

THE ISLAMIC AREA STUDIES PROJECT IN JAPAN, 1997–2002: Its Achievements and Future Prospects

ISLAMIC AREA STUDIES

The Islamic Area Studies Project was conducted for five years (April 1997–March 2002) under the auspices of the Japanese Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture. The Project covered not only the Islamic world proper, like the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia, but also non- or semi-Islamic worlds like Europe, the United States, South and Southeast Asia, China, and Japan, since regions with close ties to Islam now encompass the world.

Islam is a religion and a civilization expanding beyond regions, a fact which makes Islamic studies totally different from the conventional limits set by area studies. So we expected the Project to create a new field of study through combining various regions. Our endeavors were of course different from the kind of area studies conducted in the United States after World War II, which was closely related to the government's world strategy. I proposed that our Project be called "Islamic Area Studies" in order to understand the various regional characteristics influenced by Islam and Islamic civilization, about which the Japanese participants in the Project soon came to an agreement (*ijmā'* in Arabic).

I feel now that a new wind has begun to blow through Islamic studies in Japan since 1997. In Arabic, “taking wind” means “seizing a chance received from God’s blessings.” The present article intends to keep the wind and enhance it for the future of Islamic studies.

The Project had three main objectives:

- (1) Since social, political and economic trends in the Islamic world will definitely determine the development of world civilization in the twenty-first century, we aimed to discover new approaches in Islamic Area Studies through the accumulation of primary data related to Islamic civilization and contemporary Muslim issues.
- (2) To develop a computer system suitable for multilateral Islamic Area Studies, the Project planned to continue the development of databases in languages which use non-Roman characters, such as Arabic, Persian, Urdu, and Malay and also develop more methods to apply computer technology to Area Studies.
- (3) In recent times the rapid development of Islamic studies in Japan has been quite remarkable, although on a global scale the shortage of researchers and accumulated research is undeniable. Considering the importance of the Islamic world will have in the twenty-first century, we intended to support and encourage the formation of a new generation of scholars to be entrusted with the future development of Islamic studies in Japan.

The Project also invited non-Japanese participants, including young scholars from Korea, Egypt, Turkey, Tunisia, and France to cooperate in realizing the above objectives. Our goal in the Project was to create multidisciplinary area studies on the Islamic world, putting stress on the comparative study of different regions and historical approaches to contemporary issues.

RESEARCH ORGANIZATIONS

The Project consisted of the following six research units:

Project Management Unit

Leader: SATO Tsugitaka

Graduate School of Humanities and Sociology, University of Tokyo

Research Unit 1

Thought and Politics in the Islamic World

Leader: TAKESHITA Masataka (1997–99), KOMATSU Hisao (1999–2002)
Graduate School of Humanities and Sociology, University of Tokyo

Research Unit 2

Society and Economy in the Islamic World

Leader: MURAI Yoshinori (1997–99), KISAICHI Masatoshi (1999–2002)
Institute of Asian Culture, Sophia University

Research Unit 3

Nations, Regions, and Islam

Leader: MATSUBARA Masatake (1997–99), KATO Hiroshi (1999–2002)

Japan Center for Area Studies, National Museum of Ethnology

Research Unit 4

Geographical Information System for Islamic Area Studies

Leader: OKABE Atsuyuki

Graduate School of Engineering, University of Tokyo

Research Unit 5

Islamic History and Culture

Leader: GOTO Akira (1997–99), HANEDA Masashi (1999–2002)

Institute of Oriental Culture, University of Tokyo

Research Unit 6

Source Materials for the Study of Islamic Civilization

Leader: NAGATA Yuzo (1997–99), HAYASHI Kayoko (1999–2002)

The Toyo Bunko (Oriental Library)

As mentioned before, the areas covered by Islamic Area Studies were not limited to the Middle East and should have been flexibly determined based on the character of the above themes to be studied. Although we must remember that there are many ways to view area studies, it is generally agreed that the field is the synthesis of the results of basic research in various disciplines such as political science, economics, social studies, anthropology, history, geography, religious studies, literature, linguistics, international relations, and urban engineering. What was demanded of the six research units, the thirteen smaller groups under them, and the Project as a whole was an active effort to do just that.

