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Arabic Studies in Japan

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This essay is an attempt to observe and state, not to analyse or to express the author's preference and value judgements. I say this at the outset in order to justify my lack of knowledge of the language that handicapped any possibility to go through the works written by Japanese scholars on the Arab World. Nevertheless, this essay is based on my experience with Japan and Japanese Arabic studies circles, with whom I could establish strong ties over seven years. The essay deals with the academic Arabic studies in Japan generally concerned with the Arab World; its history, culture, religion, language and literature, socio-economic and political conditions.

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Japan's knowledge of the Arab World is as recent as the beginning of the second decade of this century for certain historical circumstances. Since the seclusion of Japan under Tokugawa Shogunate (1603 - 1867), sources of information about alien countries were limited to what the Japanese could gather from the Dutch in their man-made island and trading center of Dejima facing Nagasaki. Through that back-side window Japan started to collect her knowledge of Western science. The school of Dutch Learning (rangaku) came into existence after 1720 when the Bakufu relaxed its ban against Western books and permitted works not containing Christian ideas to enter the country. This led a small circle of scholars to begin studying Dutch in order to become acquainted with Western science, and these men started to pursue such subjects as astronomy, physics, electricity, plant studies, cartography, geography and medicine.

Through that back-side window Japan obtained her first scattered informations about the Arab Countries; their peoples, culture and history based on what the Japanese scholars heard from Western traders and missionary. The first work of the kind was written by Arai Hakuseki in the first decade of the eighteenth century titled *Seiyo Kibun* (What I heard about the West). In his work Arai introduced the first informations about the Arab countries and Egypt which he could gather through a certain Italian missionary named Sidocci.

The mid-nineteenth century witnessed the collapse of Japan's policy of isolation and seclusion as a result of external pressures exerted by foreign states, and the revolutionary social pressures within Japan herself. To put the matter another way, when in 1854 the Japanese signed a treaty with the United States, they were not reacting solely to the American naval power; they were reacting also to the fundamental needs of their own society. Hence, the seclusion was ended and replaced by a broad policy of intercourse with the West. As a result, the Shogunate and the system of feudalism were replaced by a centralised administration carried on in the name of the emperor MEIJI (1868 - 1912), which launched the modernization process of education, army, etc.

Despite the intercourse with the West and strengthening trade and cultural relations, Japanese policy was occupied with the fear of Western influence especially when Japan needed investments to build railways. Concerning this matter there were two choices; either to invite foreign investments, or to depend exclusively on the national capital. Some politicians and businessmen stubbornly warned from being pushed into the debt trap of foreign powers in order to avoid Egypt's destiny. They studied carefully the experience of Egypt with foreign investments and its political consequences. Shibusawa Eiichi, the leading entrepreneur of Meiji era, dealt with this issue in his work "*Kosei Nikki*" (Rebirth Diaries). Some leading politicians such as Ito Hirobumi, Matsukata Masayoshi, and Okuma Shigenobu contributed to the campaign.

Again, the experience of Egypt with foreign influence was inspiring to Shiba Shiro in his autobiographical novel published in 1888, under the title "*Kajin No Kigu*" (Romantic Meeting with Two Fair Ladies). In the meanwhile the writer went in a trip to Europe escorting Tani Kanjo, the minister of agriculture and commerce, who recognized his abilities and appointed him as his private secretary. At Ceylon Shiba and his chief were able to meet Arabi Pasha, the Egyptian nationalist leader in exile, who explained to them Egypt's experience with "the aggressiveness of imperialism of the white race". Their arrival in Egypt afforded them an opportunity to observe the situation under the British Occupation. When Shiba and the minister returned to Japan in 1888, they both resigned their position and joined the political opposition to foreign debts and unequal treaties with foreign powers.

By the end of 1880's the political ideas of Jamal Ad-din al Afghani about Pan-Islamism were introduced to Japan by Yano Ryukei in his work "Keikoku Bidan" (The Story of Politicians). Both Qur'an and the work of Ibn Ishaq "Sirat Muhammed" were translated from English.

