

Orientalism by the Orientals? The Japanese Empire and Islamic Studies (1931-1945)

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This article examines Japanese discourse and writings on the Islamic world during an era of fifteen years of war in Japan, stretching from the Manchurian Incident to the end of WWII (1931-1945). The aim of this investigation into Japanese scholarship on Islam is to contribute to the debates on the imperial politics of orientalist scholarship. The article notes that the boom of Japanese interest in Islam was closely linked to the crisis in Japanese imperialism during the 1930s, best seen in the government or military funding available to encourage the study of Muslim societies. However, the racial or civilizational identity of the scholars was an important factor in shaping the content of scholarship in Islam. Japan's Pan-Asianism, both as a discourse of internationalism and imperialism, shaped the way, as Japanese scholars claimed, for the production of a "better understanding" of the Muslim world independent of "Western prejudices". This Asianist vision allowed the Japanese to produce a different perspective on Muslim societies, mostly through the re-reading of European Orientalism. Japanese scholars both reproduced and questioned the Orientalist notion of the East-West civilizational divide in their writings on the Muslim world. The experience of Japan's Islamic studies also illustrates how internationalism, imperialism and Orientalism interacted in discourses of Japanese-Islamic solidarity.

Key words: Orientalism, Imperialism, Internationalism, Japanese Nationalism, Islamic Studies in Asia, Civilizational Thinking and Politics of Scholarship.

In the debates on the politics of orientalist scholarship on Islam, the significance of the Islamic studies that were produced at the peak of the Japanese Empire (1931-1945) has often been overlooked. The relationship between Orientalism and Western imperial projects has been studied from multiple perspectives. In this scholarship, the role of the religious (Christian-Jewish) or racial (white) identity of the European scholars of Islam have been underlined as factors that has sustained the complex link between imperialism and Orientalism since the mid-nineteenth century. From this perspective, Japanese

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scholarship on Islam raises interesting questions, as Japanese experts of Islam were neither Christian nor white. Moreover, these experts themselves argued that their scholarship would be different from the Orientalist Western scholarship of Islam. How was Japanese scholarship on Islam different from or similar to European Orientalism? What can we learn about Orientalism by looking at the Japanese political and intellectual interest in the Islamic world in an era of Japanese imperial expansion? This article examines a rich body of Japanese writings on Islamic studies from 1931 to 1945 to illustrate both the salience of the discourse of Asian civilization in producing a unique Japanese perspective on Islam, and the reproduction of reverse-Orientalist categories of East-West distinction for the service of the Japanese Empire.

1. The Question of Orientalism and Japan's Islamic Studies

During the most turbulent years in the history of the Japanese Empire, from the Manchurian Incident of 1931 to the end of WWII in 1945, Japan hosted one of the most vibrant and productive communities of Islamic studies scholars. One of the scholars of Islam in imperial Japan was Japan's most prominent radical nationalist and Pan-Asianist, Ôkawa Shûmei. Ôkawa's first writings on the Islamic world can be traced back to 1913, and thereafter he continued to write on the politics, history and religion of Muslims throughout his career as an Asianist intellectual. Ôkawa Shûmei even published a general introduction to Islam, *Kaikyô Gairon* (Introduction to Islam) in 1942, at the peak of the Greater East Asia War. Certainly, Ôkawa was not alone in his scholarly interest in the Muslim world during the 1930s, as there was a boom in research, publication and education in Islamic studies at that time. In fact, although the Islamic world was a world culture that the Japanese public at large knew little about, at one point it became one of the most written-about cultural geographies.¹ During the period from 1931 to 1945, almost 1,700 books and articles on Islamic issues were published.² From 1938 to 1944, Japanese scholars were publishing three regular journals on Islamic studies and maintained four research centers devoted to this subject.³

¹ A developed field of Islamic Studies, for example, rendered images of Muslims that went beyond the political stereotypes that characterized the representation of Jews during the interwar period. See David Goodman and Masanori Miyazawa, *Jews in the Japanese Mind* (New York: Lexington Books, 2000).

² The statistical account is as follows: 1905-1930: 907 items; 1931-1945: 1685 items; 1945-1949: 67 items; 1950-1959: 902 items. The peak of publications on Islam was reached during the 1939-1941 period: 1939, 260 items; 1940, 196 items; 1941, 217 items. See *Bibliography of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies in Japan, 1868-1988*, compiled and published by Tôyô Bunko (Tokyo: Tôyô Bunka, 1992).

At the outset, the purposes and functions of Japan's Islamic studies could be directly linked to the needs and visions of the Japanese Empire, which included a large population of Muslim subjects in Manchuria, China and Southeast Asia during the era of the Greater East Asia Coprosperity Sphere. In fact, wartime intelligence reports of the Allied Powers classified various programs of Islamic studies as part of a Japanese attempt at "infiltration" among the Muslims of Asia.⁴ Such an association between Islamic studies and Japanese imperialism seems to confirm the basic analysis offered by Edward Said's analysis in his *Orientalism*. However, the content of the writings by Ôkawa Shûmei and other scholars of Islam during the Greater East Asia War involved diverse subjects and a set of arguments that should not be categorized as simply useful knowledge for the sake of the Japanese Empire. Therefore, an analysis of Japan's wartime Islamic studies requires a reassessment of the Orientalism debate as well.

During the two decades that followed the publication of Edward Said's groundbreaking work, the debate on Orientalism has undergone a shift away from the politics of representation and the links between scholarship and imperial hegemony towards what the mission of area studies is in an age of increasing globalization.⁵ The fact that Islamic studies programs in America have begun to come under criticism from right-wing circles stands in sharp contrast to Edward Said's attacks from the left progressive point of view, indicating a transformation in the practice and perception of area studies in America over the past twenty years.⁶ In the first polemics provoked by Said's

³ The journals were *Kaikyô Sekai*, *Kaikyôken* and *Kaikyô Jijyô*. The research centers were Greater Japan Islam League Research Bureau, the Institute of Islamic Studies, the Foreign Ministry Research Section on the Muslim World, and the East Asian Economic Research Bureau. There will be a more detailed discussion of these journals and institutions in the following pages.

⁴ OSS reports included all the leading Islamic Studies experts in its list of Japanese agents for propaganda and infiltration. See Office of Strategic Services Research and Analysis Branch (OSS), *Japanese Infiltration among the Muslims throughout the World*, R&A, No. 890, (15 May 1943); see also OSS, *Japanese Infiltration among the Muslims in China*, R&A No. 890.1 (15 May 1944); OSS, *Japanese Infiltration among Muslims in Russia and Her Borderlands*, R&A No. 890.2 (August 1944).

⁵ For two assessment of the mission of area studies in the recent debates, see Andrew Gordon, "Taking Japanese Studies Seriously," in *The Postwar Development of Japanese Studies in the United States*, ed. Helen Hardacre (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 387-405; and Arif Dirlik, "No Longer Far Away: the Reconfiguration of Global Relations and its Challenges to Asian Studies," in *Unsettled Frontiers and Transnational Linkages: New Tasks for the Historian of Modern Asia*, ed. Leo Douw (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1997).

⁶ For a recent right-wing critique of area studies, see Martin Kramer, *Ivory Towers on Sand: The Failure of Middle Eastern Studies in America* (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2001).

critiques of British, French and American Orientalism, both opponents and friendly revisionists of his work *Orientalism* raised the issue of his neglect of German scholarship on Islam. According to critics, the existence of a rich and sophisticated program of Oriental studies in Germany made it impossible to reduce the West's "curiosity" about other cultures to a strictly imperialistic search for practical knowledge, given that Germany did not have any imperial possessions in the Muslim Orient. In fact, Bernard Lewis asserted that a scholarly desire to understand other cultures is a particular hallmark of Western civilization, additionally claiming that the absence of cultural curiosity and scholarly research in non-Western societies leads to more distortions and mistaken perceptions in their attempts to represent the West than was ever possible within Western Orientalism.⁷ For the friendly revisionists, German Orientalism was to be interpreted as an indication of the importance of cultural identity and nationalist politics in the formation of Orientalist discourses. Germans, sharing a white, Christian and Western identity with the French and British, also had a lot in common with them in their representation of the Orient.⁸

An important tradition that was overlooked in the early controversies on Orientalism was the scholarship on the Muslim world that had been carried out in the Japanese Empire, the only non-Western imperial power of the twentieth century. Did Japanese discourses on the Muslim Orient share the characteristics of British and French Orientalism given that Japan also had an empire in Asia? How did Japan's non-white and non-Christian racial and civilizational identity influence the content and ideals of Japan's scholarship on

⁷ The most vociferous opponent of Said's argument was Bernard Lewis. Bernard Lewis organized a conference on the subject of the mutual perceptions between East and West at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton in September of 1981. The conclusion of the conference was that the non-Western representation of the West was overall distorted and non-scholarly. *As Others See Us: Mutual Perceptions, East and West*, ed. Bernard Lewis, Edmund Leites, and Margaret Case (New York: International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations, 1985). Lewis also underlined Said's neglect of German, Austrian and Russian Orientalism. See Bernard Lewis, "The Question of Orientalism," in *Islam and the West*, ch. 6 (London: Oxford University Press, 1993). Lewis' work on Muslim perceptions of the West provided another indirect reaction to Said. See Bernard Lewis, *The Muslim Discovery of Europe* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1982), 259-60.

⁸ For German Orientalism, see Sheldon Pollock, "Deep Orientalism? Notes on Sanskrit and Power beyond the Raj," in *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament*, ed. Carol Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993): 80-96. Pollock shows that the Orientalist discourse of power may not necessarily be directed toward colonial subjects alone, but also towards a part of the national political culture that produced it, as seen in the example of the relations between German Indology and National Socialism.

Islam? The answers to these two questions could be expected to reveal to what extent the characteristics associated with Orientalism derive from the mission of area studies in imperial centers, and to what extent they are attributable to the cultural identities and values of scholarly communities.

Previous studies on the subject of Japanese Sinology have partly illuminated the peculiarities of Japanese Orientalism by demonstrating the crucial importance of Japan's relationship with the Western "Other", even in its discourses on China.⁹ Japan's Sinology was directly connected with the modern Japanese search for defining a national identity not only in relation to China, Japan's "unforgettable other", but also in relation to an omnipresent West.¹⁰ With this focus on Sinology and Japan's relations with China, however, the intellectual significance of Japan's relationship with non-Chinese Asia has largely been overlooked. To understand the national mission and international identity of modern Japan, one must look further than its political and historical relationship with China, without neglecting China's crucial importance. An examination of Japanese scholarly interest in Islam can enable us to reassess the modern peculiarities of Japan's imperialism and internationalism at the same time. This article will examine the major figures, scholarly contents, political contexts and the cultural significance of Japan's Islamic studies from the Manchurian Incident to the end of WWII, with a special focus on the ideas of Ôkawa Shûmei. Without overlooking the shared political context of imperialism and internationalism, the article aims to clarify the peculiarities that distinguished Japan's Islamic studies from the Oriental studies on Islam in Europe.