Research conducted under this Project was opened to scholars active both in Japan and abroad. Each sub-group was made up of five or six members, but the research was not to be carried out by these members alone. The group members were responsible for bringing in other researchers, especially younger people to participate in the planning and conducting of the research. We were hoping that those with an interest

in this Project would actively plan, conduct and present the results of their research activities.

DISSEMINATION OF RESEARCH RESULTS

The Project mainly used the Internet for the dissemination of information and announcements. Researchers and research organizations sent information directly using e-mail. In addition, a website was constructed and both information which needed to be posted for long periods of time and the results of research were posted there.

The goal was for Japanese and foreign researchers in Islamic Area Studies to maintain contact using the Internet and for research organizations and researchers to exchange information on Islamic studies. For this reason, the information was provided in both English and Japanese. The website was managed by the Project Management Unit and the six research units and was posted in Japanese and English.

The following publications were issued in order to announce and preserve the results of the research:

- A. A yearly newsletter (in both Japanese and English) to announce the research plans for each year.
- B. Working Paper Series in booklet form (published occasionally in Japanese, English, and Arabic), including papers based on reports of research seminars and workshops.
- C. Islamic Area Studies Series published in book form in both Japanese and English, containing the important results of the Project.
- D. International conferences to be held in Japan and abroad in order to achieve the aim that Japanese and foreign researchers pursue joint research for understanding Islam and Islamic civilization.

ACHIEVEMENTS

As to the themes adopted by the six research units, some continued to be conducted throughout the whole five-year duration, while others were changed from April 1999 on. For example, Research Unit 5, in particular, reorganized its study of Islamic History and Culture by forming three sub-groups, dealing with (1) the development of art and scholarship, (2) the history of cross-cultural contact and exchange, and (3) the potentials of comparative study, respectively. Each sub-group of the six

research units would hold international workshops and other meetings each year for the purpose of studying its research theme or reviewing newly published books. The results of these research activities will be outlined later on in this article, but here is what was achieved with respect to the Project's three main objectives.

Concerning the discovery of new approaches in Islamic Area Studies, I must say frankly that we are continuing our search. In order to synthesize our team-oriented disciplinary research results, I proposed that we put emphasis on the comparative method regarding regions and on a historical approach to contemporary issues. The latter was adopted mainly due to the many historians who participated in the Project. However, we did encounter some difficulty in applying the interregional comparative method, although some research teams like Research Units 1-a, "Intellectuals in Central Asia and the Middle East in the 20th Century," and 5-c, "The Potential of Comparative Study," made significant headway. They also showed in the process that we still need time to disclose the individuality of each region influenced by Islam and Islamic civilization.

For the development of a computer system suitable for multilateral Islamic Area Studies, Research Unit 6, which was based in the Toyo Bunko, built a unique system in cooperation with the National Institute of Informatics, in which source materials in Arabic, Persian, Urdu, etc., have been put on line in Arabic script and made available for joint utilization. At present, the number of hits on the Arabic script databases in the Toyo Bunko has numbered approximately 12,000 per month.

As to encouraging the formation of a new generation of scholars, the intent was realized through various research meetings, field research abroad, and international workshops and conferences. When the final international symposium was held in Kisarazu during 5–8 October 2001, several foreign participants told me that they were very impressed to find many Japanese scholars of the younger generation reading papers and discussing them in English, based on the original source materials.

Workshops and Conferences

The main workshops and conferences held during the Project are:

June 23–25, 1997

International Workshop: "Development and Culture in Asia: Comparative Studies on Grassroots Solidarity among Peoples in Asian Countries"

January 20–22, 1998

International Joint Symposium: “Islam in Middle Eastern Studies”

March 10–12, 1998

The Third International Symposium: “Population Movement in the Modern World,” “Migration in Central Asia: Its History and Current Problems”

October 10–11, 1998

International Workshop: “Slave Elites in the Middle East and Africa”

November 20–21, 1998

International Symposium: “Al-Manar and the Manarists”

December 5, 1998

MESA Special Workshop: “The Scope and Potential of Islamic Area Studies”

