

A Jewish Egyptian Marxist Intellectual and his Inquiry into the Popular Heritage

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Introduction

This is a short essay on the personal history of Egyptian Marxist intellectual Aḥmad Ṣādiq Sa'd (1919–1988), who was born into a Jewish family, and his studies of the social history of Egypt, focusing on his inquiry into the popular heritage (*al-turāth al-sha'bi*).

Aḥmad Ṣādiq Sa'd was an eminent 'amateur' historian. In the 1940s, as a leading activist in the emerging Egyptian communist movement, he analyzed social and political problems using Marxist methodology. His fascinating articles were published in the journal of his organization: *al-Fajr al-Jadīd* (the New Dawn, 1945–1946).¹⁾ His two books from this period on the agrarian problem in Egypt (1944) and the Palestinian question (1946) are still highly evaluated as distinguished pioneer works.²⁾

His research activity was suspended by the suppression of the communist movement by Nasser's government in the late 1950s. He restarted his research in the late 1970s after retiring from a state-owned electric company. He had worked for the company as an engineer after his release from political prison in 1964. In spite of the long interruption, he had not lost his high motivation for studies. He energetically wrote a number of articles and books in his last years. The best-known books among them are his studies on the Asiatic mode of production.³⁾ In these studies, he presented a grand vision of Egyptian history from the ancient to contemporary periods. He is unique for attempting to write of the dynamics of history, rather than the stagnation of society, by analyzing the roles of popular movements in each historical stage. Later, he developed this research interest into popular movements and was inclined to study the problematic issue of the popular heritage (*al-turāth al-sha'bi*) or the popular thinking (*al-fikrīya al-sha'biya*).⁴⁾ He wrote thought-provoking works on popular movements (*shu'ubiya* and *mahdi* movements) and

on Islamic economic thought.⁵⁾

I will explain how these studies in his last years originated from his personal experiences as a Jewish Marxist who had attempted to approach the Egyptian popular classes through his efforts to Egyptianize himself. In later sections, I will try to briefly describe his personal history by using his memoirs, biographical articles on his life and interviews with his comrades.⁶⁾ Finally, I will argue the case for one of his studies into Egypt's popular heritage.

1. Family Background

Aḥmad Ṣādiq Sa'd was born into a Jewish family in the Shubra district (a middle class residential area) of Cairo on January 29, 1919.⁷⁾ His parents named him Izīdūr Salfādūr (Isidoro Salvador). His father and mother were a mixed couple of Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews.⁸⁾

According to Sa'd's memoirs, the ancestors of his father, Rāfāyīl Simūn Sālītīl, moved from Andalusia to Ottoman Turkey at the time of the Reconquista and migrated from Izmir to Alexandria at the end of the 19th century. They spoke Ladino, as well as Turkish and Arabic. His father's family was not wealthy when they migrated to Egypt. His grandfather was a peddler of clothes and died while Sa'd was still young. His grandmother earned money to support the family by doing needlework at home. As his grandparents' eldest son, his father helped his grandmother to carry sewed clothes to a middleman, carrying the clothes on his head before going to school in classes held at a monastery. At the school, he was ordered to pull the rope for the chapel bell at the times of mass. This was a denigrating task for a Jewish boy and his father's family also had trouble paying his school fees. Therefore, some years later, he left the school and began to work in a shoe shop. Then he moved to a watch shop and learned the skills of a watchmaker. He eventually succeeded in that business and made some money during World War One. He opened a watch and jewelry shop at the al-'Ataba al-Khaḍrā' square near Musuki street (a famous commercial center near to the old Jewish quarter) in Cairo. Sa'd's family became well-off and bought a villa in the Zaitūn district (a sophisticated new middle-class residential area).⁹⁾

Sa'd's mother, Ṣūfī Bīrliyāfsky, was born in Odessa. Many years before, poverty drove her ancestors to migrate from Germany to Bessarabia. Her family spoke both Yiddish and Russian. Her father was a wholesale merchant dealing in coal and timber. However, her family

later lost its wealth due to internal strife among family members and then migrated to Alexandria. She studied at a convent school, where she learned French and German.¹⁰⁾

The stories of Sa'd's parents are examples of the family histories of Jews who migrated to modern Egypt. As the cotton-export economy grew in the latter half of the 19th century, a lot of Jews in the east Mediterranean, as well as Greeks, Syrians, and Armenians were among those who moved to Egypt for business opportunities. Among them, Italian Sephardic Jews attained considerable wealth in the financial and marketing sectors of the cotton-export economy. But the wealthy class consisted of only a small part of the Jewish population and the majority of the Jews worked in other urban fields as small traders, brokers, peddlers, artisans of jewelry and clothes, bank clerks and wage laborers.¹¹⁾

Sa'd described his parents as a couple composed from the 'artisan' class (his father) and the 'petit bourgeoisie' class (his mother).¹²⁾ Yet it seems their marriage faced no trouble due to their differences in class and ethnic origin. Most of the Ashkenazi Jews who immigrated to Egypt to escape pogroms in Russia and Eastern Europe were generally poorer than Sephardim. It is said that such mixed marriages were sometimes accompanied with difficulties.¹³⁾

Sa'd described his education and family cultural atmosphere as follows: "I was brought up with favor because I was the first son for my parents. But when my brother was born, in order to concentrate in raising him, my mother enrolled me in a Greek school and then an Italian school. I continued studying French language in these schools. French was the common language of the aristocratic class in Egypt in those days. I acquired my Baccalaureate in Alexandria in the mid 1930s. After my father died in 1930, we moved from Cairo to Alexandria to seek the help of my uncle (my mother's brother). We usually used French in conversation in our family, and also spoke English with guests at our monthly house party. In addition, we spoke Italian among intimate family members. As for Arabic, my mother occasionally expressed her feelings in Arabic words when facing sad accidents, but that was the broken Arabic of Western foreigners."¹⁴⁾

Sa'd explains that his original culture was "Western, basically French, but also English and Italian". However, later he began to study classic Arabic through private lessons from a *shaykh* from al-Azhar before entering university. He mentions in his memoirs: "I decided to study Arabic because I matured (politically) and participated in the struggle

for the liberation of Egypt. Actually, I only finished learning the language when I started doing research work and writing articles and books".¹⁵⁾ His decision to learn Arabic was strongly connected with his encounter with Marxism in his high school days.