Edward Said's work raised questions about the politics and epistemology of representations of human societies that extended beyond the polemics of whether or not certain Orientalist discourses could be characterized as misrepresentations of Islam. According to Said, representations of others societies are embedded "first in the language and then in the culture, institutions, and political ambiance of the representer... (and) a representation is *eo ipso*

⁹ Stefan Tanaka, *Japan's Orient: Rendering Past into History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Joshua Fogel, *Politics and Sinology: The Case of Naitô Kônan, 1866-1934* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984). Sugita Hideaki wrote about Orientalism and Japan in his commentary on the Japanese translation of Edward Said's *Orientalism*. However, he did not discuss Oriental studies in Imperial Japan, instead focusing on the implications of Said's arguments for contemporary Japanese nationalism and its image of the Muslim world. See Sugita Hideaki, "Orientalizumu to Watashitachi," in *Orientalizumu*, by Edward Said (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1986), 358-72.

¹⁰ I owe the term "unforgettable other" as a description of the Japanese perception of China to Mitani Hiroshi of Tokyo University. "Mitani Hiroshi Seminar," The University of Tokyo, Fall 1998.

implicated, intertwined, embedded, interwoven with a great many other things besides the “truth,” which is itself a representation.” For Edward Said, the real question about Orientalism “is not that it is a misrepresentation of some Oriental essence...but that it operates as representations usually do, for a purpose, according to a tendency, in a specific historical, intellectual and even economic setting.”¹¹

Within this framework, we can briefly summarize the basic characteristics of Oriental studies in Europe during the interwar period before we investigate Japanese scholarship on Islam. European societies were passing through a period of reflecting on and rethinking their collective identity in the years following WWI. The certainty about Europe’s domination of the Orient that prevailed in the late nineteenth century was no longer present, nor was there the same confident assumption that a backward Orient was in need of Europe’s enlightening and civilizing rule. In fact, Europe was experiencing a period of cultural and civilizational redefinition in the face of a perceived crisis both in the Eurocentric world order and in Western civilization itself. In the context of the crisis of European hegemony, however, the tradition of Islamic Orientalism showed a reactionary response to the new realities of decolonization and rising nationalism in the Muslim world. In his examination of the Oriental studies of the interwar period, Edward Said demonstrated how European scholars continued certain key elements of the Orientalist tradition of the nineteenth century.

First, scholars of Oriental studies maintained their estrangement from Muslim societies, not out of a desire for a better understanding of their culture, but to intensify “their feelings of superiority about European culture, even as their antipathy spread to include the entire Orient, of which Islam was considered a degraded (and usually, a virulently dangerous) representative.” Second, due to the special nature of Islam’s relationship with Christianity, “Islam remained forever the Orientalist’s idea (or type) of original cultural effrontery, aggravated naturally by the fear that Islamic civilization originally (as well as contemporaneously) continued to stand somehow opposed to the Christian West.” As a result, “Islamic Orientalism preserved within it the peculiarly polemical religious attitude it had had from the beginning.”¹² Thirdly, the Orientalist assumption about the unchanging nature of Muslim culture was preserved, as “...it was assumed that modern Islam

¹¹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 272-73.

¹² Said, *Orientalism*, 260.

would be nothing more than a reasserted version of the old, especially since it was also supposed that modernity for Islam was less of a challenge than an insult.”¹³

Thus, European Oriental studies on Islam during the interwar years reflected a heightened sense of the distinction between the Orient and the Occident, even though the nationalist transformations in the Muslim world and new developments in European humanities could have been expected to extend the sense of shared universality of global conditions. In fact, precisely when nationalist liberation movements and modernization efforts were becoming dominant in the Muslim world, European Orientalism continued to promote the belief that such values as national liberation and self-expression did not carry much appeal for Muslims, who were presumably resistant to change and modernity.

With this brief overview of European Orientalism during the interwar era, we may turn to our examination of a very different approach to Islamic studies among Japanese scholars, who focused more on change and revival in the Muslim world than on permanence and conservatism.

2. Ôkawa Shûmei's Writings on the Islamic World

When Ôkawa Shûmei published *Kaikyô Gairon* in 1942, he had already established a reputation as an advocate of an increase in scholarly attention to Muslim nationalism in Asia, with extensive coverage of Turkish, Iranian, Saudi, Egyptian and Afghan nationalism featured in his two previous books, *Fukkô Ajia no Shomondai* (Problems of Resurgent Asia, 1922), and *Ajia no Kensetsusha* (The Founders of Asia, 1941).¹⁴ Even in his first writings on Islam during the 1910s, Ôkawa urged his readers not to be misled by the popular image of Islam as being limited to the deserts of Arabia, reminding them of the presence of Muslims in China and Southeast Asia.¹⁵ In 1922, Ôkawa visited Indonesia for three months on a research assignment for the Manchurian Railway Company, his only travel experience to a Muslim society other than his encounters with Islamic culture in China.¹⁶

¹³ Said, *Orientalism*, 261.

¹⁴ Both of these works are included in *Ôkawa Shûmei Zenshû*, vol. II.

¹⁵ Ôkawa Shûmei, “Shina ni Okeru Kaikyô,” in *Ôkawa Shûmei Kankei Monjo*, 120-26 (originally published in *Tairiku*, 1-2 (August 1913)), and “Nanyô to Kaikyô,” in *Ôkawa Shûmei Kankei Monjo*, 145-52 (originally published in *Nanyô Kyôkai Kaihō* 3:8 (August 1917)).

¹⁶ Ôkawa Shûmei, “Jawa no Hoteru,” *Michi*, 168 (April 1922): 62-63.

In terms of its content, Ôkawa's *Kaikyô Gairon* offered a first-rate scholarly introduction to Islamic religion and history to an audience unfamiliar with Muslim societies, and reflected Ôkawa Shûmei's personality as a diligent and careful academic.¹⁷ Ôkawa's long introduction to *Kaikyô Gairon* is extremely insightful for an analysis of his Asianist scholarship on Islamic civilization.¹⁸ He begins by explaining the political and intellectual significance of understanding the religion and history of Muslims, reminding the readers that Japan's expansion into Southeast Asia and China had brought a sizable portion of the world's Muslim population under the control of the Japanese Empire. He urged the Japanese public to become better informed about the different cultures that existed in Asia, given Japan's claim to and preparation for leadership in that region.¹⁹

Contrary to what might be expected from an Asianist intellectual, Ôkawa's discussion first emphasizes how Islamic culture is essentially "Western," with the shared Hellenistic legacy of Muslim and Christian societies making the Islamic world historically much closer to the West than to East Asian civilization.²⁰ Based on his interpretation of Islamic civilization in the historical context, Ôkawa Shûmei raises particular criticism against European Orientalism for categorizing Islam as an "Oriental" civilization and for neglecting mutual contributions and interactions between Muslim and European societies. He places special emphasis on the medieval period, when the Christian West learned much from a superior Islamic civilization, in spite of their military conflict during the Crusades.²¹ Ôkawa underlines how Muslim states were tolerant of Christian subjects, in addition to pointing out that Muslims and Christians

¹⁷ In the postwar period, Ôkawa completed a translation of the Qur'an and worked on a biography of Prophet Mohammad. His translation of the Qur'an was published in 1950, while the biography of Prophet Mohammad was published only posthumously as part of his collected works. See Ôkawa Shûmei, "Mohammedto Den," in *Ôkawa Shûmei Zenshû*, vol. III, 504-761.

¹⁸ Included in the work are sections on pre-Islamic Arabia and its culture, the personality and biography of the Prophet Muhammad, the Qur'an and the Revelation, the basic pillars of the faith and the rituals, the development of the Muslim political community, and the nature of Islamic law. Although Ôkawa was not able to read Arabic sources, he utilized all the major works on Islam in German, French and English for his preparation of *Kaikyô Gairon*. Ôkawa Shûmei had a large collection of works on Islam in European languages in his personal library. For the content of his personal library, which is currently located in the City Library of Sakata, see the special catalogue prepared by the Sakata Shiritsu Toshokan ed. *Sakata Shiritsu Kôkyû Bunko Shozô Ôkawa Shûmei Kyûzôsho Mokuroku* (Sakata-shi: Sakata Shiritsu Toshokan, 1994)

¹⁹ Shûmei, *Kaikyô Gairon*, 19-20.

²⁰ Shûmei, *Kaikyô Gairon*, 13.

²¹ Shûmei, *Kaikyô Gairon*, 16-17.

always shared much in philosophy, culture and theology.²² This observation led Ôkawa to challenge the Western view of Islam as an Oriental religion.

Islam is frequently called an Oriental religion, and its culture is called an Oriental culture. However, Islam is part of a religious family that includes Zoroastrianism, Judaism and Christianity ... if we consider India and China as Eastern, Islam clearly has a Western character in contrast to the Eastern religions.²³

Ôkawa's criticism of the East-West civilizational framework as unsuitable for an understanding of the centrality of Islam in world history reveals an attempt to break free of the narrow boundaries of the dominant discourse of civilization during the interwar era. Ôkawa thus rejected one of the traditional premises that remained active in European Orientalism, namely the belief that Islam represented a faith and culture completely alien to the modern West. Furthermore, Ôkawa's rejection of the East-West dichotomy allowed him to criticize the appropriation of the Eurocentric view of world cultures by modern Japanese society. Ôkawa noted that the interpretations of Islam that Japan received from the West were shaped by the biases of Christian Europeans who had been involved in religious, military and political conflicts with the Muslim powers since the Middle Ages. The fear and animosity that arose accordingly among Europeans led them to hide their joint heritage with Muslims and to present a hostile depiction of Islamic civilization. After citing negative images of Muslims that appeared in Ernest Renan, Dante and Shakespeare, as well as in the writings of contemporary scholars of comparative religion, Ôkawa made the argument that anti-Muslim views rooted in the fears of medieval Christianity had not only survived in modern Western Orientalism but had also spread to the Westernized regions of Asia.²⁴

Based on his objections to the Japanese internalization of Eurocentric views of world cultures, Ôkawa proposed a scholarly mission of developing an understanding of Islamic civilization and history free of the restrictions of European representations. "In response to Christian missionaries, and without reviling this great religion, we must strive, independently, without pre-

²² As an example, Ôkawa mentions the ministerial role of Christian scholar and priest John of Damascus at the Umayyad Court. Shûmei, *Kaikyô Gairon*, 16.

²³ Shûmei, *Kaikyô Gairon*, 12.

²⁴ Shûmei, *Kaikyô Gairon*, 23-26. For two scholarly studies with a similar argument see R. W. Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), and Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1993).

conceptions, and using the spirit of the Japanese, to gain accurate knowledge about Islam.”²⁵ As an example, he cited the dominant view in Japan that regarded the spread of the Islamic faith as a product of Muslim military expansion, as embodied in the saying “either the Koran or the Sword” (*Koran ka, Ken Ka*). Ôkawa attributed this perception of Islam to the inventions of Christian writers who were puzzled by the extraordinary spread of the Islamic faith to Indonesia, the Balkans and Central Africa.²⁶ Historically, he explained, the spread of Islam occurred primarily through peaceful missionary activities, even if political expansion of the early Muslim states made use of their military superiority.