February 25–26, 1999

International Workshop: “Workshop in Ziyara: Historical and Anthropological Research of Islamic Rites”

October 8–10, 1999

International Symposium: “Beyond the Border: A New Framework for Understanding the Dynamism of Muslim Societies”

October 13–14, 1999

International Workshop: “Islam and Politics in Russia and Central Asia (Early 17th–Late 20th Centuries)”

August 8, 2000

Special Session at the 19th International Congress of Historical Sciences: “Muslim Societies over the Centuries: Symbiosis and Conflicts in Comparative Aspects”

October 13–15, 2000

International Colloquium: “Intellectuals in Islam in the 20th Century: Situations, Discourses, Strategies”

November 25–26, 2000

International Workshop: “People and Popular Movements in Muslim Areas”

January 27, 2001

International Seminar on Ottoman Manuscripts

October 5–8, 2001

International Symposium: “The Dynamism of Muslim Societies: Toward New Horizons in Islamic Area Studies”

Publications

The following publications have been released to date in order to announce and preserve the Projects research achievements, including the international workshops and conferences:

Newsletter

Islamic Area Studies Newsletter to announce the research plans for each year was published from issue No. 1 (1997) to No. 5 (2001) both in Japanese and English.

Working Paper Series

Published based on reports of research seminars and workshops in thirty-two booklets in Japanese, English, French, and Arabic:

- No. 1. R. S. Humphreys, *Tradition and innovation in the study of Islamic history: The evolution of North American scholarship since 1960*. 1998.
- No. 2. R. S. Humphreys, *Towards a history of Aleppo and Damascus in the early Middle Ages, 635–1260 C.E.* 1998.
- No. 3. Yanagihashi Hiroyuki, *Islamic law and the state* (イスラームにおける法と国家). 1998.
- No. 4. Miura Toru and Hemmi Yukiko, *Report on the present condition of the original sources of the Islamic area found in Japanese institutions*. 1998.
- No. 5. Abdeljelil Temimi, *Problematiques et development de la recherche historique dans le monde arabe: Études ottomans et moriscologie*. 1998.
- No. 6. Matsumoto Kotaro, *Economic development among the Hui of Yunnan* (中国雲南の回族における経済開発をめぐる諸問題). 1998.
- No. 7. Stéphane A. Dudoignon, *Communal solidarity and social conflicts in late 20th century Central Asia: The case of the Tajik Civil War*. 1998.
- No. 8. Takahashi Kazuo, *U.S.-Japan relationship over the Persian Gulf*. 1998.
- No. 9. Kim Jeong-A, *Al-Bukhalā', Satires by al-Jāhiz*. 1998.
- No. 10. Kim Jeong-A, *Dirāsāt 'Āmma fī "Kitāb al-Bukhalā'"* (A study of *al-Bukhala*). 1998. In Arabic.
- No. 11. Iwasaki Ichiro, *The initial phase of transition of Russo-Central Asian economic relations: An institutional approach*. 1999.
- No. 12. Hayder I. Ali, *Civil society and democratization in Arab countries with special reference to the Sudan*. 1999.