2. Encounter with Marxism: Ittiḥād Anṣār al-Salām

Aḥmad Ṣādiq Sa'd came into contact with Marxism when he was sixteen years old and a student at a Jewish Lycée high school in 1935. He remembered that his inclination toward Marxism was not due to his concern for the working class nor his sympathy for the poor in contemporary Egypt. Rather, he had a chance to read *The Communist Manifesto* in a French edition that he borrowed from his sister's boyfriend and became interested in Marxism. The subject was difficult, but still attractive because its logic reminded him of his favorite subject in school, mathematics, its logic of demonstrating engineering theories in particular. Another contact came from lectures by a young female teacher, Anna Kayanco. She was a Russian Jewish communist whose family left Russia at the time of the 1905 Revolution. He remembered that she explained in her first lesson the meaning of class struggle through the example of the French Revolution. She was a member of Ittiḥād Anṣār al-Salām (Ligue Pacifiste) and shortly later she introduced him to the organization.¹⁶⁾

Ittiḥād Anṣār al-Salām was established in 1934 as a part of the Rassemblement Universel pour Pacifisme (the World Union of Peace), an anti-Fascist organization. Its founder was Paul Jaquot-Decombes, a Swiss engineer born in Egypt, who had an intimate relationship with the German Communist Party. The organization played a role as a kind of incubator for the communist movement in Egypt in the 1940s.¹⁷⁾

In 1937, when he entered *Handasaname* of the Fu'ad I University (now the Faculty of Engineering of Cairo University) and moved to Cairo, he kept in contact with Ittiḥād Anṣār al-Salām and met its members. According to Sa'd's memoirs, a majority of them were foreign residents: "Greeks and Italians and young people and students from the Lycée and other schools, including Jews and other minorities." Among them, two Egyptian Jews, Raymond Duweik and Yūsuf Darwīsh, became his closest comrades. In this circle, he began to learn the Marxist theory of political economy and further studied bourgeois economics. In particular, he owed his learning to the Greek members, who played an

important role in establishing Ittiḥād Anṣār al-Salām.¹⁸⁾

The founder, Jaquot-Decombes, aimed to end the dominance of foreigners in Ittiḥād Anṣār al-Salām. He expected the three Jewish Egyptian youths (Aḥmad Ṣādiq Sa'd, Remond Duweik and Yūsuf Darwīsh) to strengthen the national character of the organization (that is to Egyptianize it) and to finally form a communist movement that could take root in Egyptian society. The Egyptian Jewish youths had their own motivation in participating in the movement. Sa'd explains: "The situation which I faced in those days was shared by all Jewish youths living in Cairo and Alexandria. That was the ugliness of Fascism and Nazism and the threat of racism. Therefore we took notice of the Popular Fronts in France and Spain and the role of the French Communist Party. As a result, most became interested in Marxism. This was an international phenomenon at that time. However, the trend declined after the establishment of Israel and the victory of Zionism."¹⁹⁾

As the last sentence indicates, the situation of Jewish communists (whether they were of foreign origin or not) quickly deteriorated under the shadow of the Palestinian question after 1948. But at the end of the 1930s, Sa'd himself still asserted the distinction between his group and other foreign activists (including Jews). He explains that "later the foreign members left our organization to go to their own countries and participated in their communist organizations, but the members who did not have other nationalities (legally or practically), Jews in particular, remained in our organization."²⁰⁾

After the outbreak of World War Two in September 1939, Ittiḥād Anṣār al-Salām was dissolved and reorganized into the Research Group (Jamā'a al-Buḥūth) under the leadership of Jaquot-Decombes. The object of this organization was 'to research social conditions of contemporary Egypt and the Egyptian national movement.' It published a pamphlet, *Egypt Now*, to explain Egyptian culture and social affairs 'for foreign residents, Egyptianized foreigners and soldiers of the Allied Army.'²¹⁾

However, according to Sa'd's memoirs, other members of Ittiḥād Anṣār al-Salām organized another group: the Democratic Union (al-Ittiḥād al-Dīmūqrāṭī). He criticized its members' inclination toward Trotskyism in his memoirs²²⁾. But later this organization became the mainstream faction in the communist movement in Egypt. On the development and split in the communist movement in this period, a lot of studies and memoirs of activists give different views and interpreta-

tions.²³⁾ Sa'd takes a critical view of the foreign character of the leadership of the mainstream faction. The Democratic Union split into three groups in 1943. Sa'd, like most other Egyptian communists, considered all three leaders of these groups to be 'foreign' Jews: Henry Curiel of the Egyptian Movement of National Liberation (al-Ḥaraka al-Miṣrīya li-l-Taḥarrur al-Waṭanī: EMNL), Hillel Schwartzs of Iskra (al-Sharāra) and Marcel Israel of the Liberation of People (Taḥrīr al-Sha'b). These groups were integrated with other small groups into the Democratic Movement of National Liberation (al-Ḥaraka al-Dīmūqrāṭīya li-l-Taḥarrur al-Waṭanī: DMNL) in May 1947. This group came to constitute the mainstream in the Egyptian communist movement, but foreigners still held the leading positions. As we will see later, Sa'd's group succeeded in Egyptianizing its leadership, but was pushed aside into a minor role as a faction opposed to the mainstream.

3. Egyptianization of the Communist Movement under the Shadow of the Palestinian Question: The New Dawn Group

The Communist movement in Egypt rebounded and expanded rapidly in the period during and immediately after the World War Two: 1942-1947. In this period, the critical problem for the movement was the leadership's foreign character and its nationalization ('Egyptianization'). It was most important to getting the communist movement to take root in a country where nationalism was growing as a hegemonic political ideology. In addition, this problem was deeply interlocked with the Palestine question that was becoming increasingly important in the politics of the Arab world. These two unresolved problems were compounded upon each other and led to a setback for the communist movement in 1948.

