

New Trends in Japanese Scholarship on Islam

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ABSTRACT

When there is talk about Islam, Japan is not a country that comes instantaneously to our minds. Nevertheless, there are many substantial bonds and links between Japan and the Islamic world. Japan's resource diplomacy, which centres mainly on petroleum and oil, is one of these. Perhaps, that is why various aspects of Islam including history and culture as well as the relationship with the Muslim world have been some of the important areas of scholars' interest in Japanese academia, particularly in the last few decades.

There have been three peaks in the history of Japanese scholarship regarding Islam: first is before the Second World War, the second is post-war period after the "oil shock" and the last is after 9/11. Although, Islam was not studied as a religion in early stages because the role of comparative religion was minor and the Japanese scholarship in general was mainly confined to publications in Japanese language. However, gradually the situation has improved. The academic activities in recent years are different from earlier as the spectrum of research has widened studying Islam from various approaches such as methodological and typological. Another recent trend is the production of quite reasonable amount of material in English.

This brief survey on Japanese scholarship on Islam shall trigger the attention of Pakistani scholars for further studies and be helpful to understand how Islam is perceived in Japan.

INTRODUCTION

Islam's contact with Japan is not very old as compared to other religions. The first Mosque in Japan was built in 1905 at Izumi Oksu by Muslim soldiers in Russian captivity. Besides building mosques, propagation of Islam in Japan was strengthened by the establishment of Islamic centres and organizations in various cities, which were a natural outcome of the activities of Islamic communities in the country. Japan is perhaps one of the countries in the world where Islam has found its way last. It is uncertain whether Japan is the last country in the world to have seen the light of Islam¹. Its course of event is being watched not only by the Japanese scholars but also by the scholars around the world, especially those of the Muslim countries.

However, students who are familiar with the history of Islam in Southeast Asia would not deny that indeed Japan, unlike her nearest neighbours China and South Korea, is one of the latest countries in Asia that has been exposed to Islam. Despite the fact, the interest to know about Islamic world in Japanese people grew rapidly, and particularly in recent decades a swiftly increasing number of young scholars are studying various aspects of Islam and the Muslim world including the culture, history and the Japanese-Muslim relationship.

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THREE PERIODS OF JAPANESE STUDIES ON IN ISLAM

The research on Islam in Japan went through many ups and downs, therefore in order to have better understanding it can be classified into the following three periods:

- 1-Pre-war Japanese scholarship on Islam
- 2-Post-war Japanese scholarship on Islam
- 3-Post- 9/11 Japanese scholarship on Islam

Pre-War Japanese Scholarship on Islam

It is not so that only the Japanese have independently tried to understand Islam but Muslim scholars, as per their ability and understanding of the Japanese mind, also put their efforts to introduce Islam to Japanese people according. In early 1910 Maulana Barkatullah Bhopali (1854 –1927) started a journal with the name of Islamic Fraternity².s

Shumei Okawa and Prof. Gamo were among the pioneers of Islamic studies scholarships in Japan. Okawa translated the Quran from English translation into Japanese. Prof. Gamo wrote a book on the introduction of Islam and did the translation of Gulistan³.The Japanese showed their interest⁴ in research and studies on Islam and the Muslim world from the mid-Meiji to the Taisho Era, and reached the first peak in the early decades of the Showa Era. To Cemil Aydin there was an impressive boom of scholarship on the Muslim world in wartime Japan (1935-1945).⁵ Several books, from travel books and diaries to the translations of Quran and the biographies of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH), were published. It was consequently encouraged as a national policy and various institutions and research organizations were established. Nakamura has rightly mentioned that Japanese research on Muslim world started as a part of Chinese history and was gradually expanded to cover central Asia...soon began to incorporate Arabic, Persian and Turkish sources and documents⁶.

Post-War Japanese Scholarship on Islam

After a break, which came during the Second World War, Islamic studies in Japan were resumed.

It was time of vitality as many nations of Asia and Africa were becoming independent. Young Japanese researchers and students who became interested in the movements and developments of Middle Eastern and Muslim people, acquired knowledge of western studies on Islamic history and society, of tax and state system and of Muslim literature and proceeded soon with their own studies using Arabic, Persian and Turkish sources. Also during this time some pre-war scholars started to publish their previous works. This period experienced a great advancement reaching a second peak in the latter half of the 1970s⁷. After the oil shock in 1973, Japanese think tanks realized the importance of oil-producing Muslim countries for the economy of Japan. The Iranian Revolution in 1979 further increased awareness of Islam in Japan, which led to a deeper interest in the emergence of Islamic studies. The policy makers and scholars, who used to

depend on European and American scholars for information on Muslim world, realized that it was inevitable to undertake the studies of Islam by the Japanese scholars themselves for a better appreciation of Muslim people.