- No. 13. Martin van Bruinessen, *The Kurds and Islam*. 1999.
- No. 14. Martin van Bruinessen, *The Kurds in movement: Migrations, mobilisations, communications and the globalisation of the Kurdish Question*. 1999.
- No. 15. Rafis Abazov, *Central Asian conflicting legacy and ethnic policies: Revisiting a crises-zone of the former USSR*. 1999.
- No. 16. Miyaji Kazuo, *Middle East studies in Japan*. 1999.
- No. 17. Okabe Atsuyuki and Masuyama Atsushi, *A method for qualitative trend curve analysis and its application to land cover change in Persian Gulf area*. 1999.
- No. 18. Azzam Tamimi, *Islam and democracy: Jordan and the Muslim brotherhood*. 2000.
- No. 19. Christoph Werner, *What is a Muftahid?: Functions and stratification of Tabrizi 'ulama in the early Qajar period*. 2000.
- No. 20. Muḥammad Ṣabrī Al-Dālī, *al-Zāwiya wa-al-Mujutama' al-Miṣrī fi al-Qarn al-Sādis 'Ashar* (The Zāwiya and Egyptian society in the sixteenth century). 2000. In Arabic.
- No. 21. Stefka Parveva, *The Sofia Oriental Archives: History, structure and organisation, catalogues, and publication of documents*. 2001.
- No. 22. Muḥammad Ṣabrī al-Dālī, *al-Mashāikh wal-Ghazu al-'Uthmānī li-Miṣr* (Shaykhs and the Ottoman occupation of Egypt). 2001. In Arabic.
- No. 23. Nejima Susumu, *Pir, waiz, and imam: The transformation of socio-religious leadership among the Ismailis in northern Pakistan*. 2001.
- No. 24. Bert G. Fagner, *Oriental studies, Middle Eastern and Islamic studies in Germany*. 2001.
- No. 25. Jean Calmard, *French presence and influence in Persia under the early Qajars*. 2002.
- No. 26. Abderrahmane Lakhsassi, *Ziyara to a pilgrimage center in Morocco: The case of Sidi Hmad u-Musa*. 2002.
- No. 27. Akahori Masayuki, *Ziyara and saint veneration among the Bedouins in the western desert of Egypt*. 2002.
- No. 28. Sawae Fumiko, *The reorientation of the Islamists in Turkey: An analysis of "pro-Islamic journal" in the 1990s*. 2002.
- No. 29. Makhsuma I. Niyozova, *Kubachi silversmiths in late medieval Bukhara*. 2002.
- No. 30. Yamagishi Tomoko and Morita Toyoko, *The Iranian experience of Japan through narratives*. 2002.
- No. 31. Stefan Leder, *Spoken word and written text: Meaning and social significance of the institution of riwaya*. 2002.

No. 32. Miura Toru, *Area studies as a third path between the humanities and social science*. 2002.

Islamic Area Studies Series

(a) *IAS Series in Japanese published by the University of Tokyo Press in Tokyo*

- Vol. 1. Sato Tsugitaka 佐藤次高, ed., 『イスラーム地域研究の可能性』 (The scope and potential of Islamic area studies). 2003.
- Vol. 2. Komatsu Hisao 小松久男 and Kosugi Yasushi 小杉 泰, eds., 『現代イスラーム思想と政治運動』 (Islamic resurgence in the contemporary world). 2003.
- Vol. 3. Kisaichi Masatoshi 私市正年 and Kurita Yoshiko 栗田禎子, eds., 『イスラーム地域の民衆運動と民主化』 (Popular movements and democratization in the Islamic regions). 2004.
- Vol. 4. Miura Toru 三浦 徹, Kishimoto Mio 岸本美緒, and Sekimoto Teruo 関本照夫, eds., 『比較史のアジア：所有・契約・市場・公正』 (Ownership, contracts, markets, fairness, and justice). 2004.
- Vol. 5. Sakai Keiko 酒井啓子 and Usuki Akira 白杵 陽, eds., 『イスラーム地域の国家とナショナリズム』 (State and nationalism in the Muslim world). 2005.
- Vol. 6. Kato Hiroshi 加藤 博, ed., 『イスラームの性と文化』 (Sexuality and culture in Muslim societies). 2005.
- Vol. 7. Akahori Masayuki 赤堀雅幸, Tonaga Yasushi 東長 靖, and Horikawa Toru 堀川 徹, eds., 『イスラームの神秘主義と聖者信仰』 (Sufism and saint veneration in Islam). 2005.
- Vol. 8. Hayashi Kayoko 林 佳世子 and Masuya Tomoko 榎屋友子, eds., 『記録と表象：史料が語るイスラーム世界』 (Documentation and representation: Historical materials from the Muslim world). 2005.

(b-1) *Islamic Area Studies Series in English published by Kegan Paul International in London*

- Miura Toru and J. E. Philips, eds., *Slave elites in the Middle East and Africa*. 2000.
- Yanagihashi Hiroyuki, ed., *The concept of territory in Islamic law and thought*. 2000.
- S. A. Dudoignon and Komatsu Hisao, eds., *Islam in politics in Russia and Central Asia*. 2001.
- Kuroki Hidemitsu, ed., *The influence of human mobility in Muslim societies*. 2003.
- Hayashi Kayoko, ed., *The Ottoman state and societies in change: A study of the nineteenth century Temettuat Registers*. 2004.