World War Two affected the activities and direction of communist movements across the Eastern Mediterranean. In the case of Sa'd's group, each phase of the war accelerated its nationalization. At first, the outbreak of the Nazi-Soviet war in 1941 led many foreign members (Greeks and Italians) in the Research Group to leave Egypt to join in the anti-Fascist struggles in their home countries. This eventually led to the nationalization of the movement. Sa'd says that the shift was a unique 'fundamental change' that never took place in any of the other organizations such as Iskra and EMNL.²⁴⁾

The second phase came with the invasion of Egypt by the German-

Italian army in 1942. Facing the danger of Axis occupation, a majority of the Research Group, most of them Jews who feared persecution under occupation, took refuge in Palestine. Sa'd recounts the situation at that time:

"We three members [Sa'd, Yūsuf Darwīsh and Raymond Duweik] discussed the situation and reached a conclusion. If we left the country (*bilād*), it would be a fatal error in spite of the fact that it was inevitable that we would face harsh repression by the Fascists if they occupied Cairo, because we were communists [in addition to being Jews]. We considered it our duty to resist the occupation and made the decision to hold our ground and planned to hide as follows: I would go to a village in Upper Egypt, Raymond to Alexandria, and Yūsuf to Cairo. We planned to contact each other through secret channels."²⁵⁾

After the defeat of the Axis army at the Battle of El-Alamein in November 1942, the foreign members returned from Palestine at the end of the year. But their absence had given the three young Egyptians an opportunity to seize the leadership of the group. They had come to have confidence in managing their own organization and declared independence from the old group, asserting that they were "Egyptians and not like the foreign and semi-foreign members dyed in French culture".²⁶⁾

According to Sa'd's memoirs, the foreign members accepted the change and remained friends without allowing any ideological or political confrontation between the two groups. Later, Sa'd and his comrades founded the Popular Front of Liberation (*al-Ṭalī'a al-Sha'biya li-l-Taḥarrur*) in 1946, and foreign members formed a sympathizer group named *al-Mamarr* (the Passage).²⁷⁾ In the same year, they started a bi-weekly journal *al-Fajr al-Jadīd* (the New Dawn). Later, they came to be called the New Dawn Group as they were very cautious about the secrecy of their organization, even to the point of not releasing its real name.

Sa'd considered their independence to be 'an important turning point in the nationalization of the communist movement in Egypt'. He explained: "Many foreigners still played leading roles in other communist organizations, such as EMNL, Iskra, and even DMNL. I believe that this had some [negative] influences on the strategies of these organizations."²⁸⁾

One of the negative influences was the attitude of the foreign leaders to the Palestine question. The leaders of EMNL and Iskra (Henri Curiel and Hilel Schwartz) were regarded as 'foreign' Jews. When

EMNL and Iskra united to become DMNL in May 1947, Curiel and Schwartz remained in the leadership of this biggest communist organization in Egypt. But in November of the same year, DMNL began to support the United Nations Resolution on the Partition of Palestine, obediently following a decision by the Soviet Union. This attitude provoked deep frustration with the foreigners' leadership among Egyptian members in DMNL, leading directly to a split of DMNL into more than six factions and to a major setback for the communist movement in Egypt as a whole.

The New Dawn Group took the opposite line to the decision of DMNL and the Soviet Union. Sa'd says that he wrote an article criticizing the partition plan for Palestine in their secret journal, *al-Hadaf* (the Object). But according to his biographies, he was forced to withdraw his remarks and to follow the official policy of the Soviet on the Palestinian question immediately after the end of the war in Palestine in 1948.²⁹⁾ However, Yūsuf Darwīsh asserted that this critical attitude to the partition plan was not Sa'd's personal opinion but a decision of their organization and that they held fast with this view in spite of external pressures.³⁰⁾

They decided to take a consistent stand on the Palestine question through their association with Palestinian Marxist activists. Sa'd and his comrades met two Palestinian leaders, Mukhlis 'Āmir and Būlis Faraḥ, in Cairo in 1946, on their way to Paris for the first Congress of World Labor Unions. They were members of al-'Uṣba al-Waṭaniya (the National League), a Palestinian Arab nationalist communist organization within the Palestine Communist Party. Sa'd asked Būlis Faraḥ to give him research materials on the Palestine question and Faraḥ later sent them to Sa'd from Hebron. In writing *Palestine in the Claws of Imperialism* (1946), Sa'd relied on these materials.³¹⁾

But the Palestine question negatively affected the activity of these Egyptian Jewish Marxists who supported the cause of Palestinian nationalists. In 1945 they confronted other members of the Committee of Publishing of Modern Culture (Lajna Nashr al-Thaqāfa al-Ḥadītha), a cultural association (*jam'īya*) that they joined in 1941 to publish research products such as Sa'd's analysis of Egypt's agrarian problem.³²⁾ According to his memoirs, the cause of the confrontation was that other members came to condemn the presence of Jews in the committee. As the result, they were forced to leave the committee and started publishing their own journal, *the New Dawn*.³³⁾ Their departure created an op-

portunity for them to consolidate their activity in publishing the new journal. But it must be noted that this happened in a milieu of increasing anti-Jewish feeling among the Egyptian masses, provoked by chauvinist religious and ultra-nationalist demagogues. There was also a symbolic incident in the same year. In November 1945, a demonstration against the Balfour Declaration turned into a riotous mob that attacked foreigners and Christian-owned shops.³⁴⁾

The New Dawn was suspended by the Ismā'īl Ṣidqī government in July 1946, only fourteen months from its first issue and Sa'd was arrested with his comrades. But in this short period, Sa'd wrote a great deal of articles under pen names such as Aḥmad Sa'īd or Nihād. He also participated as a representative of their organization in the famous nationalist body, the National Committee of Laborers and Students (al-Lajna al-Waṭaniya li-l-'Ummāl wa-l-Ṭalaba) in 1946. This period of 1945-46 was the peak of his activity in his younger days.

After the setback during the Palestine War in 1948, the communist movement again started to expand in the period of political crisis that brought the military coup in Egypt in July 1952. There were three eminent organizations at the time of the July Revolution: the ex-DMNL group under the leadership of Henri Curiel (who was exiled in 1950), the Vanguard of Laborers (Ṭalī'a al-'Ummāl: the New Dawn Group), and the Communist Party Group (al-Rāya group: newly established in 1950). These communist groups took different stands toward the new military government (the ex-DMNL group expected a revolutionary nature of military government at first and the others were even more critical). But all finally swore allegiance to the nationalist revolutionary regime. It is noteworthy that this process of integration (or subjugation) of the communist movement to Nasser's authority was connected with other two processes: the unification of the movement and the Egyptianization of its leadership.

The unification of communist organizations was completed in January 1958 by the foundation of the Egyptian United Communist Party (al-Ḥizb al-Shuyū'īya al-Miṣrī al-Muttaḥid) under the pressure of the government and other forces (the international communist movement in particular). But the three Jewish leaders of the New Dawn Group (Sa'd, Yūsuf Darwīsh, and Raymond Duweik) were excluded from the central committee of the new party. This was decided "as a part of the comprehensive Egyptianization policy of the new party,"³⁵⁾ even though all three of them had already converted to Islam.³⁶⁾ As men-

tioned above, Sa'd emphasizes that their organization led others in the process of Egyptianization, but its Jewish members were ironically discriminated upon because of their 'non-national' origins.

