Special Issue
Japan and the Middle East before World War II

Japanese Commercial Museum in Istanbul (1928-1937)

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I. Introduction

It is possible to recognize two types of organizations that dealt with “Islam Policy” before the end of World War II, according to the viewpoints of the shape and role; the domestic organization in Japan and the overseas organization. The most important domestic organization is the Great Japanese Islam League established in 1938.

The overseas organization, which is the second type, had the role of establishing the foothold of Japanese “Islam Policy,” to have direct contact with Muslims, to collect various information about the Islamic World, and to create the propaganda of Japan. The most famous organization of this type was the Chinese Islam Total Alliance, established in 1938. Recently some Japanese researchers have engaged in investigating this organization depending on the excavation of original documents. One of the researchers concluded that Japan’s “Islam Policy” was aimed at controlling the Chinese Muslims to utilize them for Japanese aggression in China. But I cannot agree with this opinion. The overseas organizations were not only in China but also in the Islamic World,
especially in the Mediterranean World. For example, there were a couple of Japanese Commercial Museums in Istanbul and Cairo.\(^{(1)}\)

Today, few Japanese researchers know these museums. Their existence and their roles are forgotten.

II. The Nakamura Store in Istanbul

The origin of the Museum dates back to the tragedy of the Ottoman Battleship \textit{Ertuğrul} in the year of 1890. After her official visit to Japan, the Battleship \textit{Ertuğrul} was sunk with about 500 victims [MISAWA 2003; \textsc{Chuò Bôsai Kaigi Saigai Kyôkun No Keishô Ni Kansuru Senmon Chôsa Iinkai} 2005]. This tragedy led two Japanese citizens to become resident in Istanbul. One of them is Shôtarô NODA, who was a journalist for the "\textit{fichi Shimpô}," one of the major newspapers at those days [MISAWA 2004]. He came to Istanbul with 69 survivors, and remained there for about two years. During his residence in Istanbul, he converted to Islam, the first Japanese case which has been confirmed with the use of historical sources [MISAWA and \textsc{Akçadağ} 2007]. More than one year later, in 1892, a second Japanese citizen, Torajirô YAMADA, came to Istanbul to research the possibility of establishing trade business between Japan and the Ottoman Empire. YAMADA himself said that his visit aimed to bring Japanese commodities and a donation for "the Tragedy of \textit{Ertuğrul}," but various historical sources suggest that it was an excuse to enter the Ottoman Empire. Actually his main purpose was to set up his own trade business between two countries [MISAWA 2007].

With the sincere assistance of NODA and some Ottoman people, YAMADA was successful in getting the chance to set up a Japanese store in Istanbul. After a few months' inspection in Istanbul, he came back to Tokyo in October, 1892. Due to a lack of funds, he gave some lectures in Japan to raise investment money for the trade business. Finally, the NAKAMURA family accepted YAMADA's ideas, and decided to establish the NAKAMURA Store trading Japanese goods in Istanbul, possibly in the summer of 1893 [\textsc{Inaba} 2006].\(^{(2)}\)

Kenjirô NAKAMURA stayed in Istanbul as the owner of the store, and YAMADA assisted him as the manager. Unfortunately, we have a little information about the NAKAMURA Store, but some historical materials from the Ottoman Empire suggest its activity.

The NAKAMURA Store was located at the \textit{Hazzopulo} Passage along with \textit{İstiklal}
Street in Istanbul.\(^{3}\) This store had another important role. In the name of the *Private Japanese Commercial Museum in Istanbul*, it irregularly sent some commercial reports to the Japanese Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce [MISAWA 2006, 198]. These reports had a lot of information about the trade business in the Ottoman Empire.

There are no names attached to these reports, but I suppose that the writer was YAMADA and he sent his reports to the ministry without any official requests, with only his own individual interests. It is necessary to find more source materials to confirm this, but I suppose YAMADA was similar to the famous Masaji INOUE, a unique Great Asian Activist who tried to realize his ideal of a Great Asia, opposed to American and European countries, through the trade business within non-American and non-European countries.

However, against the expectations of YAMADA, there was little progress in the trade business between Japan and the Ottoman Empire. The two countries could not conclude any official diplomatic relations because the Japanese Government wished for a treaty with special privileges, namely *imtiyāz* or *capitulation*, with the Ottoman Empire, in the same fashion as the European countries concluded.

In such a situation, at last World War I broke out in 1914, and the Ottoman Empire participated in the war. The NAKAMURA family decided to close their store in Istanbul, and as only an employee YAMADA lost his foothold in Istanbul and was also obliged to go back to Japan after about 18 years in Istanbul.

But World War I brought a drastic change for the relation between Japan and Turkey. In 1924, as one of the victorious nations, Japan concluded the *Lausanne* Treaty with the new Republic of Turkey, diplomatic relations were formally established for the first time, and embassies were established in Istanbul and Tokyo.

### III. The Establishment

In this situation, YAMADA was eager to promote the trade business between Japan and Turkey again. He approached the Osaka Chamber of Commerce in Japan, and received the support of Katsutarō INABATA, the director of the chamber who was engaged in any establishments for any foreign trade business. In October 1925, they established "the Association of Trade Business between Japan and Turkey." YAMADA succeeded in getting the important post of chief director of the association. And as a tactic, they made the Turkish Ambassador in Tokyo the Honorary Chairman of the association.

The Association also utilized the memory of "the Tragedy of *Erteğrul*" to set up
trade business between Japan and Turkey. In those days, there were few interests among Japanese people with Turkey. They had completely forgotten “the Tragedy of Ertuğrul” and lost any interest in Turkey. Due to the circumstance before World War I, the ceremonies of the tenth and twentieth anniversaries of the tragedy were held quietly, only by the village officers of the tragedy point and on a very small scale.