However, Japan's concern with Egypt or Islamic culture at that time cannot be separated from the general trend of Japanese intellectuals who focussed their intention to the study of human cultures. Arabic studies as desciplined studies were not in existence before the 1910's, when Japanese capitalism were matured enough to push the country's policy towards military expansion at the expense of neighbouring countries, and the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) which resulted in the establishment of Japanese existence and interests in Korea and Manchuria.

The expansionist movement was accompanied by a wide interest in Chinese and Asian studies which became the task of the Great Japan Cultural Association (Dai Nippon Bummei Kyokai). In 1911 the Association issued the Japanese version of Cromer's Modern Egypt with a preface stating that the British experience in Egypt is rather instructive to Japan in her administration of Korea. The fact of having an Islamic community in China encouraged the Association to study Islamic history and culture in order to find suitable approach to the Chinese Muslims and to mark the beginning of Islamic and Arabic studies in Japan.

Since then the Islamic and Arabic studies were deeply influenced by the strategic necessities of the Japanese government either economic or political. Consequently, we can distinguish three phases in the development of those studies closely connected with the development of Japanese politics and economic interests.

- I -

The Inter War Period witnessed the first phase, in which four Arabic studies institutions of semi-governmental nature came into being.

- (a) The Islamic Association of Great Japan (Dai-Nihon Kaikyo Kyokai) to which professors Matsuda Hisao, Iwanaga Hiroshi and Kobayashi Hajime were affiliated. Their concerns were varied from Islamic law and religion to the history of Islamic countries in general. Professor Kobayashi Hajime is a good example of this group. He started his academic career by Islamic law and shifted to the contemporary history of the Arab World.
- (b) The Institute for Islamic Studies (Kaikyo-Ken Kenkyujo) which was founded by Manchuria Railway Company to study the cultural background of the Chinese Muslims. To this institute professors Nohara Shiro, Takeuchi Yoshimi, Gano Reiichi, Kanazawa Makoto and Maejima Shinji were

affiliated. While the first and second turned to Sinology, the third shifted to Persian and the fourth to the modern history of France. Only professor Maejima Shinji continued his career to be the leading Japanese Arabist.

- (c) The Research Section of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Gaimu sho) which concentrated on the Arabic language and political affairs of the Arab countries. It was an apprenticeship center for training the young diplomats who were supposed to serve in the Arab World. Besides, the Ministry started to despatch young diplomats to study Arabic language in Egypt since 1926. Among the members of this section were those who could develop their studies and became deeply interested in the literature and history of Arabs. To the latter belong some distinguished diplomats such as Tamura Hideji, Ohara Yoichiro, Odaka Masanao, Nakano Eijiro and Kawasaki Torao.
- (d) The Pacific Research Association which was concerned with the study of Islamic culture and literature.

In 1939, before the outset of the war, Osaka University for Foreign Studies (Osaka Gaikokugo Daigaku) introduced Arabic as a branch of Semitic department. Since then Arabic became a disciplined study and among the graduates of this branch there are leading scholars of Arabic grammar and literature.

However, the Arabic and Islamic studies in the Inter-War period were deeply influenced by the works of the Western Orientalists as far as the Arab history and culture are concerned due to the fact that most of the Japanese scholars at that time could not consult original Arabic resources, only few of them had easy access to Arabic. But as far as the studies of Islamic history in China are concerned, the Japanese scholars were in better position since they could consult the first hand materials especially documents.

Since the Islamic studies institutions of that period were functioned as information centers to meet the demands of the Japanese diplomacy and business circles about South-east Asian and West Asian countries, they lost their raison d'etre after the defeat of Japan in the Second World War and were liquidated. Their staff members were scattered to various fields of interest, but some of them continued their career and joined the staff of certain universities.