As mentioned, there were three interrelated processes in the development of the Egyptian communist movement in the 1950s: (1) the Egyptianization of the leadership, (2) the unification of divided movements, and (3) the subjugation to Nasser's authority (which finally led the Communist Party to dissolve in 1965). It is necessary to conduct more detailed researches on the interrelations of the three processes. Some memoirs of old activists published recently reveal some facts on this issue.

In those memoirs, Sa'd Butrus Tawil, who was a member of Iskra, and later of DMNL, compares the attitudes of the three main communist groups toward their Jewish leaders: "the attitude of the Communist Party of Egypt [al-Rāya faction] is racist and chauvinist. The Unified Party [the ex-DMNL group] was stuck on the subject of the Jewish leadership for a long period. But the Laborers and Peasants Party [Sa'd's group] took a correct attitude toward this problem. Its Jewish comrades seceded from the central committee, but remained in Egypt, keeping their memberships in the party, and continued to contribute their intellectual and political influence. They understood their ambiguous situation and were sensitive to the feelings of the Egyptian masses even though those feelings were wretched."³⁷⁾

Muhammad Hilmī Yāsīn, one of the comrades of Sa'd's group, testified as follows: "Our attitude to the foreigners' problem was apparent. There was no discrimination between Jews and other members. But we took a decisive position on the selection of members of the central committee of the new party. Twelve of the thirteen members opposed the entry of Jews into the committee. All of us obeyed the pressure from the Comintern"³⁸⁾

Another comrade, Khālid Hamza Aḥmad, also from Sa'd's group, has a more critical opinion: "Many foreigners and Egyptian Jews participated in the foundation of the Vanguard of Laborers [Ṭalī'a al-'Ummāl: another name of Sa'd's group], played distinguished roles and brought great results. However, in my opinion, these Jews, who declared their conversion to Islam, injured not only themselves, but also the movement itself."³⁹⁾

4. The Origin of Sa'd's Interest in the Popular Heritage

Sa'd returned to research activities and started energetic writing after his retirement in the late 1970s. He came to focus his interest on the popular heritage and Islamic economic thought. It was the January 1977 riot and the resurrection of the radical Islamic movement in the late 1970s that decisively changed his research interest. He showed deep concern about the riot and criticized stereotyped studies on mass movements in his article, "Rereading the Incident of January 1977."⁴⁰⁾

However, it is noteworthy that his concern about the popular heritage originated in his political and intellectual experiences as a leftist activist in his youth. His approach to popular mentality is deeply connected with his personality-building process as a nationalist Marxist intellectual and his attempt to Egyptianize himself spiritually and culturally.

Sa'd reckoned: "I tried to master Arabic for my studies in the university, activities with Marxist intellectuals and journalistic work in *the New Dawn*. My spiritual and cultural Egyptianization started with my participation in the national movement (and my study of the writings of 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Rāfi'ī).⁴¹⁾ The feeling of sympathy and sense of duty to the Egyptian people and the Egyptian working class that I felt at that time was due to the influence of Marxism and Communism. This sympathy was further strengthened through my research of social, cultural and political peculiarities of Egypt based on Marxist theory."⁴²⁾

This sympathy was also deepened through his activities among the popular classes. His group began to make contact with the working classes in 1940, when they met a group of high-school students who opened a literacy school for laborers in the al-Sabtīya area of Cairo. Following this example, Sa'd's group organized the Youth Group for Popular Culture (Jamā'a al-Shabāb li-l-Thaqāfa al-Sha'biya). It opened literacy schools in Būlāq and Mīt al-'Uqba for education and the enlightenment of peasants and laborers. They further collaborated with other schools in the Delta and Upper Egypt.⁴³⁾

Sa'd's group began to develop ties with the labor movement in 1942, when they seized the leadership of the Research Group. According to Sa'd, it was the first case of cooperation between the communist movement and the labor movement in those days. They paid more attention to the independent nature of the labor movement than other communist groups. It seems that they learned this attitude toward

the mass movement through links with the Shubra al-Kheima Textile Mechanics Union. This union was known as one of most radical and independent unions at that time.⁴⁴⁾

Tāhā Sa'd 'Uthmān, a leading figure of this union, wrote memoirs on Sa'd: "Aḥmad Ṣādiq Sa'd and the Egyptian Leftist Movement." According to this memoir, 'Uthmān met at first Yūsuf Darwīsh, who was a lawyer known as a active legal advisor to the labor movement, because he knew that Darwīsh recognized the initiative of laborers in the movement. However, 'Uthmān was very cautious with intellectuals in general. He had met many activists who intended to control the labor movement for their own political purpose, in election seasons in particular. He also was critical even of Marxist intellectuals. Later many of these young Marxists abandoned their political activities after the dissolution of the Communist Party in 1965. 'Uthmān criticizes them for losing their interest in the popular classes and changing their political attitude; and further: some of them joined the class of 'exploitative big bourgeoisies.' However, 'Uthmān emphasizes that Sa'd belonged to a totally different kind of intellectuals. He understood the importance of traditions and customs of the popular classes in order to know the reality of Egyptian society. He kept in touch with labor activists even 'in the time of suppression and self-sacrifice.'⁴⁵⁾

'Uthmān also explains how Sa'd showed his deep research interest in popular thinking (*al-fikrīya al-sha'biya*) among the working classes. Sa'd paid attention to their folkloric expressions such as labor songs, colloquial poetries (*zajal*), and popular ballads (*mawālī*). Sa'd recognized the importance of popular feelings of justice ('*adl*) and injustice (*zulm*) through these expression and narratives. He asked 'Uthmān to collect popular literature. Some poems of laborer poets (*zajjāl*), for example, were published in the magazine of their union. Further, Sa'd's interest was focused on the analysis of social conditions and geographical difference in these folkloric expressions. As an example, he paid attention to differences of expression of complaints (*shakwā*) against any injustice. He thought that these indicated differences of popular thinking and social consciousness between workers in big cities (Cairo and Shbura al-Kheima) and workers in Delta cities who kept ties with their villages.⁴⁶⁾

In addition, he was interested in the phenomenon of regional '*aṣabiya*' (the communal sense of solidarity) that occurred sometimes as conflicts between peoples that came from different regions. He considered that it was 'tribal '*aṣabiya*' implanted in the working class. In his late

days, he again analyzed this topic in asserting the 'oriental' societal character of Egyptian capitalism prominent in the era of the Open Door (*infitāh*) policy.⁴⁷⁾

5. Sa'd's Critiques on Studies of Mass Movements in Modern Egypt

Aḥmad Ṣādiq Sa'd left us a lot of thought-provoking works on the Egyptian popular heritage. I believe these contain unique ideas and viewpoints that break through the intellectual crisis in the contemporary Arab world that occurs in relations between intellectuals and the popular classes in particular. Also I speculate that the uniqueness of his works might derive from his political and intellectual experiences. I will introduce one of his articles, "Spontaneous Movement in the Historiography of Modern Egypt," written in August 1987, the year before his death.⁴⁸⁾ It effectively shows the intellectual position of this distinguished amateur historian with respect to the establishment of academism in contemporary Egypt.

