

## CURRENT STATE OF AFFAIRS IN JAPANOLOGY IN TURKEY–2010

### INTRODUCTION

The 1980s and the following years have witnessed quite an active period in Turkey's international relations. Relations between Turkey and European countries and the US have become more complex as a result of more intensive activities in comparison with the past, while bilateral relations with many countries outside this geographical area have gradually reached a higher level of intensity. Japan, without doubt, is one of the most important countries in this regard. It could be said that research carried out in the field of Japanese Studies in Turkey has also played a role in the increased intensity of bilateral relations. The founding of Japanese Studies departments in various universities and the establishment of Japanese courses in many universities are also notable developments. Although the effectiveness of these developments in the education of researchers will take time to materialize, the number of researchers publishing their works in Japanese, Turkish and English increases daily.

This study analyzes the work being carried out in Japanese Studies in Turkey as well as offering an overview of the cultural developments associated with Turkish interest in Japan. It focuses on ongoing research in fields such as Japanese, Japanese history and literature, Japanese lan-

guage teaching in Turkey, Turkish-Japanese relations, and research carried out in the field of comparative studies.

## **JAPANESE LANGUAGE TEACHING AND JAPANESE STUDIES IN TURKEY**

The first steps taken in the establishment of Japanese language education in Turkey were the Japanese language teaching courses initiated at various universities and institutions at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s. It should be acknowledged, however, that the most important step was the founding of the Department of Japanese Language and Literature within the Ankara University Faculty of Letters, in 1985. This department, which admitted its first students in 1986 and produced its first graduates in 1990, has been the dynamo of Japanese language teaching and Japanese Studies in Turkey since its founding by Prof. Pulat Otkan with the help of Prof. Selçuk Esenbel, Prof. Mete Tunçoku, and Prof. Mori Masao from Japan. In addition, Ankara University started to offer MA degrees in Japanese language and literature in 1989 and PhD degrees in 1992. The researchers who were educated within these programs, which offer courses not only in the fields of language and literature but also in fields such as Japanese history and philosophy as well as Turkish-Japanese relations, went on further to develop their studies through their research in Japan, and they are still active in various research institutes in Turkey.

Following Ankara University's initiative, 18th of March University in Çanakkale founded its Department of Japanese Language Education in 1993 and a year after that, in 1994, Erciyes University's Faculty of Arts and Sciences in Kayseri established its Department of Japanese Language and Literature as an independent department. Prof. Mete Tunçoku's extraordinary efforts in the foundation of these two departments should not be overlooked. In addition to these two independent departments, Nevşehir University has also been engaged in intensive preparations for the admission of its first undergraduates to its planned Department of Japanese Language and Literature.

Besides these departments offering independent programmes, many Turkish universities offer Japanese language teaching as elective courses or as courses for the general public. Among these institutions, Boğaziçi University (İstanbul) is the most prominent, having included Japanese language teaching in its curriculum as an elective course since 1988. Middle East Technical University (Ankara; 1990), Bilkent University

(Ankara; 1994), Bilgi University (İstanbul; 1996), Başkent University (Ankara; 1997), İstanbul Technical University (1998), and Ege University (İzmir; 2000) can be counted among the institutions to offer Japanese language teaching courses. Besides these, there are a number of other institutions offering elective courses for college students or courses to the public.

Alongside the institutional framework of Japanese language teaching in Turkey, recent scholarly research carried out in Turkey within the fields of Japanese language teaching and Japanese should also be noted.

The Meeting of Turkish Japanese Instructors held in 2003 at Boğaziçi University in order to facilitate the establishment of a communications network and to strengthen cooperation among those active in Japanese Studies in Turkey was a significant step. This meeting has become established as a regular event, having been hosted by Ankara University in 2004, by Erciyes University in 2005, and by Middle East Technical University in 2006. Meetings so far have been held on an annual basis.

Taking an overview of the presentations and discussions that have taken place during these meetings, it can be seen that a wide variety of topics have been covered, ranging from the different problems associated with teaching Japanese and Japanese writing to Turkish speakers, to studies in Japanese language and the teaching of Japanese-Turkish translation. Following the improvements in information sharing and the strengthening of the communication network among Japanese language instructors in Turkey, various institutions have been able to establish connections between the Japanese language teaching field in Turkey and international organizations by hosting international activities in the field.