Consequently, the research field did not remain restricted to history, language and literature but covered a variety of disciplines like international relations, law, comparative religion, philosophy, intellectual history, politics, culture anthropology and philology. It is also worth mentioning here that the focus was on contemporary Islam, Sufism, philosophy and theology.

One of the notable scholars of that time is Toshihiko Izutsu who studied Sufism and was the first who translated⁸ the Holy Quran into Japanese directly from the original Arabic text. After this translation, two other direct translations appeared: one by Katsuji Fujimoto, Kosai Ban and Osamu Ikeda in 1970 and another one by Ryoichi Mita, a Japanese Muslim. Many Japanese researchers were trained by Izutsu like Shinya Makino and Toshio Kuroda. A semantic analysis of the Holy Quran (1970; Japanese version 1972), a biography of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) and translation of Bukhari's massive collection of Ahadith are some important accomplishments of Marino.

Another great scholar is Kojiro Nakamura⁹ who authored many books on the history of Islamic thoughts in Japanese, such as "Ghazali on Invocations and Supplications". Studies by Shrio Tomine and Sayoko Fukushima regarding Islamic studies are notable and some recent works of Yoshiako Sanada, Yukisisa Koga and Michio Yausa are significant in this matter.

Nakamura mentions that one of the greatest achievements in the study of Islam in Japan in the discipline of theology and philosophy is of Isuramu Tetsugaku (Islamic Philosophy, 2000). It provides translations of the major Arabic writings on Islamic philosophy and theology¹⁰.

The above account provides a summarized overview of the development of Islamic studies in Japan with a major emphasis on the "religious" aspect of Islam. It is often said that Islam is a religion, but not a "mere" religion; it is more than that. Therefore all research dealing with any aspect of Muslim world has been regarded as Islamic studies. Major participants have included historians, specialist in law, languages and literature, but they have recently been joined by anthropologists, political scientists, linguists and others. The involvement of scholars in comparative religion has been very limited. This may be explained by the particular nature of Japanese interest in the Muslim world and the lack of religious interest in Islam, except its modern trends and Sufism¹¹. Nakamura has rightly supported the suggestion of Oguchi, a famous sociologist of religion in Japan who has tried to find a methodological solution to the typology of religions in order to bridge the "mere" religious and the "more than" religious aspect of Islam¹².

Post- 9/11 Japanese Scholarship on Islam

In the aftermath of the 9/11, Muslims have had to face increased discrimination, scrutiny and prejudice as their religion, their culture and overall picture of Islam became the subject of intense, open debate all over the world including Japan¹³. However, on the other hand this catastrophic event intensified the interest of research on Muslim world and Islam in Japan.

More enthusiastic efforts on various individual as well as collective levels paved the way to new horizons of research on Islam in Japan. A unique and perhaps incomparable¹⁴ example for other nations, indeed, was set to follow. Among many scholars, notables are Prof. Sato Tsugitaka and Prof. Kosugi Yasushi¹⁵. They played an important role in the establishment of the Project of Islamic Area Studies which has been started with a conjecture of the situation of Islamic world and Islamic characters. Using the interdisciplinary methodology, this project has been set up to study its relationship with specific regional characteristics. To deal with topic of Islamization, Japan's first joint ten year research project in Islamic studies was initiated by Tokyo university of Foreign Studies in 1967.¹⁶

It was a new field of research aiming to build a framework of empirical knowledge on Islam, the Muslim world as well as its culture and civilization. There was a particular emphasis both on an historical approach to contemporary issues and comparative regional studies.

Moreover, as one of the independent projects, the Institute of Islamic Area Studies was established in 2006 by Waseda University Comprehensive Research Organization. In 2008, the Organization for Islamic Area Studies (OIAS) was established in order to enhance and expand these international joint research activities. In the same year, the Japanese Ministry of Education as a joint usage/research centre officially accredited this organization so that scholars from across the nation could be encouraged to conduct research.