At first he identifies two major schools of modern historical studies in Egypt: (1) the liberal school and (2) the conventional Marxist school with an inclination toward economic reductionism. He criticizes both for committing the same mistake of neglecting the spontaneous character of mass movements. The first school deems mass movements a subjective actor that always needs the guidance of a nationalist elite who direct them for their own political purposes. The second school views mass movements mechanically as a reflection of economic development into a social dimension. These conventional views of mass movements were challenged by new political phenomena such as the January 1977 riot, the revolt of the Central Security Police in 1986, and the radical Islamic movements that grew up rapidly from the latter half of the 1970s. They failed to analyze these new historical dimensions of mass movements.⁴⁹⁾

Sa'd first criticizes 'Abd al-'Azīm Ramaḍān's *The Class Struggle in Egypt 1837-1952* as a typical study of the liberal school.⁵⁰⁾ This author considers the mass, the peasant in particular, as a primitive and 'ignorant' actor who lacks any inner motives or own 'political strategy'. Therefore the mass continually has to rely on the direct guidance of the Wafd Party, the leading nationalist party since 1920s. Further, he sees nationalist motives as the ultimate cause that essentially drives mass movements.⁵¹⁾

Sa'd finds a similar perception of mass movements in the works of

another famous nationalist historian, Muḥammad Anīs, who belongs to the liberal school, but shows a sympathy to Nasserism.⁵²⁾ In his analysis of the incident of the Cairo Fires in January 1952 as an anti-foreign riot that paved the way for the July revolution in the same year, he considered this mass movement as a climax of counter-revolution. He described the people who participated in the demonstration as a rabble (*ḥushūd ghāfira*). He also affirmed the essential nationalist nature fixed in the Egyptian labor movement and therefore legitimated the leadership of nationalist politicians in the labor movement. The point of Sa'd's critique is that the liberal school could not recognize the possibility of mass movements developing outside the leadership of the Wafd party, with different trends, nor with complicated motivations.⁵³⁾

Secondly, Sa'd turns his criticism onto the school of conventional Marxist historians. They regard the mass only as 'a historical result' and consider that each political force should have a rigid and direct connection to its own social class. Further, they never admit any independent tendency in mass movements against the revolutionary leadership. For example, Rif'at al-Sa'īd, a well-known researcher of the history of the communist movement, does not accept the historical fact that the Egyptian labor movement was invariably under bourgeois leadership (the Wafd party and later Nasser's regime) except for a short period in the 1940s. Another Marxist researcher, Jamāl al-Sharqāwī, reached the same conclusion as Muḥammad Anīs did, describing the mass as the secondary actor that tends to take non-objective and anarchic destructive actions and cannot succeed in the people's revolution without a revolutionary leadership.⁵⁴⁾

Sa'd explains why the historians of these two schools do not recognize any spontaneous nature of mass movements. Firstly, these historians had been directly involved in political activities and their historical writings are always biased in favor of their political considerations. The second reason is that these political movements in modern Egypt always had the aspiration of building a strong centralized state. Sa'd says this aspiration is one of the main characteristics of the Egyptian thought heritage rooted deep in its history. This tendency can be found in different political movements such as the Wafd party, which considered itself as the only deputy of the Egyptian nation, the Nasserism, and even the Islamist movements: the Muslim Brotherhood and the Jihad Group.⁵⁵⁾

In another article, Sa'd pointed out two trends of Utopian movements in modern Egypt: (1) the *mahdī* (or *shu'ūbiya*: popular) trend, such

as spontaneous mass movements and (2) the *qanūnī* (centralistic state or San Simonist) trend, such as the Muḥammad 'Alī regime and the Nasser regime. Sa'd's model might give us a suggestion that the above-mentioned historians are ideologues of the latter (*qanūnī*) trend and inevitably failed to analyze the spontaneous character of mass movements of the first (*mahdī* or *shu'ūbiya*) trend.⁵⁶⁾

After criticizing the above-mentioned researchers for belonging to two schools, Sa'd evaluates the uniqueness of the works of Ṭāriq al-Bishrī, an 'amateur' historian and a well-known 'liberal' Islamist thinker. In his work, *The Political Movements in Egypt 1945-52* (the second edition), al-Bishrī attempts to describe spontaneous mass movements as a string of continuity putting together different ages of the long Egyptian history.⁵⁷⁾ The framework of his analysis is characterized as a model of dichotomy of two factors: *al-mawrūth* (the inherited) and the *al-wāfid* (the arriving). In this model, while mass movements always represent *al-mawrūth* factors, *al-wāfid* factors consist of the influx of different kinds of foreign thoughts. al-Bishrī concludes that intellectuals who studied imported [secular] thoughts eventually failed to cooperate with movements of the popular classes.⁵⁸⁾

However, Sa'd criticizes the point that al-Bishrī identifies an *al-mawrūth* factor with the Islamic identity and includes all 'destructive' alien thoughts in the concept of *al-wāfid*. Sa'd's criticism of al-Bishrī's argument can be summarized as follows:⁵⁹⁾

(1) al-Bishrī interprets the concept of an *al-mawrūth* factor (in other terms '*turāth*' the heritage, a key concept in the contemporary Arab thought) too narrowly.⁶⁰⁾ He confines this factor only to Islam or the Islamic heritage, and therefore treats the Muslim Brotherhood as the leading actor of mass movements for the liberation struggle from imperialism. However, Islam does not represent all of the *al-mawrūth* elements in Egypt, nor does the Muslim Brotherhood represent all of the Islamic trends.