The most important among these international activities was the 17th International Conference on Japanese Language Teaching, held in Ankara in 2005. Prominent scholars of the field from Turkey, Japan, Europe, and the Middle East presented papers and engaged in discussions on such topics as the common problems encountered in Japanese language teaching in various countries and institutions, the development of course material, the history of Japanese language teaching, and Japanese studies [Nihongo Kyōiku Renraku Kaigi Jimukyoku 2005]. Furthermore, the inclusion of Japanese language teaching in Turkey among the topics for discussion laid the foundations for international awareness of Japanese language teaching in Turkey.

Another international meeting to attract a wide range of partici-

pants was the 13th Symposium on Japanese Language Education in Europe, held in Çanakkale in 2008. Under the title of “Multicultural Harmony and Japanese Language Education,” the symposium hosted 31 presentations and 10 posters, and discussions and information exchange with the 150 participants who came from various parts of the world further consolidated communication between Turkish Japanese instructors and international bodies.

Moreover, the 1st Seminar on Japanese Language Education in Turkic Countries, held at Ankara University with the help of the Japan Foundation in 2008, constituted an important step in developing a network among academics and experts engaged in Japanese language education in Turkish speaking countries.

In the context of Japanese language teaching in Turkey, one should also take into account the projects in Japanese that support these activities. Dictionaries are without doubt among the most useful resources in language learning. The uniqueness of the Japanese writing system and the use of the *kanji*, *hiragana*, and *katakana* writing systems, however, are among the factors that make the preparation of dictionaries a more difficult task.

In the context of the increase in interest in Japanese and Japan in Turkey, Muharrem Demirci's *Kanji: Japonca Türkçe Sözlük* (Kanji: Japanese-Turkish dictionary) [1989] stands out as one of the most important accomplishments in the field of Japanese studies. The dictionary, published in 1989, includes about 13,000 words written in *kanji* and is prepared according to the *gojūonzu* system. Although the dictionary, which includes not only the meanings of the *kanjis* but also the stroke order of the words, may not be as accomplished as its Western counterparts, it is sufficient for beginning and intermediate learners in Turkey. Furthermore, the *on-kun* index found at the end makes it a user-friendly dictionary.

Another project in dictionary preparation is Oğuz Baykara's *Temel Japonca Türkçe Sözlük* (Basic Japanese-Turkish dictionary) [2002a], published in Turkish. People who are interested in learning Japanese are able to refer to this dictionary, which is in fact the Turkish version of *Kiso Nihongo gakushū jiten*, produced by the Japan Foundation and translated into 16 languages, at the beginners' level.

Baykara has also written a work titled *Japonca'dan Türkçe'ye Yolculuk* (Journey from Japanese to Turkish) [2002b] based on his experiences in the preparation of this dictionary. This study focusing on the problems of translation will be useful for those working in the field of Japanese-Turkish translation.

Another work to have appeared in Japanese is Ayşe Nur Tekmen's *Japonca Dilbilgisi* (Japanese grammar) [Tekmen and Takano 2005]. This study offers information on Japanese spelling and pronunciation systems followed by a study of basic linguistic structures. It compares Turkish and Japanese and offers a general linguistic overview of Japanese. The work is notable as a compilation of Japanese language teaching material rather than as a contribution to research.

## TURKISH-JAPANESE RELATIONS

One of the most significant sub-fields within Japanese Studies in Turkey is that of Turkish-Japanese relations. Although more popular studies in the field have occasionally appeared, Selçuk Esenbel's article "Japanese Interest in the Ottoman Empire" [2000], published in English, is a comprehensive work in the field of Turkish-Japanese relations focusing on Japanese impressions of the Ottoman world as part of the world of Islam with specific attention to Japanese-Ottoman relations beginning in the Meiji Era.