Ôkawa’s condemnation of a Eurocentric view of the Islamic world may have placed him in a position to question the ontology of European Orientalism that posited a permanent separation between the West and Islamic East. In his final analysis, though, Ôkawa contradicted his own argument on the “Westernness” of the civilizational legacy of Islam, instead claiming a shared identity for Muslims and Japanese in the historic confrontation between East and West. He offered a political definition of Islamic civilization as an essential part of Asia and the East together with India, China and Japan, and thus reaffirmed the ontology of Orientalism. For example, consistent with his previous writings on the clash of civilizations, Ôkawa interpreted the relationships of Muslim states with Europe from the perspective of the conflict between East and West. He accordingly lauded the Umayyad, Abbasid and Ottoman Empires as the historic banner-holders of the East against an ever-present threat from the West.

This contradiction of emphasizing the Western character of the Islamic religion while categorizing it with Eastern civilization in the historical clash against the “West” is another example of the paradoxes inherent in Ôkawa Shûmei’s scholarship. Ôkawa never felt the need to substantiate the validity of the East-West distinction used in his observations about the revival of Asia against the declining Western order, given that these civilizational categories had already attained global recognition during the interwar period.

Ôkawa did not resolve the paradoxes of his approach to Orientalism. For example, recognizing the differences among the Chinese, Indian and Islamic cultural spheres in Asia, he was aware of the diversity and divergence of these distinct cultural zones. However, he still believed that it was possible to

²⁵ Shûmei, *Kaikyô Gairon*, 22-27.

²⁶ Shûmei, *Kaikyô Gairon*, 10-11

define a totality of Asia in terms of the modern experience of resistance to Western domination. Ôkawa criticized those Japanese scholars who expressed a cynical view of the idea of an East comparable to the unified West. On certain occasions, Ôkawa chose to invoke a shared history for Asia comparable to the Greek and Christian legacy of “Western civilization.” He sometimes referred to Tang-period China and the spread of Sung Neo-Confucianism as the historical sources of Asian cultural unity. Ôkawa’s weak reference to ancient Chinese history as a potentially legitimizing factor for the future solidarity of Asia contradicted the view of Okakura Tenshin, who traced the shared Asian heritage back to the spread of Buddhism from India to China and Japan, and to the universal spirit of Asian aesthetics.²⁷

To understand Ôkawa Shûmei’s positive description of the Muslim world, we should consider that there was no large-scale Muslim rebellion or resistance against the Japanese Empire that could have challenged Ôkawa’s pro-Muslim sympathies. Furthermore, the relationship that characterized Ôkawa’s approach to Islam was not primarily that between Japan and the Muslim world, but rather that between Japan and the West. This being the case, the details of his writings on Islam included aspects of his anti-Westernism. Moreover, Ôkawa’s confidence in attributing an Oriental identity to Japan and the Muslim world should be seen as a reflection of both the rising power of nationalism in Asia and the attainment of great-power status by Japan itself.²⁸ During the interwar period, the East no longer carried the negative connotations that had existed in the late nineteenth century. On the contrary, Eastern civilization signified a revived, independent Asia and Japanese national greatness on a global scale.

Islamic history provided Ôkawa with new metaphors and models for his reflection on the problem of cohesion in the Japanese Empire. Ôkawa emphasized Islam’s ability to motivate different nations and peoples to unite around common principles, and discussed the role of educational networks and pilgrimage rituals in this unity.²⁹ In fact, echoing the interpretations of both

²⁷ Okawa does not clarify whom he meant when he criticized those who denied the idea of Eastern civilization in Japan. Tsuda Sôkichi was one of the leading scholars who rejected an idea of the Orient comparable to the idea of the West; see Tsuda Sôkichi, *What is Oriental Culture?* trans. Yasotaro Morri (Tokyo: Hokuseido Press, 1955).

²⁸ Arif Dirlik has discussed how the new power configuration between East Asian nations and the West led to a reinterpretation of Orientalist ideas and categories. Arif Dirlik, “Chinese History and the Question of Orientalism,” *History and Theory*, 35/4 (December 1996): 96-118.

²⁹ Shûmei, *Kaikyô Gairon*, 14.

Arab nationalists and European Orientalists, Ôkawa describes the rise of Islam in Arabia as “both a national awakening and a religious faith.”³⁰ Ôkawa’s admiring narration of the history of the spread of Islam, particularly its success in uniting adherents from highly diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, carried a few idealistic hints for Japan’s colonial policy. Ôkawa Shûmei’s fascination with the “unity in diversity” of Islamic societies must therefore be considered with his background as a scholar of colonialism in mind. At the time that Ôkawa wrote admiringly of the new political identity that early Islamic states were able to create among diverse ethnic groups and tribes, the Japanese Empire was facing a similar challenge of creating a politically unified entity out of the different nations it ruled after the declaration of the Greater East Asia Coprosperity Sphere.

Another aspect of Islamic history that attracted Ôkawa’s attention as an example for contemporary Japan was the way Islam assimilated and incorporated the legacy of Persian, Byzantine and Greek traditions without any bias, successfully creating the integrated civilization termed “Saracen” (Abbasid).³¹ According to Ôkawa, as Islam spread to become a unifying force in cultures ranging widely from China and India to Europe and Africa, it never lost its essential nature, even though it assumed multiple forms according to the culture of a given local area. For Ôkawa, Islam’s open and assimilative approach to other civilizations was a positive example from which the Japanese Empire could benefit in its attempt to create a new universal synthesis in the Greater East Asia Coprosperity Sphere. He argued that Japan should similarly locate and develop a few shared Asian ideals within the pluralist spectrum of cultures in the Empire, allowing for the unification of these different peoples under one roof. Such hints at the need to create a universal ideology in the Japanese Empire are indicative of Ôkawa Shûmei’s approach to the crisis that the Japanese Empire faced in its need to strike a balance between the strategy of imposing Japanese culture in the colonies and that of envisioning a new universalism that went beyond the narrow confines of Japanism.³²

³⁰ Shûmei, *Kaikyô Gairon*, 9.

³¹ Shûmei, *Kaikyô Gairon*, 11-12. Ôkawa’s use of the concept of ‘Saracen Civilization’ itself implies the depth of his dependence on European Orientalism, as the concept was an invention of Medieval Christianity and was never used by Muslims themselves.

³² For a recent discussion of the dilemma of harmonizing the Japanese national identity and sense of exceptionalism with the necessity of a universal identity to unite the culture in different parts of the Japanese colonies, see Komagome Takeshi, *Shokuminchi Teikoku Nihon no Bunka Tôgô* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1996).

Ôkawa's interest in the Islamic religion also reflects an interest in societal and political organizations that differed from both the Western model and the Japanese experiences. In particular, Ôkawa was attracted to the metaphor of a lack of separation between religion and the social-political sphere that was present in the Islamic tradition. He notes sympathetically that Islam is not only a religion, but also a way of life.³³ In fact, in the aftermath of WWI, both Ôkawa Shûmei and Kita Ikki used the epigram "either the Koran or the Sword" in a positive context as a metaphor for their restorationist nationalism that proposed combining the Japanese spirit with political idealism.³⁴ Almost two decades later, Ôkawa would condemn this dictum as an incorrect characterization of Islamic history. However, he continued to perceive the "unity of religion and life" as an essential aspect of Islamic tradition, even though the meaning of this principle was open to highly diverse interpretations in the Muslim world.

Ôkawa's praise for the practical and life-oriented aspects of Islam conflicts with his explanations for the historical decline of Asia in comparison to the West. In the social Darwinist mood of his generation, Ôkawa often attributed the contemporary weakness of Asia either to the otherworldliness of Indian spirituality or to the worship of ancient traditions in China. For example, he was torn between his admiration for Indian thought and his belief that the same tradition encouraged overindulgence in inner freedoms, leading to the neglect of social concerns and causing the decline of India.³⁵ On the other hand, Ôkawa perceived a healthy combination of spiritualism and worldliness in the Japanese spirit, which, for him, explained the success of modern Japan and its resistance to Western hegemony. But, if Islam could also claim a praiseworthy balance between spirituality and social and political pragmatism, then why did the Islamic world share the destiny of other Asian societies in being subjected to colonization and domination by the West?

Ôkawa Shûmei was careful not to attribute the decline of Muslim powers to the essence of Islam. In his account of Islamic history, Ôkawa notes that Muslims were able to win over their Mongol conquerors and convert them as a result of their spirituality and religious dynamism. In fact, the greatest expansion of Islam in Southeast Asia, India and Africa occurred after the Muslim states had already lost their initial position of military superiority and

³³ Shûmei, *Kaikyô Gairon*, 19-20.

³⁴ Wilson, *Kita Ikki*, 86; Shûmei, *Fukkô Ajia no Shomondai*, 20.

³⁵ Shûmei, *Fukkô Ajia no Shomondai*, 18-19.

political unity.³⁶ According to Ôkawa, the Muslim decline could be attributed to the overall weakening of Muslim political power and to changes in the networks of global trade after Europe's discovery of the Oceanic routes and America.³⁷ In this narrative, while the Muslim religious spirit served as the explanation for the rise of the Islamic world, it was social and economic factors created outside of the Islamic world that precipitated a Muslim decline. Ôkawa does not make any argument about the stagnation in Muslim belief in his explanation of the decline of the Muslim world in the modern period, even though such sweeping generalizations are the key to his characterization of the situation in India and China. Ôkawa comments that the tendency to become fatalistic and deterministic appeared only after the relative decline of Muslim power, when they were not psychologically capable of overcoming the shock of European hegemony. The narrative Ôkawa presents ends with an optimistic vision of a Muslim revival, attributed partly to reformism aimed at eliminating fatalistic elements and partly to the political impact of nationalism and Pan-Islamism.³⁸

In conclusion, Ôkawa's depiction of the Muslim world drastically differs from the European Orientalist vision of Islam in all its major aspects. First, he did not put forward any claim of Japanese superiority to Islam, and nowhere did he adopt a polemical tone against Islam on behalf of Buddhism, Confucianism or Shintoism. Rather, Ôkawa showed a sense of identification with Muslims that stood in sharp contrast to the European Orientalist tendency, which maintained their estrangement from Muslim societies with their belief in permanent Western superiority. Secondly, Ôkawa presented Islam as a dynamic civilization that changed over time and according to local cultures, a representation that differed from the general representation in European Orientalism, which presumed a fundamentally unchanging nature for Islam. This contrast could be attributed partly to the fact that Ôkawa's scholarship was primarily devoted to the contemporary nationalist and modernist movements in the Muslim world rather than the classical texts of Islam. Ôkawa

³⁶ Shûmei, *Kaikyô Gairon*, 9.

³⁷ Shûmei, *Kaikyô Gairon*, 18.

³⁸ Shûmei, *Kaikyô Gairon*, 19. Throughout his writing career, Ôkawa's perception of the practicality and universality of Islam and the Muslim victories against Europe remained useful metaphors. For example, in an interesting postwar reflection on the success of the Communist movement in China, Ôkawa referred to the metaphor of the early Muslim military conquests in medieval times, likening the armies of Mao against the Western-supported Nationalist government to the Muslim armies in Spain marching towards France. See Takeuchi Yoshimi, "Profile of Asian Minded Man X: Ôkawa Shûmei," *The Developing Economies* 7:3 (September 1969): 378.

wrote sympathetically about the Muslim response to modern times, praising the reforms in Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan as a fulfillment of their Muslim identity, rather than an alienation from it. This approach contrasts with that of the interwar era Orientalism in Europe, which depicted modernization either as a deviation from Islam's unchanging essence, or else as a futile attempt doomed to inevitable failure based on Islam's inability to come to terms with modernity. Finally, in contrast with the European Orientalist tradition of locating the origins of Muslim decline in the culture and religion of Islam, Ôkawa Shûmei did not attribute any weakness to the religion, instead citing external factors to explain the decline of the power of Islamic states. However, Ôkawa did share a belief in the existence of a sharp distinction between the civilizations of the Orient and the Occident with European Orientalism.