(2) It is undeniable that Islamic thought is a major constitutional (*murakkaba*) element in the Egyptian intellectual heritage. But even the Islamic heritage is a multi-dimensional and multi-layered one. It has absorbed various kinds and trends of Islamic and other thoughts into itself such as Shi'at, Khawāriji, Mahdī elements, as well as Greek and Indian thought, and further non-Arab elements such as Turkish and Mongolian elements in the Mamluk regime etc. Therefore, if we classify the complex composition of these elements into two categories: *al-mawrūth* and

al-wāfid, we may risk coming to an arbitrary (*ta'ssuf*) conclusion. Rather, in relation to this point, we should reckon how Christian intellectuals succeeded in enriching the Islamic heritage by bridging the cultural and intellectual gap between two civilizations: Islam and the West.

(3) The argument of al-Bishrī on heritage is confined only in a narrow dimension: that is, the level of intellectuals and educated people. Therefore, he neglects the important role of the popular classes who repeatedly inherited their 'living' heritage (the popular heritage: *al-turāth al-sha'bi*) generation by generation. This popular heritage includes even some marginal elements of Islam expressed in popular poems and proverbs.

(4) al-Bishrī interprets *al-mawrūth* factors as fixed and unchangeable (*al-thābit*), neglecting any confrontation and mutual influences with *al-wāfid* factors. However, spontaneous mass movements have continuously been absorbing new thoughts throughout Egypt's long history. These new thoughts and ideas were not only the results of the inner development of the *al-mawrūth* elements, but also sometimes were products derived from *al-wāfid* alien elements. Thus Sa'd seems to consider that the Egyptian popular heritage is not fixed and unchangeable (*al-thābit*), but a self-changeable one (*al-mutahawwil*) that renovates itself through its inner dynamics.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have tried to present a personal history of Aḥmad Ṣādiq Sa'd, a Egyptian Jewish Marxist intellectual, and to outline his inquiry into the popular heritage (*al-turāth al-sha'bi*). To conclude, I would like to speculate on the interrelations between his personal experiences and his intellectual development, his unique research into the problematique of heritage (*al-turāth*).

Firstly, Sa'd's positive evaluation of the spontaneous nature of mass movements and his interpretation of self-changing popular thought was fostered through his experiences from his association with the labor movement in 1940s, its independent union activities in particular. Sa'd endeavored to come close to the people (*al-sha'b*) through his cultural and spiritual Egyptianization. But for him, the concept of the people does not stop only at the emerging modern proletariat class, but also includes other popular classes. He was therefore attracted to the world of popular culture as the material for his inquiry into the Egyptian popular

heritage.

Secondly, Sa'd asserts a self-changeable character of the popular heritage. He does not consider it homogenous or monolithic nor fixed or unchangeable. Further, he admits that the Egyptian popular heritage changes by absorbing different *al-wāfid* (arriving) elements. I would like to speculate that when he argued for this process of absorbing foreign elements into popular thought, he might have thought about the prospect of getting Marxism to take root in Egyptian society (that is the Egyptianization of the movement), in popular classes in particular, but also, he might have thought of his personal aspiration as an 'arriving' Jewish intellectual who had attempted to Egyptianize himself culturally and spiritually in order to associate with the Egyptian popular classes.

Notes

- 1) His articles published in this magazine are available in Aḥmad Ṣādiq Sa'd, *ṣafḥāt min al-yaṣār al-miṣrī fi a'qāb al-ḥarb al-'ālamīya al-thānīya*, Cairo: Maktaba Madbūlī, 1976. After his death, a memorial issue was published in the journal *al-Adab wa al-Naqd* (Culture and Critics) in February 1989 (No. 44) and Markaz al-Buḥūth al-'Arabī (the Center of Arab Studies) held a memorial symposium and published its result in *ishkālīyāt al-takwīn al-ijtimā'ī wa al-fikrīyāt al-sha'biya fi miṣr*, Nicosia, 1992.
- 2) Aḥmad Ṣādiq Sa'd, *mushkila al-fallāḥ*, Cairo: Dār al-Qarn al-'Ishrīn, 1944; do, *filasṭīn bayna makhālib al-isti'mār*, Cairo, 1946. On the evaluation of these books, see 'Abd al-Bāsiṭ 'Abd al-Mu'ṭī, "hawāmish 'alā kitāb mushkila al-fallāḥ" in Markaz al-Buḥūth al-'Arabī, *op.cit.*, and Ṭāriq al-Biṣhrī, *al-muslimūn wa al-aqbāt fi 'iṭār al-jamā'a al-waṭanīya*, Cairo: Al-Hay'a al-Miṣrīya al-'Āmma li-l-Kitāb, 1980, pp. 663-64.
- 3) Aḥmad Ṣādiq Sa'd, *tārīkh miṣr al-ijtimā'ī al-iqtisādī fi daw' al-namaṭ al-āsiyawī li-l-intāj*, Beirut: Dār Ibn Khaldūn, 1979; do, *tārīkh al-'arabī al-ijtimā'ī-taḥawwul al-takwīn al-miṣrī min al-namaṭ al-āsiyawī ilā al-namaṭ al-ra'smālī*, Beirut: Dār al-Ḥadātha, 1981; do, *nash'a al-takwīn al-miṣrī wa taṭawwur-hu fi daw' al-namaṭ al-intāj al-āsiyawī*, Beirut: Dār al-Ḥadātha, 1982.
- 4) The term *al-turāth al-sha'bi* is used often in the same meaning as *al-funūn al-sha'biya* (popular art) and *al-thaqāfa al-sha'biya* (popular culture) in folkloric studies. However, *al-turāth* (heritage) is a key concept in contemporary Arab thought. It constitutes one of the fundamental problematiques for Arab intellectuals. I would like to see different trends in contemporary Arab thought be classified by their definition of *al-turāth*. But few intellectuals pay attention to *al-turāth al-sha'bi* (popular heritage), or *al-fikrīya al-sha'biya* (popular thinking). On the discussion of the popular heritage, see Rif'at Sallām, *bahṭhan al-turāth al-sha'bi, nazra naqdīya minḥajīya*, Beirut: Dār al-Fārābī, 1989; NAGASAWA Eiji, "The Contemporary Arab Thought