Following Esenbel's article, other notable works include H. Can Erkin's *Geçmişten Günümüze Japonya'dan Türkiye'ye Bakış* (History of Japanese views on Turkey) [2004]. This study focuses on Japanese scholars' perception of the world before the Meiji Era and the image of Turkey within this framework, as well as significant travel books, memoirs, and literary works by Japanese authors that have played a role in Turkish-Japanese relations up to date.

Another notable work in the same field is A. Merthan Dünder's *Pan-İslâmizim'den Büyük Asyacılığa* (From Pan-Islamism to Great Asia ideal) [2006]. The work investigates in parallel the themes of Ottoman-Central Asia relations and Japan's interest in Central Asia and offers a detailed study of modern Japan's Central Asian policies and the relations developed within the framework of these policies up to World War II, Japan's attempts to assume a dominant place in the Islamic world, in particular with regard to the Ottomans, and the ideal of a Great Asian Empire.

Again, Dünder's work titled *Japonya'da Türk İzleri* (Turkish traces in Japan) [2008] is another noteworthy study in the field of Turkish-Japanese relations. This work offers an in-depth study of the building of mosques during the 1920s and 1930s among Turco-Tatar communities in Nagoya, Tokyo, and Kobe in Japan and also in Harbin city in China, which was under Japanese control at the time.

One of the most important events in Turkish-Japanese relations was the Ertuğrul Frigate incident. While it was always a focus of scholarly attention, popular interest in the affair increased with the widespread coverage in the media of recent underwater archaeological investigation of the frigate. Research done by various scholars in different fields offers a multitude of views on the subject, which has never lost its vibrancy.

## JAPANESE HISTORY

Research carried out in the field of Japanese history also deserves mention within the frame of Japanese Studies in Turkey. Generally speaking, these works—limited in terms of quantity—focus mainly on recent Japanese history, with a specific focus on the Meiji Era and after. All the same, one can find studies focusing on previous eras.

In terms of detailed analysis of pre-nineteenth-century Japanese history, Erkin's aforementioned study [2004] again should be noted. The work analyzes developments starting with the arrival of Europeans in Japan in the sixteenth century, the spread of Christianity in Japan and its prohibition in the seventeenth century, and Japan's relations with other countries in the Edo period with specific attention to the effects of the Opium War that broke out in the middle of the nineteenth century and Japan's reopening of its doors to European countries. The work analyzes Japan's *sakoku* policy not in terms of "isolation" or the "sealing off of the country," but within the frame of "minimizing international relations" and thus introduces a more appropriate conceptual vocabulary which reflects recent changing views of Japan's early modern history.

Another notable study of Japanese history before the nineteenth century is Hakan Gönen's work entitled *Modern Japonya'nın Ulusal Güvenlik Arayışları* (Modern Japan's search for national security) [2007]. Although Gönen's work focuses on the diplomacy associated with the Japanese-American alliance during the cold war, placing it within the ambit of international relations, the work is strengthened through the provision of historical context in the form of a detailed analysis of Japan's international relations since the seventeenth century and of significant historical developments over the intervening period. Gönen's work also collates Turkish views on Japan's international relations and style of diplomacy following World War II.

Several journal articles that have appeared in Turkey presenting studies of Japanese history before the nineteenth century should also be recognized. First of all, Esenbel's article entitled "Japon Aydınları ve

Batı Bilimi” (Japanese intellectuals and Western sciences) [1988] offers a detailed look at *Rangaku* studies in Japan during the Edo period while providing an overview of the ways in which Western style scientific understanding developed.

Again in the field of Japanese history before the nineteenth century Erkin’s “Japonya Ortaçağ’ında Zen Işığ” (Zen enlightenment in medieval Japan) [2005] should be mentioned. Erkin’s work was published in a special edition of the prominent intellectual journal *Doğu-Batı* (East-West) dedicated to “The Enlightened Middle Ages,” and which was a collective protest against the euro-centric characterization of the “Dark Ages.” The essay goes a step further to argue that the Middle Ages were not unique to Europe and that a similar period was seen in Japan too. Erkin proposes that, contrary to the generally accepted perception of the “Dark Ages,” Zen Buddhism, which appeared in the Japanese Middle Ages exercised an influence on various artistic fields, forging an aesthetic perception peculiar to Japan. The work also analyzes the *bushi* class’s emergence and rise to prominence in Japan.