Consisting of five research centres that are located at five different universities of Japan that are the University of Tokyo, Sophia University, Kyoto University, the Toyo Bunko (the Oriental Library) and Waseda University, the OIAS is also endowed with a central office for Japan's Islamic Area Studies (IAS) joint research network. The five research centres in this network function are in close collaboration with one another under the support of two simultaneous national research programs. First is the Program of Islamic Area Studies which is primarily funded by the National Institutes for the Humanities (NIHU) and the second is Promotion of Joint Research Facilities in Humanities and Social Sciences which is funded by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT).

Now, coming to the achievements, first Urbanism in Islam project under the directorship of Itagaki Yuzo started from 1988 to 1993. It was accomplished with

success as more than 130 scholars from diverse fields participated in it. Two international conferences under this project were held which produced six volumes of research published by Middle East Cultural Centre as well as an encyclopaedia on the subject published by Aki Shobo in 1992.

Over the five years of the second project, besides many workshops, research meetings and international conferences, an eight-volume series in Japanese and two English language series were produced (Islamic Area Studies series, 200-2004, 5 vols., Kegan Paul, International; New Horizons in Islamic Studies, 2003-2006, 5 vols., Routledge), all contained essential research accumulated during the project. Recently published (2010) book on Japanese scholarship on Islam with the title of "Japanese contribution to Islamic studies: the legacy of Toshihiko Izutsu interpreted" is also a remarkable accomplishment among many others. This volume (edited by Anis Malik Thoha) is a selection of papers and essays that have been improved thoroughly by their respective authors based on the discussion, comments, remarks, suggestions, criticisms etc.

Along with research journals on Islam and the Muslim world such as "The World of Islam", "Orient", "Asian and African Area Studies" and "Journal of Islamic Area Studies", the research on Islam that has been conducted by individuals, Muslim and non-Muslim Japanese scholars alike such as Suzuki Hirosh, Reiko Okawa, Kosugi Yasushi, Yamane So, Kamal Atsuhiko Okuda and many others¹⁷, is equally significant and important aspect of Japanese scholarship on Islam for which undoubtedly these lines are insufficient, and needs to be studied as a separate research work.

STUDIES ON MOLANA ABUL A'ALA MAUDUDI AND MODERN ISLAMIC THOUGHT IN JAPAN

An especial emphasis on socio-political, cultural norms, modern Islamic trends¹⁹ as well as Islamic revival movements such as Jamat-e-Islami²⁰ has also been a new trend in the Japanese scholarship²¹. For example, among international conferences held by IASP two had especial focus on the intellectual aspect of modern Islamic world namely "The Lighthouse of Modern Islam: Al-Manar (1898-1935) Revisited" in 1998, and "Intellectuals in Islam in the twentieth Century: Situations, Discourses, Strategies" in 2000²².

From 1997 to 2002 the five-year IASP consisting of six units conducted cross cultural and interdisciplinary studies on modern Islam. For instance, unit 1 focused on the dynamism of thought and politics analysing the evolution of contemporary thought.

Several prominent scholars and research students like Prof. So Yamane, Kikkawa Takuro²³, Ms. Sunaga Emiko²⁴ and Sasaoki Noriko are very active in this regard. Prof. Dr. Moinuddin Aqeel²⁵ has also been dynamically promoting academic and cultural exchanges between Pakistan and Japan.

Along with great Muslim scholars such as Shah Waliullah, Rasheed Riza, Seyed Abul Ala Mududi and Allama Muhammad Asad, various aspects of modern Islamic thought and Islamic revivalist movements have been studied in the recent years taking the historical backgrounds and interregional influences into account.

More importantly, the work of Molanan Maududi has received especial focus in Japanese academia. For example, Moinuddin Aqeel mentions four articles written by So Yamane on Molana Abul A'ala Maududi. These are as follows:

- 1- Saiyed Abul A'ala Maududi's Islamic Revivalism and the Establishment of Dar al Islam.
- 2- Maududi's Islamic Revivalist Movement: A Dynamic Study of Indian Muslim Intellectuals of 20th Century.
- 3- Legal and Inevitable war in Islam- in Maududi's Al-Jihad fi al Islam.
- 4- Horizons of Islam in South Asia: Iqbal and Muadudi²⁶.

In addition to this, "Urdu Works of Abul A'ala Maududi: an Annotated Bibliography" supervised by So Yamane, edited by Noriko Sasaoki and published by NIHU Research Series of South Asia and Islam as well as "Characteristics of the Qur'anic Interpretations in the Urdu Language: From Shah Wali Allah to Maududi" by Sunaga, Emiko published by Kyoto Working Papers on Area Studies: G-COE Series (2011), are remarkable studies on Molana Abul A'ala Maududi in Japan²⁷.