- and the Popular Heritage,” in *Ikkyo Ronso*, 110-4: Oct. 1993 (in Japanese).
- 5) Aḥmad Ṣādiq Sa’d, *dirāsāt fi al-thaqāfa al-’udwiya*, Beirut: Dār al-Fārābī, 1988; do, *dirāsāt fi al-mafāhīm al-iqtisādiya ladai al-mufakkirīn al-islāmīyīn*, “*kitāb al-kharāj*” *li-abī yūsuf*, Beirut: Dār al-Fārābī, 1988; do, *dirāsāt fi al-ishtirākīya al-miṣriya*, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr al-Jadīd, 1990; do, *dirāsāt fi al-mafāhīm al-iqtisādiya ladai al-mufakkirīn al-islāmīyīn (2)*, ‘*uhūd al-imbarātūriyāt al-islāmīya*, Beirut: Dār al-Fārābī, 1990; do, *dirāsāt fi al-mafāhīm al-iqtisādiya ladai al-mufakkirīn al-islāmīyīn (3)*, *al-fikr al-mur’āsīr*, Beirut: Dār al-Fārābī, 1990.
 - 6) In summarizing his personal history, I used the following documents: (1) Sa’d, *ṣafḥāt min al-yaṣār al-miṣri* . . .; (2) Bashir al-Sibā’ī, “aḥmad ṣādiq sa’d (1919-1988): ma’lūmāt biyūjrāfiya muwajjaza” in *al-Adab wa al-Naqd*, February 1989 (No.44); (3) Markaz al-Buḥūth al-’Arabī, *op.cit.*; (4) Muḥammad Dakrūb, “aḥmad ṣādiq sa’d: ḥarakīya al-fikr wa al-niḍāl fi al-baḥth ‘an al-ṭarīq al-miṣri al-’arabī ilā al-ishtirākīya” in Sa’d, *dirāsāt fi al-ishtirākīya* . . .; (5) Sa’d “aḥmad ṣādiq sa’d, suṭūr wa ‘anāwīn” in *ibid.*; (6) his unpublished memoir, Aḥmad Ṣādiq Sa’d, “radd ‘alā al-as’ila,” n.d. I would like to show my gratitude to all those persons who granted me interviews on Aḥmad Ṣādiq Sa’d. Also I thank his two daughters, Mrs. Rawīya Ṣādiq Sa’d and Mrs. Munā Ṣādiq Sa’d, as well as Mrs. Rawīya’s husband, a distinguished poet, Mr. Rif’at Sallām (see note 4) for their comments and discussions.
 - 7) Sa’d, n.d, p.1. Most other documents said that he was born in Cairo.
 - 8) al-Sibā’ī, *op.cit.*, p. 29.
 - 9) Sa’d, n.d, p.1.
 - 10) *Ibid.*
 - 11) On the social history of Jews in modern Egypt, see Gudrun Krämer, *The Jews in Modern Egypt, 1914-1952*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1989.
 - 12) al-Sibā’ī, *op.cit.*, p. 29.
 - 13) Krämer, *op.cit.*, p. 27.
 - 14) Sa’d, n.d., p. 1
 - 15) *Ibid.*
 - 16) Sa’d, n.d, p.2; Sa’d “aḥmad ṣādiq sa’d, suṭūr . . . , p.423; Krämer, *op.cit.*, pp. 75-76.
 - 17) On Ittihād Anṣār al-Salām and Paul Jaquot-Decombes, see following studies: Krämer, *op.cit.*, p. 175; Selma Botman, *The Rise of Egyptian Communism, 1939-1970*, Syracuse; Syracuse University Press, 1988, p. 6; Tareq Y. Ismael and Rif’at El-Sa’id, *The Communist Movement in Egypt, 1920-1988*, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1990, p. 33. Sa’d criticizes the assertion that Jaquot-Decombes was a Jew (Sa’d, *ṣafḥāt min* . . . , p. 36).
 - 18) Sa’d, n.d., pp. 2-3.
 - 19) *Ibid.* Also see Botman, *op.cit.*, p. 7.
 - 20) Sa’d, n.d., p. 3
 - 21) al-Sibā’ī, *op.cit.*, p. 30; Botman, *op.cit.*, p. 8.; Tareq and El-Sa’id, *op.cit.*, p. 35; Sa’d “aḥmad ṣādiq sa’d, suṭūr . . . , p. 424.

- 22) Sa'd, *ṣafhāt min* . . . , p. 40. Also see Botman, *op.cit.*, p. 15.
- 23) Especially the Committee of Documentation of the Communist Movement until 1965 (Lajna al-Tawthīq al-Ḥaraka al-Shuyū'īya ḥattā 1965) has published collections of memoirs of activists in recent years. See notes 37, 38, 39.
- 24) Sa'd, *ṣafhāt min* . . . , p. 48.
- 25) *Ibid.*, p. 45.
- 26) *Ibid.*, p. 47.
- 27) *Ibid.*, p. 54.
- 28) *Ibid.*, p. 47. Jaquot-Decombes left Egypt in 1946.
- 29) Al-Sibā'ī, *op.cit.*, p. 31; Sa'd "aḥmad ṣādiq sa'd, suṭūr . . . , p. 425; Joel Beinin, *Was the Red Flag Flying There?: Marxist Politics and the Arab-Israel Conflict in Egypt and Israel, 1948-1965*, California: University of California Press, 1990, p. 62; Interview with 'Abd al-Qādir Yāsīn on Nov. 30, 1998. However, his comrade, Abū Saif Yūsuf, denied that Sa'd wrote this article in *al-Hadaf*. He supposed that Sa'd might have remembered things incorrectly because he could not find any such article in the archive of the New Dawn Group's activities (Interview with Abū Saif Yūsuf in Feb. 7, 1999). I could not find this article in the collection of documents in the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam.
- 30) Interview with Yūsuf Darwīsh on Dec. 7 1998, Feb. 20, 1999.
- 31) Interview with 'Abd al-Qādir Yāsīn on Nov. 30, 1998, Dec. 16, 1998. Also see note 2. According to Yāsīn, Both of these Palestinians left the Nationalist League; 'Amir died in a prison in Jordan and Farah emigrated to the United States.
- 32) Sa'd, *ṣafhāt min* . . . , pp. 46-47 ; Tareq and El-Sa'id, *op.cit.*, p. 36. Also see note 2.
- 33) Sa'd, *ṣafhāt min* . . . , pp. 49-50. ; Tareq and El-Sa'id, *op.cit.*, p. 35.
- 34) Krāmer, *op.cit.*, pp. 162-63; Beinin, *op.cit.*, p. 56; Joel Beinin, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry, Culture, Politics, and the Formation of a Modern Diaspora*, Berkeley , University of California Press, 1998, pp. 64-65.
- 35) al-Sibā'ī, *op.cit.*, p. 31.
- 36) It is said that both Sa'd and Duweik converted to remove this issue as an obstacle to unity, but Yūsuf Darwīsh did it for private reasons ten years earlier (Beinin, *Was the Red Flag* . . . , p. 187) But it must be noted that the 1956 war and the policy of Egyptian government toward Jews at that time escalated anti-Jewish feelings in the Egyptian masses and led the exodus of a great number of Jews. See Krāmer, *op.cit.*, pp. 220-221; Beinin, *The Dispersion of* . . . , pp. 86-89, 107-110.
- 37) Lajna al-Tawthīq al-Ḥaraka al-Shuyū'īya al-Miṣriya ḥattā 1965, *shahādāt wa ru'ā min tārikh al-ḥaraka al-shūyu'īya fī miṣr*, Cairo: Markaz al-Buḥūth al-'Arabī, 1998, Vol. 1, p. 70.
- 38) Lajna al-Tawthīq al-Ḥaraka al-Shuyū'īya al-Miṣriya ḥattā 1965, *shahādāt wa ru'ā min tārikh al-ḥaraka al-shūyu'īya fī miṣr*, Cairo: Markaz al-Buḥūth al-'Arabī, 2000, Vol. 3, p. 48.