There is an ample number of works that focus on Japanese history after the nineteenth century. The common characteristic of these works, however, is their superficial analysis of historical developments in Japan within the frame of Turkish-Japanese relations. There is still no work in Turkey that presents a general history of Japan or focuses on a specific era in Japanese history.

Finally one should also note the international symposium titled “A Comparative Study of Historical Archives among Several Nations” held at Ankara University in 2006 in the context of contributions to the field of Japanese history. The symposium was held with the support of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science and under the direction of Watanabe Koichi, who is a member of the National Institute of Japanese Literature, as part of a multinational research project conducted between the years 2004 and 2007. It was coordinated by Erkin, and discussions covered issues such as the construction of archives in Ottoman and Japan of the early modern periods, the processes involved in document production, and methods for establishing a social history based on documents produced by state authorities [Watanabe 2007]. The symposium was enriched by the active participation of researchers from various countries and was also received with interest by Turkish researchers.

Another work that derives from this symposium is “State, Society and Documents in Early Modern Japan and Ottoman Empire” that was published in 2009 by Toyo Bunko in both Turkish and Japanese under the editorship of Hayashi Kayoko, Özer Ergenç, and Watanabe Kōichi.

The articles included in this study demonstrate the level of research conducted with historical documents as well as containing analyses of which points need to be underlined in the future. Although one may come across difficulties in comparing such disparate fields as Japan and the Ottomans, we can say that factors such as the differences and similarities between these fields, their common and original points have been refined and a significant step has been taken for consecutive studies through this work [Hayashi, Ergenç, Watanabe 2007].

## JAPANESE LITERATURE

When viewed within the framework of Japanese studies in Turkey, one can say that the field of Japanese literature is almost a blank page. But when we talk about Japanese literature we should first mention cultural issues in Turkey.

Japanese literature became known in Turkey during the 1960s. During this period works by such master authors of Japanese literature as Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, Mishima Yukio, and Kawabata Yasunari were published in Turkish. These works were translated not from their original language but consisted of second-hand translations from English, French, and German.

As is known, the syntax of Japanese is different from those of Western languages. Even this basic characteristic alone points to the possibility of certain lapses of meaning, if we consider that the text will be transferred first into one new syntax and then into a third. A publishing house or a translator who sanctions this kind of indirect translation also becomes a factor that needs to be considered in the context of translation ethics.

Furthermore, a translation from Japanese, the socio-cultural foundations of which are completely different, into a Western language, followed by a re-translation into Turkish, the socio-cultural foundations are again completely different, makes lapses of meaning much more likely. If the translator is not adept in the cultural codes of a given text, these lapses of meaning become more likely, while this is not the case for translators who have in-depth knowledge of Japanese culture (or of other lesser known cultures). In this case it is hard to argue that the task of translation has been carried out properly. There are many instances of this type of translation.

It is possible to identify two boom periods in terms of this type of translation. The first one occurred in the second half of the 1960s and



the beginning of the 1970s, as mentioned before. It should also be noted that the reason for the awakening of interest in this period, during which works by important authors of modern Japanese literature were translated into Turkish, is related to the fact that Kawabata Yasunari received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1968.

The other boom coincides with Oe Kenzaburō's receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1994. During this period, besides the modern classics of the authors already named, some works by Yoshimoto Banana, Abe Kōbō, and Dazai Osamu were also translated into Turkish.

All the same, there are also instances of translations of Japanese literature from its original Japanese into Turkish dating from the first decade of the new millennium. Mariko Erdoğan and Hüseyin Ozkaya's joint translation of Natsume Sōseki's *Botchan* (*Küçük Bey* / The young master) [2003] was the first translation of a novel from Japanese to Turkish. This was followed by Oğuz Baykara's translation of Akutagawa Ryūnosuke's *Kappa* [2004]. Erkin has also translated a series of works from Japanese literature to Turkish. Among these one can list Dazai Osamu's *Ningen shikkaku* (*İnsanlığımı Yitirirken* / No longer human) [2006], Abe Kōbō's *Suna no onna* (*Kumların Kadını* / Woman of the dunes) [2007], Kawabata Yasunari's *Koto* (*Kiraz Çiçekleri* / The old capital) [2006], Murakami Ryū's *Koinrokkā beibizu* (*Emanet Dolabı Bebekleri* / Coin-locker babies) [2008], and Murakami Haruki's *Umibe no Kafuka* (*Sahilde Kafka* / Kafka on the shore) [2009]. In addition to these, the translation of *Hagakure* again by Erkin, is a source book for researchers interested in pre-modern Japan [Yamamoto 2006].