To better assess the peculiar characteristics of Japan's Islamic studies and its relation to Asianism, it is necessary to extend our analysis beyond the writings of Ôkawa Shûmei and examine other actors and products of the Islamic studies community in Japan during the era of the Greater Asian Coprosperity Sphere. For this purpose we will undertake an exploration of two institutions - the Greater Japan Islam League and the Institute of Islamic Studies.

3. Scholarship for the Sake of Empire: The Greater Japan Islam League

The major motive for wartime research on Islam was the need for accurate and scholarly information about the peoples of Asia under Japanese rule and beyond. Although this imperial interest was not the sole motivation for all studies of the Islamic world, there were institutions and scholars for whom the quest for knowledge of the Islamic World had to have a useful function for the interest of the Empire. The group that best represented this functional approach to research was the Greater Japan Islam League (GJIL, *Dai Nippon Kaikyô Kyôkai*). Established in 1938, the organization had about 250 members, which included individuals from the military and the bureaucracy as well as scholars and ultranationalists. General Hayashi Senjûrô was president of the organization, a clear indication of its connection with the military establishment.

The mission statement of GJIL emphasizes the new circumstances created by the establishment of the New Order in East Asia and the principle of "*hakkô ichiu*"³⁹ (eight corners of the world under one roof) as the main fac-

³⁹ *Hakkô ichiu* literally means "eight cords under one roof," the eight cords referring to the eight corners of the whole world. The phrase was adapted from a quotation of the eighth century chronicle *Nihon Shoki* (720), attributed to the legendary first Emperor Jimmu. On August 1,

tors motivating a more intense study of the Muslim world.⁴⁰ A message from Prime Minister Konoe Fumimaro, dated September 19, 1938, stands as evidence of the political support that GJIL was receiving from the government. The main purpose of GJIL was to develop, advocate and implement an “Islamic policy” (*kaikyō seisaku*). More specifically, GJIL identified among its primary goals the promotion of research and publication in Islamic studies, the introduction of Japanese culture to the Muslim world, the development of mutual trade ties and the formulation of relevant international policies. The single greatest political purpose was to gain the loyalty of Muslims in China and to respond to the perceived pro-Chinese and anti-Japanese sentiments in the Muslim world. The leaders of GJIL were careful to clarify their differentiation from the Institute of Islamic Studies (*Kaikyōken Kenkyūjo*), as the latter was devoted solely to scholarship on Islam, while the former focused more on the promotion of cultural exchange and policy research.⁴¹ The leaders of GJIL also explained that their organization neither represented a religious entity by Muslims for the practice of Islam, nor did it have any similarity to Christian organizations.

GJIL hosted a sizable and prolific research bureau, a result of its merger with the Islamic Culture Association (*Isuramu Bunka Kyōkai*),⁴² a previously existing research center led by Naitō Chishū.⁴³ In their translation projects,

1940, the Second Konoe Fumimaro Cabinet referred to *hakkō ichiu* as a basic principle of Japan’s national policy to achieve “world peace and the establishment of Greater East Asia.”

⁴⁰ Dai Nippon Kaikyō Kyōkai, *Dai Nippon Kaikyō Kyōkai no Shimei ni Tsuite* (Tokyo: Dai Nippon Kaikyō Kyōkai, 1939)

⁴¹ Kaikyō Kyōkai, *Dai Nippon Kaikyō Kyōkai ni Tsuite no Mondō*.

⁴² The Islamic Culture Association had been established in May of 1937 by Naitō Chishū in cooperation with Kasama Akio of the Foreign Ministry and Endo Ryūsaku of the Interior Ministry. In comparison with the larger group of academics gathered at the Institute of Islamic Studies, these three scholars seemed to be distinguished by the closeness of their ties with the military. The group of scholars associated with Naitō Chishū published the journal *Isuramu: Kaikyō Bunka* (Islam: Muslim Culture) from October of 1937 until January of 1939. In the introductory editorial for their journal, these scholars indicated their conviction that racial conflict was a dominant force in world history, supporting their claim with quotations from Lothrop Stoddard’s “Rising Tide of Color.” See “Isuramu Bunka Kyōkai Shuisho Narabini Kiyaku,” *Isuramu: Kaikyō Bunka*, 1 (1937).

⁴³ Naitō chose to specialize in the history of West Asia and the Balkans due to his fascination with the ideas of civilizational interaction and synthesis. He also hoped that the internationalization of the Japanese culture would contribute to the new global culture he saw developing at that time, and his writings urged Japanese leaders to regard themselves as having a universal mission towards the civilization of the world. Naitō Chishū was famous for his work on the history of Turkish-Japanese relations, which explained, among other things, the background of Muslim admiration for Japan and the historical impact of the Russo-Japanese war. See Naitō Chishū, *Nittō Kōryū Shi* (Tokyo: Senshoin, 1931); Naitō Chishū, *Tōzai Bunka no Yūgō* (Tokyo: Rokumeikan, 1942). See also Naitō Chishū, *Sekai Taisen to Nihon* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1934).

GJIL gave preference to the works of not only Muslim authors, but also to German scholarship.⁴⁴ According to their assessment, German and Muslim scholars could be relied upon to offer a more impartial perspective than the biased view of Islamic studies offered by British and French scholars.⁴⁵

GJIL was most active and successful in its release of policy papers, such as its pamphlet “On the Necessity of Developing a Policy towards the Muslim World.”⁴⁶ This policy paper begins by describing the great potential for political and economic power latent in the Islamic world, even though the majority of Muslims at the time were living under European colonial rule. It cited access to natural resources, especially to oil, as Japan’s primary economic interest in the Muslim world. In addition, the large population of Muslims was regarded as a potential economic market to increase Japanese exports. To prove the importance of the Muslim world as a trading partner, their literature contained detailed charts listing the populations and balances of trade for Muslim countries and the quantity of their imports from Japan. In the discussion of political concerns, GJIL assumed that Muslims would support Japan in a war against the Anglo-American powers and Communism. A GJIL pamphlet entitled “Muslim Nations as an Ally (of Japan),” notes with regret that Muslims in China and elsewhere had on the whole adopted an anti-Japanese point of view in the wake of Japan’s war against China. The pamphlet attributed the negative image of Japan to the influence of anti-Japanese propaganda, including the influence of Chinese Muslims in Mecca on pilgrims from across the Muslim world.⁴⁷ In reality, there was no concrete evidence that the pro-Chinese sympathies in the Muslim world were due to the influence of Chinese Muslims. However, GJIL used this argument to push for its policy proposals. In its conclusion, GJIL put forth a cultural policy for the “correction” of Muslim views of Japan that would entail fostering ties between the two cultures and promoting a scholarly study of the Islamic world.

⁴⁴ For example, they published a Japanese translation of Paul Schmitz’s work *All-Islam! Weltmacht von Morgen* (Leipzig 1937), under the title *Kaikyō no Zenbō: Ashita no Sekai Seiryoku* (Tokyo: Isuramu Bunka Kyōkai, 1938).

⁴⁵ Halide Edip Adivar’s *Inside India* was translated into Japanese. See Halide Edip Adivar, *Rutsubo ni Tagiru Indo Kaikyōto* (Tokyo: Isuramu Bunka Kyōkai, 1938). When GJIL published the translation of Syed Ameer Ali’s *A Short History of the Saracens*, both the introductions by General Hayashi Senjurō and by the translators emphasized the need for understanding the Islamic world in the context of a new Greater East Asia heralded by the Pearl Harbor attack. See Syed Ameer Ali, *Kaikyō Shi*, trans. Tsukamoto Gorō and Takei Takeo, foreword by General Hayashi Senjurō (Tokyo: Zenrinsha, 1942).

⁴⁶ Dai Nippon Kaikyō Kyōkai, *Sekai Kaikyōto Seisaku no Hitsuyōsei ni Tsuite* (Tokyo: Dai Nippon Kaikyō Kyōkai, January 1939).

⁴⁷ Kaikyō Kyōkai, *Sekai Kaikyōto Seisaku no Hitsuyōsei ni Tsuite*.

With a self-deceptive naiveté, the pamphlet emphasizes its assumption that Muslims would be willing to cooperate with Japan rather than with the Anglo-American powers or the Communist Soviet Union if Japan's "universal message" was delivered. The idea of a synthesis between Eastern and Western civilizations, "*Tôzai Bunmei no Yûgô*", was introduced as one of the ideals of Japan's world mission, since it was thought to have the potential to appeal to Muslims and lead them to a pro-Japanese position in international politics. However, this emphasis on Asianism was overshadowed by the view that the anti-Comintern pact among Japan, Germany and Italy would shape a new form of international system.⁴⁸

GJIL advocated the classification of Islam as one of the officially recognized religious faiths in the Japanese Empire.⁴⁹ The group took great pride in its political impact when the 81st Imperial Diet discussed the "Muslim problem" and revised its legislation on religious organizations to include Islam within the category of recognized religions.⁵⁰ As part of the implementation of its cultural policy, GJIL sponsored several exhibitions on the Muslim World at the Tokyo-Ueno and Osaka-Nihonbashi branches of the Matsuzakaya Department Store from November to December of 1939.⁵¹ GJIL and the Tokyo Muslim Community were the main organizers of the exhibitions, with additional support being received from various governmental ministries, the consulates of several Muslim nations and the Manchurian Embassy. The exhibitions attracted great interest, and many high school students were taken to the exhibition for educational trips. Muslim leaders from Indonesia were among the guests of honor for the opening ceremony.

GJIL also advocated a more aggressive anti-Soviet policy and urged the government to benefit from the anti-Communist sentiments of Asian Muslims. According to one policy paper, Muslims could be expected to voluntarily join in the international fight against the Communist "threat" in sup-

⁴⁸ Saitô Tôkichi, "Nobi Iku Nihon to Kaikyô Minzoku," *Nihon Oyobi Nihonjin*, 345 (1937): 50-54; Suzuki Takeshi, *Nihon Ni Tai Suru Sekai Kaikyô no Sakebi* (Tokyo: Dai Nihon Kaikyô Kyôkai, 1939); Takisawa Toshiaki, "Nihon Kaikyôken ni Hairu," *Shokô*, 118 (1938): 1-3.

⁴⁹ Dai Nippon Kaikyô Kyôkai, *Kaikyô Kônin Ga Waga Kokumin Ni Ataeru Eikyô Ni Tsuite no Mondô* (Tokyo: Dai Nippon Kaikyô Kyôkai, 1939).

⁵⁰ Dai Nippon Kaikyô Kyôkai Chosabu, ed. *Dai 81 Kai Teikoku Gikai Ni Okeru Kaikyô Mondai No Shingi* (Tokyo: Dai Nippon Kaikyô Kyôkai, 1943).