- 39) *Ibid.*, p. 67.
- 40) Aḥmad Ṣādiq Sa'd, "qirā'a thāniya fī aḥdāth yanāyir 1977," *al-Ṭarīq*, Sept. 1987.
- 41) 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Rāfi'ī was a nationalist historian and wrote a series of books on modern Egyptian history from the nationalist viewpoint.
- 42) Sa'd, n.d., p. 2. Studying Arabic became a crucial point to differentiate the fate of other Jewish activists like Henri Curiel from that of Aḥmad Ṣādiq Sa'd. See Henri Curiel, *awrāq hinrī kuriyīl wa al-ḥaraka al-shuyū'iya al-miṣriya*, Cairo: Sīnā al-Nashr, pp. 105-106.
- 43) Joel Beinin and Zachary Lockman, *Workers on the Nile: Nationalism, Communism, Islam and the Egyptian Working Class, 1882-1954*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987, p. 314; al-Sibā'ī, *op.cit.*, p. 30.
- 44) Beinin and Lockman, *op.cit.*, pp. 315, 325, 328-29; Ellis Goldberg, *Tinker, Tailor, and Textile Worker: Class and Politics in Egypt, 1930-1952*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1986, pp. 139-63.
- 45) Ṭāhā Sa'd 'Uthmān, "aḥmad ṣādiq sa'd wa ḥaraka al-yasār fī miṣr," Markaz al-Buḥūth al-'Arabī, *op.cit.*, pp. 268-270.
- 46) *Ibid.*, p. 274.
- 47) Aḥmad Ṣādiq Sa'd, "miṣr shubh al-sharqiya," *Qaḍāyā Fikriya*, No. 3-4, 1986.
- 48) Aḥmad Ṣādiq Sa'd, "ḥaraka al-jamāhīr al-tilqā'iya fī al-manhaj al-miṣrī li-kitāba al-tārīkhī al-mu'āṣir," in Sa'd, *dirāsāt fī al-ishtirākīya* . . .
- 49) *Ibid.*, pp. 64-65.
- 50) 'Abd al-'Azīm Ramaḍān, *ṣirā' al-ṭabaqāt fī miṣr, 1837-1952*, Beirut, al-Mu'assasa al-'Arabīya li-l-Dirāsāt wa al-Nashr, 1978.
- 51) Sa'd, "ḥaraka al-jamāhīr . . .," p. 66.
- 52) Muḥammad Anīs and Al-Sayyid Rajab Ḥarrāz, *thawra yūliyu 1952 wa uṣūl-ha al-tārīkhīya*, Cairo: Dār al-Nahḍa al-'Arabīya, 1969; Muḥammad Anīs, *ḥarīq al-qāhira 26 yanāyir 1952: 'alā daw' wathā'iq tanshūr li-awwal marra*, Cairo: Maktaba Madbūlī, 1982.
- 53) Sa'd, "ḥaraka al-jamāhīr . . .," pp. 66-67.
- 54) Rif'at al-Sa'id, *tārīkh al-ḥaraka al-ishtirākīya fī miṣr, 1900-1925*, Cairo: Dār al-Thaqāfa al-Jadīda, 2nd. ed., 1975; Jamāl al-Sharqāwī, *ḥarīq al-qāhira, qarāra ittihām jadīd*, Cairo: Dār al-Thaqāfa al-Jadīd, 1976; Sa'd, "ḥaraka al-jamāhīr . . .," pp. 69-71
- 55) Sa'd, "ḥaraka al-jamāhīr . . .," p. 73.
- 56) Aḥmad Ṣādiq Sa'd, "madkhal li-dirāsa al-ṭubāwīyāt al-miṣriya [1]," in Sa'd, *dirāsāt fī al-ishtirākīya* . . .
- 57) Ṭarīq al-Bishrī, *al-ḥaraka al-siyāsīya fī miṣr 1945-1952*, Beirut: Dār al-Shurūq, 2nd. ed., 1983.
- 58) Sa'd, "ḥaraka al-jamāhīr . . .," pp. 73-74.
- 59) *Ibid.*, pp. 86-88.
- 60) See note 4.

Remembering Professor John K. Fairbank*

HIRANO Kenichiro

Sitting Before the Vietnam Hearings

It was on a day in March 1966. I was listening to radio broadcast of the Vietnam Hearings being held by the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations in my dormitory room at Harvard University, for “my mentor,” Professor John King Fairbank was scheduled to appear that day. When he did appear and began his testimony, I remember being surprised at the weak, even tense and trembling tone of his voice and impression that he was being coached by the chairman of the Committee, Senator William Fulbright. It was predicament in which I would never have imagined Professor Fairbank to be placed, given his strong and confident lecturing style in the classroom. I also remember thinking about Senator Fulbright; “So there is someone who can get the best of Fairbank.” I do not remember much of his testimony, mostly due to the shock of his incredibly weak presentation, so untypical of the towering over six-foot-six frame that would turn every head whenever he appeared on the Harvard campus and the way he was being treated by a much shorter Senator Fulbright.

I first met John King Fairbank when he was fifty-six and balding. His face was large and long, even formidable-looking, enhanced by the fact that he was described as the most prominent leader of Chinese studies in the United States, or in the world for that, and far too prestigious for a student from Japan to approach. Why was such a man acting so nervous before hearing? Could it have been due to memories of another hearing held by the Senate Judiciary Committee in 1952, during the reign of McCarthyism? As an expert in Asian studies, he appeared before the American public twice when it sunk into despair and disunion, namely,

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