatic negotiations with the Islamic world from the 1880s. In addition, as symbolized by the Ertugrul Frigate Incident, mutual interest in Japan and the Ottoman Empire increased in a short period of time. However, Japan at that time did not recognize the Ottoman Empire as the same Asia, and did not see it as a partner with a common purpose of anti-Western powers.

Due to the Russo-Japanese war in 1904-05, Japan drew its attention not only from Western countries but also from peoples in Asia. Japan then began to notice the existence of the Muslim origin peoples, and came to see the world of Islam from a new point of view, which was based on expansionist theory and strategy in a sense to emulate the Western imperialist approach. Until then, Muslim regions were recognized only as places of passage to Europe, and Muslims were seen as undeveloped nations, that Japan did not necessarily establish close relations. But, Muslims began to be viewed as instruments to increase the sympathy towards Japan in Asia by Japanese army authorities after the Russo-Japanese war. In particular, contacts between Japanese army officials and Muslims in different parts of the continent in the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century played fundamental roles in this transition.

The Greater East Asia New Order which Japan aimed at in the pre-war and mid-war periods was not limited to East Asia and Southeast Asia, but it was in the range to Muslim regions in west Asia. Having new allies in these regions was seen as an essential condition for the establishment of Japan's Greater East Asia New Order. In particular, the northwestern region centering on Xinjiang was envisioned as the border line in the west part of the Greater East Asia New Order. If this vision had been realized, it would have expanded the sphere of influence to Central Asia, which was a mediating region between Germany and Japan. In sum, recognition as a part of the same Asia was strong for the Japanese before the war. And Muslims were perceived as tools to infiltrate the influence of the Imperial Japan by Pan-Asianists, especially those of the army authorities and civil activists.

In postwar Japan, there was also a tendency to mention "Kaikyōto", namely Muslims in prewar time as Turks, Turkic people or Arabs, Iranians. In other words, Muslims were usually mentioned with their ethnic nationality more than religious identity, especially during the Cold War period. Muslims in the western part of China and those under the Soviet rule, which entered the expansion line of the wartime Japan, became unspoken subject and diplomatic taboo in postwar time. Japanese relations with the Muslim World were more focused on sovereign countries such as Iran, Arab countries in the Middle East. Japanese view towards Muslims has changed

from the Pan-Asianist ideology in prewar time into the pragmatic way in postwar Japan, of which the only aim is to provide safe and cheap petroleum.

In conclusion, Japan have considered the Muslim World as a trans-national space in modern times. While Muslims of Russia and China were given priority in politics of prewar Japan as potential instruments for expanding its sphere of influence, those in the Middle East became cordial and formal partners in postwar time diplomacy to gain the most crucial energy, oil for its economy.

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