ENCYCLOPEDIAS ON THE MUSLIMS AND ISLAM

Without any doubt contemporary research on Islam has made remarkable progress in Japan which can be seen from the following few examples of encyclopaedias published in Japan. For instance over 130 academics and 200 researches from various disciplines contributed in Encyclopaedia of Urban Nature of Islam²⁸.

Iwanami Dictionary of Islam is the first and the largest reference work on Islam in Japan published until now²⁹, covering 4,500 subjects in which 250 experts put forward their contribution. Heibonsha, which is a top publishing company in Japan, published a book entitled "New Encyclopaedia of Islam in Japanese". This was a result of four years of publishing research by nearly 100 Japanese scholars of Islam. Another one -volume unique encyclopaedia of modern Islamic world draws on the resources of 100 contemporary specialists including scholars, businesses and trade groups, diplomats, social workers and other experts. Entries on Islamic world in Japan include the Japan Muslim Association, education, event, academic research, missionaries and pilgrimage.

The encyclopaedia of the Islamic way of life aiming to enhance the reader's practical relationships with Muslims in order to promote international and peaceful multi-cultural co-existence and prosperity is also a notable work. The encyclopaedia of Islamic common sense by a Japanese Muslim scholar Suzuki

Hirosh aims to disentangle some misunderstood aspects of Islam which are perceived with prejudice in Japan and has been published in 2004.³⁰

TRANSLATION OF THE HOLY QURAN INTO JAPANESE

Due to the shortage of native Muslim scholars in earlier time, this great task could not be handled by Muslims in Japan. However, the first Japanese translation of the Holy Qur'an according to Morimoto was completed by Keu-iche Sakamoto. He was one of non-Muslim graduates of Tokyo University's Department of Literature. It was compiled in two volumes and published in 1920. Versions of English translation of the holy Quran were used by him because he could not translate from Arabic directly. Similarly, the second version of the Holy Qur'an in Japanese language was again translated by a Japanese non-Muslim which was published in 1938. Under the title "The Holy Qur'an, the Canon of Islam", it was published in a single volume. Then in 1950, the third translation of the Holy Qur'an was published in Japanese. This time, translator Shumei Okawa, was again a non-Muslim.

It was in 1957 when the first translation directly from the Arabic text of the Holy Quran appeared in Japanese as a set of three separate volumes. This translation was accomplished by Toshihiko Izutsu who was a Japanese non-Muslim and a scholar of Islam. He was an expert in Arabic language. In 1970, the fifth translation of the Holy Qur'an was published by a joint effort of two non-Muslim scholars. They were professors at the Osaka University in the department of Foreign Studies. They also translated the Holy Qur'an directly from the Arabic text.

Just two years later, in 1972 Haji Umar Mita was the first Muslim, who translated the Quran into Japanese. It should also be noted that it is the only Japanese translation in which separate, elaborate notes are given as interpretation of the meaning of the Qur'an as well as every Ayah (verse) in Arabic text has its Japanese translation³¹.

CONCLUSION

In short, Japanese interest in Islam and Muslim world was, has been and shall remain intact for many reasons. This interest triggered a comprehensive study of Islam, not leaving even a single aspect of it untouched, and consequently set unprecedented examples of remarkable scholarly works in various fields with regard to Islam and Muslim world, in both Japanese language and English. In the last few years, prompted largely by the research work in universities and institutions, numerous research papers, books, encyclopaedias and articles on Islam have appeared. On the other hand, however, Muslim scholars' indifference particularly in Pakistani universities towards Islam in Japan seems a matter of worry. Nevertheless the outstanding Japanese scholarship on Islam will certainly draw attention in near the future.

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7. Ibid
8. One of his famous contributions is: "God and Man in the Qur'an: Semantics of the Qur'anic Weltanschauung, published by A.S. Noordeen.
9. After this translation, two other direct translations appeared: one by Katsuji Fujimoto, Kosai Ban and Osamu Ikeda in 1970 and another one by Ryoichi Mita, a Japanese Muslim
10. He is a Professor of Islamic Studies at Obiinn University and Professor Emeritus and head of the Department of Islamic Studies at the University of Tokyo.
11. Ibid, Nakamura 12. Ibid 13. Ibid
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