⁵¹ Dai Nippon Kaikyô Kyôkai-Tokyo Isuramu Kyôdan, *Kaikyôken Tenrankai—Zen Sekai Kaikyôto Daichi Taikai Raichô Kaikyôto Shisatsudan* (Tokyo, Dai Nippon Kaikyô Kyôkai, 1940).

port of the anti-Comintern pact.⁵² The paper divided the colonized Muslim world into two categories, separating those under British and Dutch rule from those under Soviet Communist rule. While hinting that Japan could not ignore the Muslim colonies of the British Empire in the context of its policy towards Britain, it focused specifically on the benefits of cooperation with the Muslims of Central Asia in a conflict against Soviet Communism.⁵³ The policy suggestions were enthusiastic and over-optimistic:

The majority of Muslims live in Asia. They have the self-consciousness of being oppressed colored peoples, and they hold, very sincerely and fiercely, anti-Bolshevik and anti-Western ideas. Meanwhile, they keep very warm feelings towards our country as an Eastern nation and as the leader of Asia. Even concerning the present China Incident, the Muslim attitude is different from the Western and Soviet position, as they hope to get the support of a strong Japan in order to revive their homelands.⁵⁴

GJIL compared Japan's Islamic policy to those of other great powers, quickly dismissing the policies of England, Russia and France as failures in view of the rising anti-colonial, anti-Christian and anti-Communist trends prevalent in the Muslim world. Italy and Germany also had specific Islamic policies, declaring their leaders "friends of Muslims." For example, as early as 1898, the German Emperor took the opportunity of a visit to Damascus to declare himself "a friend of Muslims," while Mussolini made the claim that he was "a protector of Muslims" during his 1937 visit to Libya.⁵⁵ However, according to GJIL, the Islamic policy of Italy was also a failure, largely attributable to the legacy of the Ottoman-Italian wars and Italian military expansion into North Africa. Only to Germany did GJIL concede recognition of partial success in its policy towards the Muslim world. In contrast to the failings of all these white powers, though, Japan's Islamic policy was presented as a potential success, given that Japan had no negative colonial history in the Muslim world. This policy paper also argued that both Italy and Germany supported Japan's Islamic policy in Asia.⁵⁶ However, GJIL believed that Japan

⁵² Dai Nippon Kaikyô Kyôkai, *Higashi Hankyû ni Okeru Bôkyô Tebbeki Kôsei to Kaikyôto* (Tokyo: Dai Nippon Kaikyô Kyôkai, 1939).

⁵³ Dai Nippon Kaikyô Kyôkai, *Kunô Suru So-Ren Kaikyô Minzoku* (Tokyo: Dai Nippon Kaikyô Kyôkai, 1939).

⁵⁴ See Kaikyô Kyôkai, *Kunô Suru So-Ren Kaikyô Minzoku*, 13.

⁵⁵ Italy's Islamic policy was also described and discussed as a potential model for Japan by Sakurai Masashi, *Dai Toa Kaikyô Hattenshi* (Tokyo: Sanseido, 1943), 8.

⁵⁶ Kaikyô Kyôkai, *Sekai Kaikyôto Seisaku no Hitsuyôsei ni Tsuite*. There were Muslim nationalists exiled from Russia that were supported by both Japan and Germany. See Matsunaga

had yet to exploit the untapped potential of its presumed cultural and political prestige in the Muslim world. As the only evidence for this argument, the pamphlet quoted a call for collaboration with Japan issued over the course of an interview with Prince Huseyin of Yemen, a minor figure from the Zaydi ruling family, who visited Tokyo in 1938 to attend the opening ceremonies of the Tokyo Mosque.

Besides publishing policy papers and organizing exhibitions on the Muslim world, GJIL accomplished its most tangible work by issuing a monthly journal entitled *Kaikyō Sekai* (The Muslim World) after April of 1939. The journal was primarily devoted to introducing Islamic culture, history and civilization to a Japanese readership and included assessments of international affairs. It argued that nationalist movements in the Muslim world should cooperate with the Axis Powers and Japan if a war were to break out in Europe.⁵⁷

Ôkawa Shûmei's books were praised and promoted in the pages of *Kaikyō Sekai*. However, the contents of the literature published by GJIL showed major differences from Ôkawa Shûmei's Asianist views on two crucial points. First, GJIL tended to perpetuate the stereotypical images of Muslims that Ôkawa Shûmei had often criticized as a Japanese appropriation of prejudiced Western views of Islam. Secondly, and more importantly, GJIL did not make an idealistic commitment to the decolonization of Asia. Instead, it reflected a realistic political discourse that focused on forming an anti-Communist alliance against the Soviet Union and on strengthening Japan's policy in China. For the GJIL, knowledge of the Muslim world was primarily for the sake of advancing Japanese interests. However, in their self-referential repetitions of several misleading assumptions of Muslim sympathy for Japan, GJIL promoted an unsubstantiated and misleading optimism that the Japanese Empire would find natural allies in the Muslim populations of Asia in the case of a military confrontation with the Western colonial powers.⁵⁸

Akira, "Ayazu Ishaki to Kyokutô no Tatarujin Comuniti," in *Kindai Nihon to Toruko Sekai*, ed. Ikei Masaru and Sakamoto Tsutomu (Tokyo: Keisô Shobo, 1999), 219-263.

⁵⁷ As an example, see Sôsa Tanetsugu, "Ôshu Senran to Kaikyô Ken no Dôkô," *Kaikyô Sekai* 1/7 (October 1939): 1-8.

⁵⁸ A book entitled *The Present Conditions and Future of Muslims* by Katô Hisashi demonstrates the difference between the realistic Asianism of GJIL, which stressed Japan's national interest, and the internationalist and idealistic themes of Ôkawa's Asianism. Published with a calligraphy page of "*hakkô ichiu*" by General Hayashi Senjurô, Katô Hisashi's book devoted a special chapter to discussing the situation of Muslims in China, India and Indonesia, offering concrete policy suggestions such as advocating the use of Muslim religious and national identity both in the construction of the New Order in East Asia and in the fight against Communism. See Katô Hisashi, *Kaikyô no Rekishi to Genjo* (Tokyo: Ôsakayagô Shoten, 1941).

4. Historical Background of Japan's Islamic policy

Although the pragmatic Asianism of the GJIL seemed to emerge in response to the crisis that followed the China Incident in 1937, the idea of developing a special policy for the Islamic world can be traced back to the period after the Russo-Japanese War, originating from a small group of Japanese Asianists mostly connected with the Kokuryūkai. Therefore, the Islamic policy experimented with by the Japanese authorities cannot be regarded solely as an immediate response to the crisis of the China Incident, particularly given the absence of a comparable policy towards Christian and Hindu societies. A full profile and the activities of the Kokuryūkai members who were involved in the propagation and networking for Japanese-Muslim solidarity is beyond the scope of this article.⁵⁹ However, it should be noted that the ideas and activities of this small group of advocates for an Islamic policy within the Kokuryūkai were not taken very seriously by the military and civilian authorities between 1905 and the 1930s.

It was only after Japan's withdrawal from the League of Nations in 1933 that some members of the military began to show interest in the suggestion that Japan develop a special policy towards Muslims in China and beyond. We can follow the change in the relationship between Kokuryūkai activists and the Japanese government in the autobiographical narratives of Wakabayashi Han, who was interested in the Muslim world ever since his visit to India with a Burmese monk and the nationalist U. Ottama in 1912.⁶⁰ Wakabayashi's discovery of Indian Muslims led him to undertake further research about Islam in Asia. For twenty years, he worked closely with a small circle of Islamic experts within Kokuryūkai, led by Tanaka Ipppei.⁶¹ According to Wakabayashi, however, the activities of his small group not

⁵⁹ Selçuk Esenbel, "Japanese Interest in the Ottoman Empire," in *The Japanese and Europe: Images and Perceptions*, ed. Bert Edstrom (Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000), 112-20; El-Mostafa Rezrazi, "Pan-Asianism and the Japanese Islam: Hatano Uhō: From Espionage to Pan-Islamist Activity," *Annals of the Japan Association for Middle East Studies*, 12 (1997): 89-112.

⁶⁰ U. Ottama (1879-1939) was an influential figure in Burmese nationalism. Influenced by both the Indian National Congress and the Japanese model, Ottama denounced British colonial rule. He was imprisoned by the British authorities for a very long time, ultimately dying in prison. For Ōkawa's praise of Ottama, see Ōkawa Shūmei, "Ottama Hōshi o Omou," in *Ōkawa Shūmei Zenshū* 2: 913-15.

⁶¹ Tanaka Ipppei was a scholar of China and Buddhism. He converted to Islam and performed pilgrimages to Mecca in 1925 and 1933. Wakabayashi describes Tanaka Ipppei as a fighter for "Sonnō Yūkoku," meaning "Revere the Emperor, and be a Patriot", despite the fact that Tanaka became a Muslim and adopted the name Haji Nur Muhammad in 1918.

only did not achieve any results, but it received no support from the government, and he became pessimistic about future success.⁶² Then in 1932 Wakabayashi was sent by Tōyama Mitsuru and Uchida Ryōhei to observe the meeting of the League of Nations in Geneva. It was only during his trip back to Japan, having witnessed the vital decision to withdraw from the League, that Wakabayashi had his first chance to talk with Isogai Rensuke, a Lieutenant Colonel in the Japanese Army, and he seized this opportunity to explain the benefits that attention to the Muslim World could bring to Japan's East Asian policy. Isogai Rensuke later contacted Wakabayashi and introduced him to Army Minister Araki Sadao.⁶³ Wakabayashi's story of the developments that followed this meeting runs as a narrative of triumph, as the Japanese army began to implement an Islamic policy and supported the activities of the Kokuryūkai group. It is clear from Wakabayashi's story that Japan's withdrawal from the League of Nations in 1933 was a turning point in the Japanese government's attitude to the ideas of an Islamic policy. The account also demonstrates that, had a vocal group of Kokuryūkai activists not existed to promote the potential political benefits of sympathy from the Muslim populations for Japan, it is probable that an organization such as the Greater Japan Islam League would not have come into being by 1939.

Sakuma Teijirō and Ariga Bunpachirō were two other personalities representing the continuity of ideas in the Asianist commitment to Japanese-Muslim cooperation. Both converted to Islam during the 1910s, without abandoning their ultra-nationalistic patriotism. Sakuma had been assigned by Kokuryūkai to study Islam, and he lived in Turkey for three years.⁶⁴ He was primarily an expert on Chinese Muslims, among whom he was known as a convert with the name Ilyas. Sakuma established the first important Japanese-sponsored Islamic organization in Shanghai in 1923, aiming to inspire Chinese Muslims to rise "from their age-old lethargy to unite them in a great Pan-Islamic movement."⁶⁵ As early as the mid-1920s, Sakuma out-

⁶² His brother Wakabayashi Kyūman worked for the same cause, operating undercover as a merchant among Chinese Muslims until he died in Changsha in 1924. For Wakabayashi's reflections on the history of the Kokuryūkai circle of Islamic policy advocates, see Wakabayashi Han, *Kaikyō Sekai to Nihon* (Tokyo: Wakabayashi Han, 1937), 1-3.

⁶³ Han, *Kaikyō Sekai to Nihon*, 3-7. Araki Sadao (1877-1966) was a leader in the Imperial Way faction of the Army.