For example, Professor Maejima Shinji who has been research worker of Kaikyo-Ken Kenkyujo sponsored by South Manchuria Railway Company, joined Keio University. He pioneered in Islamic history to which he made valuable contributions. He translated some original Arabic sources into Japanese. His translation of the Arabian Nights (The Thousand and One Nights)

came out in three volumes, he translated too the Travels of Ibn Battuta and al-Jahiz's work al-Bukhala (The Stingies).

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Arabic studies in the Post-War years faced a critical dilemma. Once the governmental and semi-governmental institutions were collapsed due to the defeat which has been accompanied by the hard task of reconstruction, the Arabic studies in Japan were left for individual initiatives. While Professor Maejima Shinji established the Islamic historical studies in Keio University. Professor Izutsu Toshihiko of the same university concentrated on Islam as a religion. In 1957, he introduced the first Japanese version of Qur'an translated from Arabic in three volumes. He had the hard task of adapting Japanese characters to the Qur'anic expressions. His work on "God and Man in Qur'an" has been a unique reference in the subject for several years.

At the same time, Professor Haneda of Kyoto University pioneered the studies of Islam and Islamic culture in their regions of Mid-Asia especially the history of Turks. When he died Kyoto University turned his house into a research center for those studies known as Haneda Memorial House.

In addition, some Buddhist priests were interested in the studies of comparative religions and contributed to the study of Islam, then became more interested in certain area such as Honda Minobu who concentrated on Persian history and the history of Mongols in Persia and Mori Masao the prominent scholar of Turkish history and culture.

Another group of Japanese contained those who started their academic career as students of modern contemporary history of Europe, and organized a study group on imperialism in Asia and Africa. The nationalization of Suez Canal and following Suez War in 1956 drew their attention to study the historical background of imperialism in the Arab countries of West Asia. In search of the native viewpoint, they studied Arabic to the extent that they could be able to consult the Arabic resources. The results of their studies came out in a book on The Modern History of the Arabs compiled by Itagaki Yuzo and Nakaoka San-eki. In the 1960's the authors came to Cairo University to develop their knowledge and experience about the Arab affairs. Together with Miki Wataru, the third pillar of this group, they led a new trend in the Japanese Arabic studies.

Since the 1960's those individual efforts came to be appreciated and encouraged by the authorities when they found it necessary to have their own experts in West Asian affairs. It was then the time of economic recovery and the emergence of Japan's new capitalism.

Through the Occupation years Japan struggled up from the defeat and postwar disorder. When the Allies withdrew in 1952 her economy had at last regained its prewar level of output, real national output nearly tripled from 1951 to 1963, growing at over 9 percent a year. As Japan moves forward in the 1960's then she has already raised her productive powers twofold above their prewar level. Since the manufacturing industries were leading the boom, Japan's demand for energy was increasing. With the Arab East acting as the main supplier of Oil, Japan's economic interests in the area were growing, and the Arab-Japanese trade flourished.

Hence, developing the Arabic studies in Japan in order to create competent experts of Arab affairs became the main target of Japanese diplomacy and economic interests. Japanese companies handling business in the Arab countries badly needed personnel with some knowledge of Arabic created a demand for teaching Arabic language and led to the emergence of concerned institutions.

In 1961, Tokyo University for Foreign Studies (Tokyo Gaikokugo Daigaku) opened a new department for Arabic language and literature. In the meanwhile, the branch of Arabic language in the Semitic department of Osaka University for Foreign Studies gained independence. Courses for teaching Arabic language and literature were organized in various universities (Tokai, Tenri, Waseda, Keio and Takushoku Universities). Besides, the Egyptian Cultural Center, the Saudi-Japanese Friendship Association and the Kuwait-Japanese Friendship Association opened evening classes for teaching Arabic.

Again the Arabic studies in Japan reached a new boom. The Ministries of Education, International Trade and Industry, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Japanese business circles provided financial funds to the research projects and the academic institutions concerned with Arab affairs. The Arabic studies have to be re-organized in conformity with the needs of Japanese diplomacy and economic interests in several universities and research institutes.