In August 1928, the Association and the Osaka Chamber of Commerce made a large scale ceremony and established a new mourning monument in conjunction with some central government ministries and the military authorities. Also in 1929, about one year after this ceremony, a royal visit of the Showa Emperor Hirohito was performed to dig up the memory of “the Tragedy of Ertuğrul,” and to make an approach with Turkey. Such efforts were successful, and in 1929 a temporary trade agreement between Japan and Turkey was created, and it was signed formally the next year in 1930.

As the final step in establishing the trade business with Turkey, the Association and the Osaka Chamber of Commerce established the “Japanese Commercial Museum in Istanbul” in 1928 with the support of the Ministry of Business and Industry.

According to the assistances of various authorities, this museum was excellent at promoting the trade business. It is impossible to compare with the former private museum of the NAKAMURA Store. It was located at the sleeve of Galata Bridge in Karaköy district, an excellent location in Istanbul, and it had four floors and ten showrooms (see figure 1). There were some resident Japanese staff. They also published official monthly reports, named “The Reports of Japanese Commercial Museum in Istanbul,” which were issued from No.1 (1930) to No.90 (1937) (see figure 2a-c).

We can get the information about the activities of this museum in detail through these monthly reports.

Although the existence of these reports was forgotten for a long time, fortunately there is a complete collection among four Japanese libraries.

IV. Turned Dark to End

However, without much time passing after the establishment of this museum, the trade business between Japan and Turkey turned dark.

In November 1931, the Republic of Turkey established a severe import barrier against any foreign countries and began to protect its domestic products for the stability of national economy, under the strong guidance of President Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

In this circumstance, the Association and the Museum were obliged to change
their policy regarding the area. Turkey, at that time, was the only area of their activity. They began to seek opportunities for trade business in the Balkan countries and the Arab countries, as all of “Near East” area. Because of this change, in June 1932, they changed the name of the association as “Association of Trade Business in Near East.” They could no longer keep their trade business in Turkey only.

YAMADA also gave up the trade business with Turkey in the early stages of this situation. In his short autobiography YAMADA proudly wrote that during his visit to Turkey in October 1930, he himself said that he met with the President Mustafa Kemal Atatürk on the republic memorial day. But before this visit to Turkey, YAMADA had attended the international commerce trade fair held in Thessaloniki, Greece to promote the trade business between Japan and Greece. Because of such efforts, in 1933, YAMADA took office as Greek honorary consul resident in Osaka, Japan.

Although it was so difficult to keep the commercial relation with Turkey, the Museum and the Japanese Government negotiated with the Turkish Government for a long time. On July 26, 1934, both countries concluded the Reciprocal Trade Agreement, setting the quantity of export and import in the same scale together. But the trade fever of Japanese merchants already had cooled down because there were not any valuable import goods from Turkey. So the Japanese Commercial Museum in Istanbul was obliged to close in 1937 after this agreement was revised. Then the import and export business in and of itself came to have difficulty with the outbreak of World War II, and finally this agreement was disposed in 1940. In this way, the trade business between Japan and Turkey finished.

V. Conclusion

In such a way, the foothold of Japan’s “Islam Policy” in Istanbul was obliged to withdrawal after a very short term without having any big footprint.

At the same time the trade business between the countries ended, Japan entered into World War II. Turkey maintained a stance of neutrality for a long time, but declared war against Japan in the last years of the war. As one of the victorious nations, Turkey participated in the San Francisco Peace Treaty of 1951 with Japan. Today’s diplomatic and trade business relations between Japan and Turkey resumed from this treaty.
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Notes

(1) The Japanese Government established two Japanese Commercial Museum in Cairo and soon after in Istanbul in the same year 1928.

(2) We had no detailed the historical source materials about the NAKAMURA Store. So we do not have the real date when the NAKAMURA Store started the business in Istanbul. According to the memoir of the son of Kenjirō NAKAMURA, the store was established in 1893 (INABA 2006).

(3) Some researchers pointed that the store located in the Çiçek Passage, also along the İstiklal Street, without showing the concreate evidence. But we can only find the evidence about the location at the Hazapplo Passage in the time of its establishment among the mementos of YAMADA preserved in the YAMADA family.

(4) Unfortunately this building is not preserved today. But we can see this building in the several photographs of the old Galata bridge (= the third Galata bridge).

(5) The existence of this monthly report was forgotten. According my investigation in Japan, I found the all issues among the 4 libraries in Japan. And I also found 4 books, and 10 booklets, published by the museum. I am preparing the list of the all articles [MISAWA 2007].

(6) According to the biography, YAMADA had visited both Greece and Turkey in 1931 (SANSHÔTEI SHUJIN 1952]. But according to his article [YAMADA 1931], he visited in 1930 not 1931. Although the biography was written under his own inspection, it is the clear mistake.

Bibliography


ABSTRACT

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In October 1925, they established "the Association of Trade Business between Japan and Turkey." In 1928, the Association and the Osaka Chamber of Commerce established the "Japanese Commercial Museum in Istanbul" with the support of the Ministry of Business and Industry, to encourage the trade business with Turkey. They published official monthly reports, named "The Reports of Japanese Commercial Museum in Istanbul," which were issued from No.1 (1930) to No.90 (1937).
Figure 1: Japanese Commercial Museum in Istanbul (Karaköy)

Figure 2-a: The Reports of Japanese Commercial Museum in Istanbul (No. 1)

Figure 2-b: The Reports of Japanese Commercial Museum in Istanbul (No. 40)

Figure 2-c: The Reports of Japanese Commercial Museum in Istanbul (No. 49)