⁶⁴ Derk Bodde, "Japan and the Muslims of China," *Far Eastern Survey* 15/20 (9, 1946): 312.

⁶⁵ Sakuma Teijirō, *Shina Kaikyōto no Kakō, Genzai Oyobi Shōrai* (Tokyo 1924). This book was highly praised by eminent scholars in the field like Naitō Chishū for its analysis of the reality of Muslims in China. For Naitō Chishū's positive assessment of the book, see the introduction to Sakuma Teijiro, *Kaikyō Kaisetsu* (Tokyo: Genkai Shobō, 1935).

lined a program for bringing the Islamic religion to Japan through the agency of Chinese Muslims, arguing that if Japan could cooperate with the Pan-Islamic movement, Russian penetration into the Islamic world could be checked and the entry of Communism into Japan prevented.⁶⁶

Ariga Bunpachirô has a unique profile among all the Japanese Muslims.⁶⁷ He converted to Islam through his encounter and relations with Muslims in India, and just a few months after the China Incident in December 1937 he published a highly ambitious pamphlet titled *Nihon Isuramukyô no Setsumei* (An Explanation for Japanese Islam). The striking aspect of this missionary manifesto to the Japanese nation was its political stance emphasizing Japan's isolation in the event of a struggle between civilizations. Regarding a final war between the white and colored races as an almost inescapable culmination of the conditions of the 1930s, Ariga expected that Japan would naturally take on the leadership of the colored peoples. However, he believed that Japan on its own could not hold its position of power in a global struggle for very long, and was in need of the strength and support of international allies. As a missionary for Islam, he produced a doctrine of Japanese leadership among the Muslims against the "world domination of the white race."⁶⁸

Ariga Bunpachirô's patriotic advocacy of Islam as a universal religion to facilitate Japan's leadership of Asia raises questions about the nature of the Japanese approach to the Islamic faith within an Asianist framework. How is it that some Japanese Asianists could be very confident about converting to a new religion while preserving their nationalist loyalties and imperialist visions? An answer to this question can be found in a commentary written by Sakurai Masashi, a scholar of Buddhism and religious studies, on the subject of the future of Islam in Japan. Sakurai looked favorably on the efforts of an increasing number of Japanese Muslims to combine the Japanese national mission with the Islamic faith. He also categorically identified Islam, described

⁶⁶ Sakuma Teijirô, *Kaikyô No Ugoki* (Tokyo 1938). After depicting the contemporary political and social reality of Chinese Muslims, Sakuma asks the Japanese government to pay attention to the independence movement in Eastern Turkistan, especially to counter the British and Soviet policies in West China.

⁶⁷ Ariga Bunpachirô was once praised by Kasama Akio as a "progressive Muslim with a Japanese Spirit" whose religious commitment "springs from the abiding spirit of patriotism of the Japanese, while he does away with the superficial and petty rules and regulations blindly followed by the Turks and the Arabs." See Kasama Akio, *Kaikyôto* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shinshô, 1941), 113.

⁶⁸ Ariga Bunpachirô, *Nihon Isuramukyô no Setsumei* (Tokyo 1937), 2.

as a religion of Asia which was “born and developed in Asia”, with the colored races in opposition to his identification of Christianity with the white race. Accordingly, he believed that Japan could count on the support of Muslims within the East Asia Coprosperity Sphere against the Anglo-American powers.⁶⁹ Sakurai depicted the Muslims in China who fought against Japanese rule as “puppets of the whites”, believing that Japan could, in the end, rely on Muslim support on the basis of racial solidarity. Meanwhile, Sakurai was so confident in the strength of Japanese identity that he did not expect Islam to offer any further cultural and religious appeal to Japanese people beyond its immediate political utility in international relations.⁷⁰

5. Internationalism and Imperialism at the Institute of Islamic Studies

While GJIL’s policy initiatives largely fit into the framework of area studies research undertaken for the sake of the Japanese Empire, the activities of the Institute of Islamic Studies (*Kaikyōken Kenkyūjo*) represented a more scholarly interest in Islamic studies and reflected the cultural internationalism of the interwar period. The Institute’s ties with Japan’s imperial projects, however, raise questions about the complex interaction between the ideals of Pan-Asianism and the Japanese Empire.

The Institute of Islamic Studies was Japan’s primary academic center for research on Islam, hosting the largest number of scholars and the best library facilities out of four such centers in existence.⁷¹ Although the institute was established in March of 1938 by Ōkubo Kōji, Matsuda Hisao and Kobayashi Hajime, its origins can be traced back to 1932, when almost all the Japanese scholars with an interest in Islamic studies established the Institute of Islamic Culture (Isuramu Bunka Kenkyūjo) and published a periodical called *Isuramu Bunka* (Islamic Culture).⁷² The approach of Japanese scholars to Islamic studies was specified in the introductory editorial of the journal as the pursuit of an understanding of Muslim societies independent of the negative influ-

⁶⁹ Sakurai Masashi, *Dai Toa Kaikyō Hattenshi* (Tokyo: Sanseido, 1943), 8.

⁷⁰ Masashi, *Dai Toa Kaikyō Hattenshi*, 269-70. According to Sakurai, even Christianity, with its long history in Japan, had had little success in taking root in Japanese society.

⁷¹ The other three centers were: the Research Bureau of the Greater Japan Islam League, the East Asia Economic Research Institute in Tokyo, and the Research Section of the Foreign Ministry.

⁷² For the charter of Isuramu Bunka Kenkyūjo, see Kawamura Kōrō, “Isuramu Gaku: Senzen No Nagare,” in *Kaikyōken* (Fukkōkuban) (Tokyo: Biburio, 1986), 2.

ence of Western prejudices (*Ôbeijin no Henken*). A manifesto-like declaration summarizing these aims in English was appended to the first issue of *Isuramu Bunka*; in it was reflected the shared Asianist approach that characterized this community of scholars, who were highly critical of European Orientalism within their vision of the history of civilizations:

...the world's ideas of Asia and Islam are rotten chiefly because of the religious and social prejudices which poison the air between the two continents (of Europe and Asia). History teaches us what Titanic things the Islamic civilization created. This is a very powerful branch of the Eastern Civilization; and at the same time, the mother of Modern European Civilization. What a splendid history the Musulman nations had! To check back the Western barbarian invasions towards the East, and thereby to keep the classical learnings and culture untouched from those invaders, was a holy role that they played. In this chaotic state of the whole world as now, Islam may play its great role once more, for Western and Central Asia, a good part of India, and North and Central Africa are under the spiritual rule of Islam.

An old saying is very popular: "ex oriente lux." And so was once Islam to Europe. In sincere estimation we, the Japanese nation as a branch of the Asiatic, hold Islam and the Musulman nations as a powerful religion in the East and the nations belonging to the East. But once very rare were the chances for us to get into direct contact with them. Unfortunately, as we happened to know the Christian Civilization previous to the Islamic, even though the former is very much antagonistic to the latter, when the latter were not so well situated politically in the world in modern ages, our understanding on Islam has been too much crooked mostly because of the anti-propaganda on the part of the Christian nations. As it is, the time is now with us at last when we can hold our cordial hands forth to Muslim people. Friendship is ensured, and our door is open to the Islamic nations including Turkey, Persia, Afghanistan and Egypt. Traffic is now vivid between them and us: we may fully grasp a true idea of them through direct and non-prejudiced media. Recently the number is enormously increased of students and investigators among us who are deeply interested in things Islamic, and the glory of Islam is being widely known to us. Even several moves are suggested with a view to distributing thorough information about Islam and Islamic nations to wider extents. Our organization "Islam-Bunka-Kenkyûjo" (The Islam Institute, Tokyo) is actually an example thereof."⁷³

⁷³ *Isuramu Bunka* 1/1 (1932). The text was on the back cover of the journal.

This extremely sympathetic view of Muslim civilization, marked by its repeated criticism of the European representation of Islam, was to become one of the key characteristics of Japan's Islamic studies, penetrating the field to the extent that no Japanese scholar of that period approached Muslim culture in an attempt to demonstrate their inferiority. In other words, the self-estranging sense of superiority that European Orientalists adopted in judging the claims to truth of Islam was entirely missing from Japan's Asianist scholarship on Islam.

Although the Institute of Islamic Culture ended its activities after a short span of time, in 1933 Ôkubo Kôji formed a smaller study group, called the Islamic Academy (*Isuramu Gakkai*), in cooperation with Matsuda Hisao, Kobayashi Hajime, Miyagi Ryôzô and Yagi Kametarô.⁷⁴ For about three years, the Islamic Academy brought scholars together for intellectual exchange and research, also arranging language courses in Turkish, Persian and Arabic. However, rapid changes in the political climate following the China Incident in 1937 gave a new political urgency to the field of Islamic studies. Zenrin Kyôkai (The Good Neighbor Association), a military-sponsored institution that aimed to improve Japan's ties with China and Manchuria, adopted a plan to establish a special research institute for the development of cultural policies for the Muslims in North and Northwest China. Even though Ôkubo Kôji established the Institute of Islamic Studies with funding from Prince Tokugawa Iemasa, a wealthy aristocrat and former ambassador to Turkey, soon they began to accept financial support from the Zenrin Kyôkai, which saw in the Institute of Islamic Studies its opportunity to realize the plan of creating a policy center devoted to the Muslim World.⁷⁵

The Institute of Islamic Studies started to publish a monthly journal named *Kaikyôken* (The World of Islam), which distinguished itself as the most scholarly journal on Islam in comparison with two other periodicals on Islamic issues: *Kaikyô Sekai*, published by the Greater Japan Islam League and *Kaikyô Jijyô*, published by the Foreign Ministry research section.⁷⁶ Even after the journal was terminated, due to the wartime shortage of paper,

⁷⁴ At that time, Matsuda Hisao was a professor at Kokugakuin University, and Kobayashi Hajime was teaching at Komazawa University. Miyagi Ryôzô was a Literature Ph.D. student and Yagi Kametarô was an assistant at Tokyo Imperial University's Literature Department.

⁷⁵ Nozoe Kinjirô, "Zenrin Kyôkai no Tai Kaikyô Bunka Jigyô," in *Kaikyôken*, (Fukkôkuban) (Tokyo: Biburio, 1986): 23-25.

⁷⁶ The journal lasted for six and a half years, from July of 1938 to December of 1944. Each issue of the journal was printed in approximately 1,000 copies.

the institute itself continued its activities until May 24, 1945, when approximately 10,000 books in its library holdings were burned during the intense bombing of Tokyo. In its seven years of activity, the Institute of Islamic Studies hosted an average of ten full-time researchers from different ideological orientations, published high quality academic books, organized public conferences, produced documentary films, sponsored radio talks, and coordinated research projects in China and Indonesia, thus indisputably representing a vibrant intellectual center despite wartime conditions.

a) Ôkubo Kôji and the Discourse of Civilization

The writings of Ôkubo Kôji, the director of the Institute of Islamic Studies, offer the best illustration of the salience of Japan's Asian identity in the scholarship on Islam. Born in 1887 in Tokyo, Ôkubo graduated from the German Language department of the Tokyo Foreign Languages School in 1913. He completed his graduate studies at the Oriental History section of Tokyo Imperial University in 1918. Ôkubo learned Turkish through self-study, and had a chance to improve his speaking and writing skills with the help of Turkish-speaking Muslim emigrants in Tokyo. In parallel with his research focus in Islamic studies, Ôkubo began to teach Islamic and Asian history at Komazawa University after 1925, and from 1939 to 1949 he held Japan's first chair in Islamic studies at Waseda University. When Ôkubo made a research trip to Turkey in 1936, his command of Turkish was extensive enough to deliver lectures on Japanese history and culture at Turkish universities.⁷⁷ It was during this research trip to Turkey, which was funded by the Kokusai Bunka Shinkôkai (Society for International Cultural Relations) and the Nihon-Toruko Kyôkai (Japan-Turkey Friendship Association), that Ôkubo began to develop his close ties with Ambassador Tokugawa Iemasa, who then became a patron for his scholarly activities.