Being the center of Arabic and Islamic studies from the mid-sixties to the early seventies, Tokyo University for Foreign Studies concentrated on the study of Arabic grammar, literature especially modern and Islamic Philosophy. The Institute for the Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa (Aja Afurika Gengo Bunka Kenkyujo) established by the same university in 1964 had a plan to promote a research project in both Islamic and African countries. In 1967, the co-ordinating project titled "Islamization and Modernization in Asia and Africa" was organized at the Institute.

This project made considerable success in bringing three generations of Japanese scholars together: those who started their research career in the Interwar period, those who started their career after the war and those who started in the sixties. Under the auspices of this project three periodical

symposiums a year had to be held to which scholars from various universities had to be invited. Each symposium was allocated for certain topic such as the Problems of Contemporary Islam in Southeast and West Asia, Islam in Middle Ages, Islam in Africa, Land-ownership and Land Systems in West Asia, Rural and Urban Societies in Muslim countries, Islamic Thought, and the Modern Arabic Literature.

At the term of a year, the Institute of the Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa used to issue a publication containing the papers submitted to the symposiums in that year, together with the comments and discussions. This publication was titled "Islamization and Modernization in Asia and Africa". As the project lasted for seven years, the Institute issued seven volumes of this publication which presents the Japanese viewpoint on Islamic societies.

While Osaka University for Foreign Studies paid more attention to Arabic grammar and linguistics, both Tokyo and Kyoto Universities have wide range of interest in Islamic studies through the Institute of Oriental Culture (Toyo Bunka Kenkyujo) in the former, and the Institute of Middle Asia (Nairiku Ajia Kenkyujo) in the latter. The Institute of Oriental Culture of Keio University concentrated on the history of West Asian countries and comparative religion. Both Tenri and Taisho Universities shared the same interest.

Besides the universities, there are two independent research institutes considered among the basic centers of Arabic studies in Japan, the Institute of Developing Economies (Ajia Keizai Kenkyujo) founded in 1958 and the Middle East Institute (Chuto Chosakai) established in 1956. While the former institute is affiliated with the Ministry of International Trade and Industry, the latter is affiliated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Their budgets are subsidized by the Government and Japanese business.

The Institute of Developing Economies is mainly concerned with the economic affairs and the socio-economic development in the Arab countries. Some research personnel were despatched to the Arab countries and succeeded in opening channels with the academic circles in the area, some Arab scholars were invited to the institute as well. The Institute organized study groups on the Middle East to which competent scholars from various Japanese universities are contributing.

The Middle East Institute is acting as a research and information center for Japanese diplomacy and business. It recruits the Middle East experts from the universities to carry out the research projects, and issues the Annual Book on Middle East and North Africa to provide the interested Japanese circles with the basic informations about the area.

In the early seventies there were three trends among the Japanese scholars. The first, represented those who had been educated in the West and were directly or indirectly disciples of the Western Orientalists, stood for following the traditions of Orientalism and looking for the institutes of Islamic and Oriental studies in the West as fundamental sources of informations on Arabic and Islamic countries without paying attention to the studies of contemporary Arab and Muslim scholars. To support their point of view they claimed that the contemporary works of native scholars are heavily depending on the works of the Western Orientalists. Professor Shimada Johei of Chuo University was the spokesman of this trend supported with a limited number of Japanese scholars.

The second trend was rather isolated and less supported. They call for a pure Japanese approach to Islam and Islamic societies based on the original sources and first-hand materials without considering the works of both Western Orientalists and contemporary Arab and Muslim scholars. They claimed that the Japanese scholars with their own way of thinking and cultural background could be able to have their own interpretation of Islam and Muslim societies which is different from the others. Professor Makino Shinya of the Arabic Department in Tokyo University for Foreign Studies was the advocate of this trend.