When one considers the increase in the number of translations from Japanese within the framework of Japanese Studies in Turkey, one can conclude that the start of formal Japanese language teaching in Turkey in the 1980s bore fruit in the 2000s in the number of competent translators who were able to translate texts from the original language. Another noteworthy point is that the aforementioned translators are all academics working at various universities. It is too early to talk of professional literary translators from Japanese to Turkish. Nevertheless, it is a gratifying development that academics and graduate students of various universities have begun working in the field of literature.

## JAPANESE PHILOSOPHY, CULTURE AND SOCIETY

Within the framework of Japanese studies in Turkey one should note that the fields of Japanese philosophy, culture and society constitute the

weakest field. Among the studies in this field Bozkurt Güvenç's 1980 work, titled *Japon Kültürü* (Japanese culture), was the first [Güvenç 1980]. This work, which was completed at rather an early stage from the perspective of Japanese studies in Turkey, has been one of the basic reference books for students in Japanese teaching, dating from the mid-1980s. The work covers subjects such as everyday life in Japan, family structure, education, agricultural life, and the natural world and is still considered a masterpiece among works written in the field of Japanese Studies in Turkey.

In the field of philosophy there are no original works. Those that are available consist of translations into Turkish of English translations, and most of them are about Zen Buddhism, written for the general reading public. The absence of original and in-depth studies by Turkish researchers is a significant problem for Japanese Studies in Turkey. It should also be noted that there are not many studies in fields such as sociology, art history or the architecture of Japan.

One point we should take into consideration with regard to popular culture is the interest in anime and *manga* in Turkey as in other countries. Although translations from Western languages constitute a large proportion of *manga* publications, which have recently begun to be published in increasing numbers, it is also noteworthy that the *manga* adaptations of Karl Marx's *Capital* and Kobayashi Takiji's *Kanikōsen* were translated into Turkish directly from Japanese.

## IN CONCLUSION

It can be said that one of the most significant problems of Japanese Studies dating from the 1980s is the lack of an independent journal or a regular meeting dedicated to the field. The work titled *Çağdaş Japonya'ya Türkiye'den Bakışlar* (Views on modern Japan from Turkey) edited by Esenbel and Demircioğlu [1999], which attempted to represent collective efforts within the field of Japanese studies in Turkey, is the first joint work on modern Japan published in Turkey.

*The Turkish Yearbook of Asia-Pacific Studies*, which was first published in 2006, also met a significant need for young scholars, providing them with a venue for the publication of their works [İlden Foundation... 2006].

Moreover, the Japanese Studies Conference of Turkey, which was first held from 4–6 June 2010 and which will be held on a regular basis every three years in the future, will enable scholars of Japanese stud-

ies in Turkey to come together and present their research, exchanging views with other researchers. The first conference, which was held in cooperation with Boğaziçi University, Ankara University, and the Japanese Studies Association based in İstanbul, and with the support of the Executive Committee of the 2010 Year of Japan in Turkey, the Foreign Economic Board Turkish-Japanese Business Council and the Consulate General of Japan in İstanbul, reflects the development of Japanese studies in Turkey during the last 25 years with its 27 presentations ranging from Japanese history, Japanese language, Turkish-Japanese relations, and Japanese economy and business culture to Japanese philosophy and society.

Finally, activities carried out in various places in Turkey within the ambit of the 2010 Year of Japan in Turkey will stimulate interest in Japan among Turkish people, while it seems also to be contributing to the development of the field of Japanese Studies. We end our assessment here, noting that it is too early to evaluate the concrete results of this project.

— Originally written in Turkish

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