In Ôkubo's prolific writings on the Islamic world, the number of articles directly related to the politics of the Japanese Empire increased dramatically after 1940. In his role as the leader of the institute, he gave interviews with newspapers and radio stations, lectured frequently and attended events at

⁷⁷ Ôkubo attended the annual congresses of Turkology and the Turkish Historical Association during his visit, and he was even received by the President, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Ôkubo's travel memoirs covering Turkey and the Balkan regions were published in the Asahi News in a series of ten articles. During the same trip, he also collected film-footage for the documentary "*Istanbul: The City Where Eastern and Western Culture Meet.*" See *Kaikyôken* (Fukkokuban), 10-11.

embassies.⁷⁸ Although he was regarded as a liberal by the standards of that time, Ôkubo embraced the ideal of the East Asian Coprosperity Sphere, and regarded Japan's war in Asia as the path to liberation from colonial oppression for the Muslim World.⁷⁹ One of his editorials in *Kaikyôken* referred to Japan's confrontation with the West as a "Holy War" (*Jihad*) for the liberation of Asia.⁸⁰ Since Ôkubo's large number of media commentaries and public engagements as the director of the Institute of Islamic Studies made it necessary for him to discuss issues related to the Greater East Asia War, he usually affirmed Japan's official Asianism. For example, in the first conference series of the Institute of Islamic Studies that was open to the public, held from July 15-19 of 1938, scholars of the Institute addressed accessible topics including "colonial policy and Islam," Chinese Muslims and mosques in Beijing.⁸¹

One can see the impact of Japan's imperial policies on the field of Islamic studies by comparing two book projects edited and introduced by Ôkubo Kôji, one in 1936, only one year before the China Incident, and the other at the peak of the Greater East Asian War in 1942. In the earlier book, *Contemporary Islamic World*, which he co-edited with Kobayashi Hajime, Ôkubo formulated the mission of studying the "contemporary Muslim world" in an effort to overcome the fantasy impression of Islam that prevailed among the Japanese public, and to understand the reality of Muslim culture beyond stereotypical images of the "one thousand and one nights."⁸² He thus was aiming to debunk some of the predominant myths in Japan about the Muslim world, simultaneously criticizing the Eurocentric approach to the global community and world history. In explaining why the enlightened Japanese should pay more attention to the Muslim world, Ôkubo emphasized the importance of decolonization in the international order, in addition to mentioning the economic interest raised by Japan's increasing trade relations with the region. Overall, however, the book reflected the cultural internationalism of the scholarly community.

⁷⁸ For example, Ôkubo Kôji and Kobayashi Hajime, *Kaikyô Ken Shiyô* (Tokyo 1939).

⁷⁹ Ôkubo Kôji, "Daitôa Sensô to Kaikyôken," in *Kaikyôken* 6:1, 2-3. Besides writing numerous articles, Ôkubo also published a book on this topic. See Ôkubo Kôji, *Dai Tôa-sen to Kaikyô Mondai* (Tokyo: Satsukikai, 1942).

⁸⁰ Ôkubo Kôji, "Seisen," *Kaikyôken* 1/4 (1938): 2-3.

⁸¹ According to the advertisements in the first issue of *Kaikyôken*, Nohara Shirô lectured on Recent Political Turbulence among Chinese Muslims, Matsuda Hisao spoke about the Mosques in Beijing, and Miyagi Ryôzô lectured about the Muslim World and Colonial Policy. They also showed their movie on Istanbul. See *Kaikyôken* 1/1 (1938). Advertisement and attendance application forms were attached to the journal.

⁸² Ôkubo Kôji and Kobayashi Hajime, *Gendai Kaikyôken* (Tokyo: Shikai Shobô, 1936).

The peculiar Asianist coloring of his Islamic studies becomes clear in Ôkubo's narration of modern Muslim history from the perspective of an East-West encounter, especially in his sympathetic account of Muslim revivalist movements and Pan-Islamism. Ôkubo presents the movements for Islamic revival not as reflections of religious-nationalist xenophobia, but as Muslim responses to Western expansion and imperialism, frequently invoking images of the Meiji Restoration and Japan's own encounter with the West. Muslim modernists, such as Muhammed Abduh, were depicted as heroes, who embodied the anti-imperialism and successful Muslim appropriation of modernity. Ôkubo expressed optimism for the achievements of the Islamic synthesis with modernity, writing favorably of rising Muslim nationalism, modernist-revivalist movements in contemporary Islamic thought and the diverse paths of modernization taken by Muslim nations such as Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan.

Six years later, in the edited volume *Introduction to the Islamic World*, Ôkubo Kôji celebrated the fifth anniversary of the foundation of the Institute of Islamic Studies.⁸³ However, Ôkubo still found the enlightened public's general knowledge about Islam to be both insufficient and contaminated by Western prejudices. Ôkubo presented the collective research products of the members of the Institute of Islamic Studies in the hope of creating a more sophisticated popular understanding of Islam in a mood of cultural internationalism. However, in the conclusion of the work, Ôkubo went on to argue that Japan's "sacred" war against the British Empire would open the way for the rebirth of the Muslim awakening and solve the problems faced by Muslim nationalism, while Muslims living within the Greater East Asia Coprosperity Sphere would become role models for the rest of the Islamic world.

The purpose of the construction of the New Order in East Asia reflects the world policy of our nation. This means a change in world history by the liberation of East Asia from the Anglo-American powers and the establishment of a new order in East Asia with Japan as its center. From a different point of view, we should not forget that this implies a great advantage for the liberation of the Muslim world, and reflects Japan's leading position in the rationalization of world history.⁸⁴

Looking at Ôkubo Kôji's writings from a broader perspective, it would be inaccurate to characterize even his wartime scholarship as based merely on

⁸³ Kaikyôken Kenkyûjô, ed. *Gaikan Kaikyôken* (Tokyo: Seibundô Shinkôsha, 1942).

⁸⁴ *Gaikan Kaikyôken*, 334-35.

a desire to further Japan's imperial interests, as he maintained an internationalist agenda of introducing an unfamiliar culture and Asianist vision of decolonization throughout his career. His support for Japan's Asia policy during the period of the Greater East Asia Coprosperity Sphere was derived more from his own Asianist convictions. Ôkubo did not have any ideological affiliation with nationalist organizations, and did not share the strong ideological commitments of Ôkawa Shûmei. However, he did believe in the existence of two conflicting civilizations, East and West, and he saw Japan as having a "liberating mission" in Asia, even to the extent that he condoned Japan's war in China as an effort to save the Chinese nation from Western hegemony.⁸⁵

b) The Mission of Area Studies in the Era of the Empire

Further illustration of the cultural internationalist mission of Islamic studies scholarship can be seen in the writings of Nohara Shirô, the young director of the research section of the Institute of Islamic Studies. Nohara was no ultranationalist; he was even arrested by the military police in 1942 under suspicion of socialist activism.⁸⁶ In an article on the mission of Japan's Islamic studies, Nohara formulated three intellectual purposes.⁸⁷ The first of these was the enhancement of the knowledge of the Islamic world, which he thought necessary for the fulfillment of Japan's mission in Asia and the world. Nohara expressed his dissatisfaction with a narrow economic approach to the Muslim world that concerned itself only with exports and access to natural resources, taking no interest in culture and history. For him, even those pursuing economic advantages would benefit from an understanding of the culture of the society they were dealing with.⁸⁸

The second purpose Nohara emphasized was the establishment of a particular Japanese scholarship on Islam that would gain independence from Western Orientalism. This stated goal resonated with a consciousness of the need to overcome Japan's reliance on a Eurocentric knowledge of world cultures. In their effort to free themselves from European perspectives, however, scholars of the Islamic Institute were faced with a major dilemma. They were well aware of the immense breadth and depth of European Orientalism,

⁸⁵ Ôkubo Kôji, "Seisen," *Kaikyôken*, 1/4 (1938): 2.

⁸⁶ Interview with Professor Yûzo Itagaki, March 1999, Tokyo.

⁸⁷ See Nohara Shirô, "Kaikyô Kenkyû no Yakuwari," *Kaikyôken*, 6/1 (1942): 8-10.

⁸⁸ Nohara Shirô, "Kaikyôken Kenkyûjo no Omoide," *Kaikyôken* (Fukkokuhan) (Originally published in *Tôyô Bunka*, no. 38, March 1965): 47.

as they were conducting their own research by utilizing studies in Western languages. In contrast with the century-old tradition of Oriental studies, Japanese scholarship on Islam was in its infancy. In order to conduct original studies without the mediation of European scholarship, they were making humble efforts to learn Turkish, Persian and Arabic. In fact, as a result of this early attention to language training, there emerged at the institute a world-renowned scholar of Islam, Toshihiko Izutsu, famous for his mastery of classical Arabic.⁸⁹ However, Japanese scholars with a full mastery of Muslim languages remained rare, and reliance on European Orientalism was still necessary for good quality research.

One group within the institute suggested that, since Japan's Islamic studies were at least a century behind the Oriental studies in Europe, it was necessary to translate the classics of Western literature on Islam in order to establish the basic infrastructure for their own developing scholarship. As an alternative, Nohara Shirô pointed out that European scholarship usually focused on linguistics, geography and textual studies at the expense of the studies of contemporary social and economic issues, arguing that a focus on the modern Muslim world would allow Japan to gain leadership in those fields.⁹⁰ However, irrespective of this theoretical debate about their scholarly agenda, and despite their heavy use of Western literature, the members of the Institute of Islamic Studies were already producing research that differed drastically from the products of European Orientalism. This was a direct result of the Japanese scholars' identification with the Muslim world under the umbrella of Asian identity.

The third purpose outlined by Nohara Shirô was the modification and correction of world history consciousness by opening a neglected field of history to Japanese attention. In fact, members of the Institute of Islamic Studies edited several books on world history in an effort to promote a view of Asian history that extended beyond the traditional Sinocentric and Eurocentric per-

⁸⁹ For the contribution of two Pan-Islamist scholars, Abdurresid Ibrahim and Musa Carullah, to the education of Toshihiko Izutsu, see Cemil Aydın, "Toshihiko Izutsu, Abdurresid Ibrahim ve Musa Carullah: Global Ölçekte Geleneksel Bir İlimi Nakil Hikayesi," *Dergâh* 10/111 (Istanbul 1999): 15-16. When Izutsu published his first book on Islamic philosophy and theology in 1941, he not only showed his mastery of original Arabic texts, but also demonstrated a distinctly Japanese approach to the texts. See Izutsu Toshihiko, *Arabia Shisôshi: Kaikyô Shingaku to Kaikyô Tetsugaku* (Tokyo: Hakubunkan, 1941). This book was printed in a series on Asian revival, *KôA Zenshō*, under the editorial supervision and with a foreword by Ôkubo Kôji.