(b-2) *New Horizons in Islamic Studies Series published by
RoutledgeCurzon in London*

Kondo Nobuaki, ed., *Persian documents: Social history of Iran and Turan in the fifteenth–nineteenth centuries*. 2003.

Sato Tsugitaka, ed., *Muslim societies: Historical and comparative aspects*. 2004.

Okabe Atsuyuki, ed., *Islamic area studies with geographical information systems*. 2004.

Stephen Dudoignon and Komatsu Hisao, eds., *Intellectuals in the 20th century Islamic world: Status, networks, discourse*. Forthcoming.

Kisaichi Masatoshi, ed., *Democratization and popular movement in the Islamic countries: Reconsidered civil society*. Forthcoming.

Finally, I would like to add a book entitled *The Index of al-Manar* (Beirut, 1998; in Arabic) as a joint work of Japanese and Arabic scholars in the Islamic Area Studies Project.

FUTURE PROSPECTS

The most significant achievement of the Islamic Area Studies Project was, in my opinion, swift internationalization of Islamic and Middle Eastern studies in Japan soon after the Project began. When the Project's prospectus (research objectives, schedules, and results) were posted on our website in both Japanese and English, the attention and interest of not a small number of foreign scholars were drawn to Islamic studies in Japan, many proposing to cooperate with the Project. At the same time, requests were made to publish our results not only in Japanese but also in foreign languages. Consequently, we have been confronted with the need to publish our research achievements in the future more willingly than before in English, Arabic, Persian, Turkish, etc., in order to promote cooperative research on an international basis.

While the Project achieved considerable progress over its five-year duration, there remain several important subjects requiring further study. Here are three.

- (1) We need to pursue and encourage more comparative study of different regions, an aim that was not fully achieved during the Project. As indicated above, we should need to find methods of comparison that will help us to understand better the individuality of each region influenced variously by Islam and Islamic civilization.

- (2) It is well known that Muslim intellectuals (*ulama'*) have played important roles in forming the social order and leading religious and political movements. Some research groups in the Project took up *ulama'* in various ways to disclose their social and political roles in Muslim societies. However, little effort was made to place them as the main subject for understanding social, political and cultural issues in both historical and contemporary Muslim societies. Since personal relationships have always had particular importance in Muslim societies, more intensive study on *ulama'* will certainly disclose more characteristics essential to a better understanding of Muslim societies.
- (3) During the Project we found that the study on Sufism and Tariqa was attracting more and more younger scholars, mostly specializing in history, anthropology, and religion. As to the reason why, I suppose that such factors as the Sufis' passionate devotion to God, the popularity of their ideas and activities, and the duality in their attitudes for and against rulers are probably the most attractive to Japanese scholars. Whatever the reason, there is no doubt that we need to improve our knowledge of Sufism in order to deepen our understanding of Islamic issues in the world today.

In addition, during the Islamic Area Studies Project, two study groups began their activities in new research fields. The first was the study group on Jawi documents in Southeast Asia, which have hardly been used by Japanese scholars. The second was the group to study the source materials in China written by Muslim intellectuals in Chinese characters, which have been also relatively neglected by both Chinese and Japanese scholars. Again it was younger scholars who led the way in both of these efforts.

After the Project was concluded in March 2002, a new project entitled "Contemporary Islamic Studies" was begun in April 2003 at the Toyo Bunko as a synthetic study of contemporary Asian issues. The present subject being dealt with is "Parliamentary systems and constitutionalism: Comparative studies between Arabic, Iranian and Turkish countries," utilizing parliamentary documents contained in databases. The aim of the Project is to understand the process of democratization and its setback in the Middle East from the beginning of the twentieth century to the present, based on contemporary documents in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish. The new academic year beginning in April 2006 portends even more new developments in the field,

centering around the Institute of Area Studies at Waseda University in cooperation with several other institutions of higher learning, including the University of Tokyo, Sophia University, and the Toyo Bunko.