The third trend was far-sighted and gained the support of the majority of Japanese scholars. They drew their colleagues' attention to the fact that the Orientalist movement in the West was designed to meet the demands of imperialism. Hence the Western interpretation of Arab and Muslim societies was not always accurate, and the writings of the Western Orientalists on Japan are good evidence of the case. They called for taking the experience of the native scholars in Arab and Islamic countries together with the original sources as their guide without neglecting the writings of the Western scholars. Therefore interest should be cultivated in field studies and relations with Arab academic circles should be advanced. Professors Itagaki Yuzo (Tokyo University), Miki Wataru (AAKEN), and Nakaoka San-eki (AJIKEN) are the advocates of this trend which dominated the academic arena since 1973.

The third phase in the development of Arabic studies in Japan followed the October 1973 War and the oil crisis or what was described by the Japanese public opinion as the "Oil Shock". The impact of oil crisis on Japan was the most serious among the developed industrial countries, as shown by reports published by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), due to the fact that Japan's dependence on overseas sources for her total energy requirement, and specifically her dependence on Arab oil for her oil needs is far greater than that of the others.

Naturally, Japan changed it's political attitude towards the Arab-Israel conflict and showed her intention to maintain and promote friendly relations with the

Arabs through such measures as more active economic and technical co-operation to secure the supply of petroleum resources. This new Middle East policy impacted the Arabic studies in Japan.

Not only Government and business circles required a new approach to the Arab World, but also the Japanese people became more interested in the Arab affairs. The number of applicants to the Arabic language departments in the Japanese universities increased. The publishers became more interested in issuing books on the Arab countries and Arabic literature, etc.

In addition to the semi-governmental institutes which has been established in the sixties to supply informations on the Middle East to the Government and business circles, a new institute of the kind was founded in 1974. It is the Institute for Middle East Economies (Chuto Keizai Kenkyujo), mainly subsidized by the Agency for Economic planning and the business circles.

While the Institute of Developing Economies (AJIKEN) started a research project on the Middle East to cover the various aspects of contemporary problems, it encouraged the translation and publication of some important works of socio-economic and political significance. Under the auspices of this project the Japanese versions of al-Sharqawi's "al-Ardh" (by Nutahara), Tawfiq al-Hakim's work "Awdat-ul-Wa'iy" (by Horiuchi), and Mohamed Uda's work "Al-Wa'iy-ul Mafqud" (by Ikeda) were published.

The Institute for the Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa (AAKEN) initiated a new trend in the Arabic studies. In the fall of 1974, a research team headed by Professor Miki Wataru was dispatched to the Middle East for six month term to investigate the comparative aspects of Islamic societies and their cultural changes. This team applied the field-work methods and collected various first-hand materials from the Arab countries. One of the important functions of the team was open channels with Arab universities and cultivate academic relations with the Arab scholars. The results of their studies came out in a series of publications in English and French titled "Studia Culturae Islamicae".

The Middle East Institute organized study groups to which the Middle East experts (scholars, journalists, diplomats and businessmen) participated. The topics of these study groups are closely related to Japan's policy, making and economic interests. The results of their studies are published and distributed to the concerned government agencies and business circles.

In spite of the increasing interest in the studies on recent conditions of the Arab World and especially the oil producing Arab Countries, the fundamental Islamic studies in the Oriental studies departments at the Japanese universities such as Tokyo, Keio and Kyoto are left behind.

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In conclusion, the Arabic studies in Japan are developing since the sixties and making considerable achievement due to the favourable political and economic circumstances especially after the October 1973 War, which marked a new epoch of better mutual Arab-Japanese understanding and economic co-operation. Although the future of the Arabic studies in Japan is prospective, they are scattered among various institutions without creating co-ordination between them. The establishment of an Arabic studies association to act as a co-ordinating body is, I believe, a prompt need. But this association should be independent from both government and business influence in order to lay down the academic tradition of this field of studies that secures continuity.