⁹⁰ Shirô, "Kaikyôken Kenkyûjyo no Omoide," 45-46.

spectives.⁹¹ Ôkubo Kôji edited a thirteen-volume series on Asian history and culture in the *KôA Zenshō* (Revival of Asia Series). In his editorial foreword, Ôkubo pointed out that in order to understand Asian thought (*Ajia Teki Shisō*), one must be as familiar with Islam as with Confucianism and Buddhism, and comprehend the basics of Islamic thought together with Indian and Chinese thought.⁹²

Although Nohara and other members of the Institute of Islamic Studies claimed to write a more universal and comprehensive world history through their privileged position as experts on Islamic civilization, their vision of history was still constrained within the idea of the conflict between civilizations. Thus, while they aimed to overcome Eurocentrism and Sinocentrism, they never questioned the organizing theme of the discourse of civilization. For example, Nohara promoted an evaluation of Middle Eastern history in terms of the conflict between East and West in modern history, suggesting that such an evaluation would allow Japanese intellectuals to develop a better understanding of Asian history.⁹³ The influence of the Asianist discourse of civilization can best be seen in Nohara's own research on the Muslim reformer Jamal al-Din al-Afghani. Nohara argued that the ideas of reformist thinkers such as al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh and Taha Hussein had to be investigated in order to comprehend the peculiarities of Japan's own Westernization. He pointed out that the Islamic synthesis between East and West could prove extremely instructive for Japanese intellectuals in their efforts at reassessing the Meiji Period. For instance, Nohara attributed to Al-Afghani the achievement of an ideal synthesis between Western knowledge and the Muslim religious tradition for the purpose of strengthening the Islamic world, commenting that it was the Pan-Islamist thinker Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani who "bravely" met the challenge of modernity and strove to transcend the unequal conflict between East and West.⁹⁴ Nohara's Asianist view

⁹¹ Matsuda Hisao and Kobayashi Gen, *Kansō Ajia Bunka Shi Ron* (Tokyo: Shikai Shobō, 1938); Matsuda Hisao and Nohara Shirō, *Tōyōshi Jyosetsu* (Tokyo: Shikai Shobō, 1936); Kobayashi, Hajime, *Sekaishi Shinko* (Tokyo: Futami Shobō, 1944).

⁹² See Ôkubo Kôji, editorial preface, in Izutsu Toshihiko, *Arabia Shisōshi: Kaikyō Shingaku to Kaikyō Tetsugaku*, 1-2. The series included books on Manchuria, China, Mongolia, Buddhist East Asia, the South Seas under Euro-American Rule, India, Central Asia, Afghanistan, Iran, the Arab World, the Near East, and Turkey.

⁹³ Shirō, "Kaikyō Kenkyū no Yakuwari," 8-13. See also Matsuda Hisao and Nohara Shirō, *Tōyōshi Jyosetsu* (Tokyo: Shikai Shobō, 1936). The advertisement of the book specifically emphasized that it was a history of Asia that transcended the Sinocentrism of earlier works.

⁹⁴ Nohara Shirō, "Kindai Kaikyō Kaikaku Shisō" in *Ajia no Rekishi to Shisō* (Tokyo: Kōbundō, 1966), 213. The article was originally written in 1942 for the journal *Kaikyōken*.

of modern world history combined the destinies of West and East Asia by underlining their shared experience of intrusions by a powerful West. He quoted the following declaration from al-Afghani with a tone of approval:

The Christian nations, despite their internal disputes, band together to destroy the Islamic world. They have regarded the Islamic world with hate and ridicule since the age of the Crusaders. As proof, we are not regarded as equals in their international law. They defend this situation, pointing to the backwardness and savagery of the Islamic world. However, is it not savage of them to suppress our development by force?⁹⁵

The extent to which the Institute of Islamic Studies became involved in Japanese imperialism in Asia has been the subject of various discussions and interpretations since the end of WWII. Wartime OSS reports on the Japanese infiltration into the Muslim World prepared by Derk Bodde make reference to the Institute of Islamic Studies as one of the instruments of Japan's Islamic policy.⁹⁶ In his recollections of his research career at the Institute of Islamic Studies, Nohara criticized Derk Bodde's generalization, asserting that the ties connecting the institute with Japan's imperial projects were in fact complicated by their intellectual criticism of the Islamic policy and their personal ideological differences.⁹⁷ According to Nohara, the institute's director Ôkubo Kôji did not believe in conducting research for the sake of the Islamic policy of the Empire. Rather, Ôkubo did everything in his power to protect the academic integrity of the institute against the pressures of Zenrin Kyôkai, which was demanding that the institute perform more policy research of direct utility to the military in return for their financial assistance. Ôkubo urged his colleagues to continue their own research agendas without giving much attention to such external pressures.⁹⁸

Nohara Shirô also noted that members of the Institute of Islamic Studies did not feel much sympathy with the military's Islamic policy, as they were usually disappointed by the uninformed and simplistic discourse of the military. They would ridicule the ignorance of the authorities when, for example,

⁹⁵ Shirô, *Ajia no Rekishi to Shisô*, 213.

⁹⁶ Derk Bodde was a Professor of Chinese History at the University of Pennsylvania. He later turned his OSS research into articles. See Derk Bodde, "Japan and the Muslims of China," *Far Eastern Survey*, 15/20 (9, 1946): 311-13.

⁹⁷ Shirô, "Kaikyôken Kenkyûjyo no Omoide," 45.

⁹⁸ Gamo Reichi and Takeuchi Yoshimi also emphasized the liberal and tolerant attitude of the institute's director towards members with different ideological orientations. See Gamo Reichi, "Kaikyôken Kenkyûjo no Omoide," *Kaikyôken* (Fukkokuhan), 50-51.

someone in the military had the idea of creating a second Mecca in Japanese-occupied Singapore as a bid for Muslim sympathy. They also expressed their disapproval when military leaders planned to use pretend conversions of Japanese nationals to Islam for intelligence gathering purposes in Muslim Southeast Asia.⁹⁹

Overall, all the members of the Institute were aware of the military interest in separating Chinese and Uygur Muslims from Chinese nationalism in the context of Japan's expansion into Northwest China. In fact, it was the Socialist Takeuchi Yoshimi who wrote on the subject of Muslims in China, Manchuria and Japan in a volume edited by the Institute. Takeuchi's careful discussion of the different policies adopted towards the Chinese Muslims by Chinese nationalists, Communists and the Japanese government reveals his awareness of the politics of their academic scholarship on the Muslims of China.¹⁰⁰ According to Nohara, Japanese authorities did not push for an Islamic policy very enthusiastically after they realized the failure of this effort by 1940, even though terms such as "the Muslim Problem" (*Kaikyôto Mondai*) and "the Muslim Policy" (*Kaikyô Seisaku*) had begun to be used for the policies towards Muslims living in Southeast Asia.

However, Nohara admitted that he and his colleagues had objected to the government's Islamic policy only on the grounds that it did not reflect a proper understanding of the Islamic tradition and the national character of Muslim societies. They tried to revise the misconceptions of the army in order to lead them towards more rational policies. At the same time, the Institute cooperated with the Japanese occupation forces in Southeast Asia by soliciting articles from scholars who were working for the military units located in that region. Members of the Institute of Islamic Studies did not harbor any objection to the government's official discourse of Pan-Asianism. Especially as far as the notion of liberating Asia from Western colonial rule was concerned, Nohara concedes that their "reaction to the American, British and French oppression of the nationalist liberation movements was not very different from the reaction of the Japanese ultra-nationalists (towards Western imperialism)."¹⁰¹

Nohara Shirô maintained ambivalence in his attitude toward not only the institute's complicity in Asianist projects, but also towards the legacy of Pan-

⁹⁹ Shirô, "Kaikyôken Kenkyûjyo no Omoide," 47.

¹⁰⁰ *Gaikan Kaikyôken*, ed. Kaikyôken Kenkyûjo (Zenrin Kyôkai) (Tokyo: Seibundo Shinkosha, 1942), 297-332.

¹⁰¹ Shirô, "Kaikyôken Kenkyûjo no Omoide," 47.

Asianism, hinting that the Japanese occupation of Muslim Southeast Asia may have contributed to decolonization and national independence. He proposed that there should at least be a careful study of the memoirs of Japanese figures who had been to Southeast Asia during the Japanese occupation in an effort to reassess the (de)colonizing impact of the Japanese invasion of Asia. Takeuchi Yoshimi, who was another Socialist at the Institute of Islamic Studies in wartime Japan, did not enter into a discussion of the decolonizing impact of Pan-Asianism in his postwar reflections, though he was sympathetic to the Pan-Asianist interest in anti-colonial nationalism. Rather, Takeuchi focused on the intellectual achievements of the Islamic studies community, especially in their original contribution to the vision of world history, and their expanded attention to non-Western cultures and nationalist movements. Takeuchi Yoshimi criticized the fact that world historians of the postwar period were still overlooking Islamic history during the 1960s, neglecting their prewar period intellectual achievements.¹⁰²

Conclusion:

While the Islamic area studies carried out by Japanese intellectuals during the Fifteen Years War (1931-1945) can be characterized as including an interest in producing useful knowledge for the purposes of the Japanese Empire, the effort clearly cannot be reduced to this single aim alone. Japanese experts on Islam displayed a high level of identification with and sympathy for the Muslim world they studied, carrying a deliberate agenda of overcoming the Eurocentric perception of world history and global cultures. Furthermore, Japanese scholars depicted change and reform in the Muslim world as a successful Muslim response to modernity, rather than a deviation from the essence of Islam. However, while their approach assumed that Japanese and Muslims shared a common Asian civilization, they had a tendency to reaffirm the knowledge categories of Orientalist epistemology, even at a time when some Japanese scholars were vehemently advocating academic freedom from Western Orientalism. Ironically, Japanese scholars could produce a deliberately anti-Orientalist agenda of scholarship on the Islamic world when they were relying primarily on the writings of European Orientalists.

¹⁰² Yoshimi, "Ôkawa Shûmei no Ajia Kenkyû," 395. Takeuchi also argued that Ôkawa's Islamic Studies had nothing to do with Japanese Imperialism and criticized postwar world historians for ignoring the Islamic Studies of the prewar period.

The intellectual peculiarities of Japan's program of Islamic studies reflect the salience of the Asianist discourse of civilization in Japan's internationalist and nationalist vision. Thus, the whole scholarship reproduced the knowledge categories of the East-West civilizational paradigm. This time, Japanese scholars of Islam were championing solidarity between Japan and the Muslim world as part of the Eastern Civilization or Asia against the Western hegemony in the world. However, even within a rigid framework that relied on an ontological distinction between the Orient and the Occident, Japanese scholars succeeded in producing a new perspective on Islamic studies that, in the long run, resembled the line of thinking that dominated the scholarship of Middle Eastern Studies in the postcolonial period.