Shintoism and Islam in Interwar Japan: How did the Japanese Come to Believe in Islam?

Nobuo MISAWA*

In previous studies on the Japanese ideology of Pan-Asianism towards the Muslims in the interwar and World War II period, all Japanese Muslims were said to be “bogus Muslims”, who converted to Islam with the intention to utilize the Muslims for the Japanese interests. The Japanese Government committed to provide such “bogus Muslims” among the Japanese people. In reality, a number of Japanese military agents became Muslims in order to promote such an ideology among the Muslims in the East and Southeast Asia. However, quite a few aforesaid Japanese intellectuals and activists became Muslims by their own will. When we consider the history of Japanese Muslims, it is required to clarify how they came to believe in Islam, especially their comprehension of harmony between Shintoism and Islam.

Among such unique Japanese Muslims in the interwar period, Nur Muhammad Ippei TANAKA (1882–1934) and Ahmad Bunpachirô ARIGA (1868–1946) provide us the details of their comprehension about Islam and the unique ways they used in order to syncretize Shintoism and Islam. TANAKA learned the Chinese language and Confucianism. When the Russo-Japanese War broke out in 1904, he went to China as the interpreter of the Army and stayed in China to study Confucianism as a private scholar after the war. In this career, he was interested in the Chinese *Kai-ju* or *Hui-ru*, which literally means “Islamic Confucianism.” Finally, he converted to Islam in China in 1924. He found similarities between Shintoism and Islam, and the possibility of syncretizing Shintoism and Islam occurred to him. His idea was not realized due to his sudden death after his second pilgrim to Mecca in 1934. ARIGA converted to Islam in the year 1932 after his retirement as a businessman. He was extremely enthusiastic about the missionary actions of “Japanese Islam,” which depended on the syncretism of Shintoism and Islam, different from TANAKA’s idea. He was not religious but nationalist. Therefore, his idea was the result of the syncretism of Pan-Asianism and Islam.

---

* Associate Professor, School of Sociology, Toyo University

We must excavate unique, forgotten Japanese Muslims such as TANAKA and ARIGA in order to understand Interwar Japanese Muslims.

Keywords: Ippei TANAKA, Bunpachirô ARIGA, Shintoism, Buddhism, Confucianism

I. Introduction

The history of the Japanese Muslims dates from the end of the nineteenth century. Compared with the history of the Chinese and Korean Muslims, the recentness of the Japanese Muslims is outstanding in East Asia. We can admit the influence of Shintoism in the process of the Japanese people coming to believe in Islam. In the early stages of the conversion, before World War II, the Japanese Muslims tried to syncretize Shintoism and Islam.

Prof. Dr. Toshihiko IZUTSU (1914–93), one of the most important scholars on Sufism in the twentieth century, first encountered Islam in interwar Japan. After he conducted a series of excellent academic studies on Sufism, he tried to compare Sufism with Taoism in the later days.¹ As he himself confessed in his complete works, he gravitated toward Oriental ideas and philosophies year by year in his later academic career. He said that at the age of seventy, he found his roots in the Orient.²

As in the case of Prof. Dr. IZUTSU, it was natural for Japanese intellectuals in the interwar period to be charmed by Islam due to its contrast with Oriental religion and ideas. Among these intellectuals, some came to believe in Islam but retained their faith in Shintoism. I think this is a very important point. This phenomenon was similar to that of the Chinese Muslims, who established *Kai-ju* or *Hui-ru*, literally “Islamic Confucianism.” It can be said that the East Asian people developed an interest and belief in Islam in harmony with their original religions and ideas, such as Buddhism, Shintoism, Confucianism, Taoism, and so on. In other words, the East Asian people were fascinated by Islam while retaining their strong beliefs in their original religions and ideas.³ This probably was different, however, in the case of the Southeast Asian people such as the Indonesian and the Malaysian Muslims.

In previous studies on the Japanese ideology of Pan-Asianism, or the Great Asianism, among the Muslims in the interwar and World War II periods, all Japanese Muslims were referred to as “bogus Muslims,” who converted to Islam with the intention to utilize the Muslims for the Japanese interests. The Japanese government committed to creating these bogus Japanese Muslims. Many Japanese military agents converted to Islam to promote their ideology among the Muslims in East and Southeast Asia. There were also quite a few Japanese

intellectuals and activists, as mentioned earlier, who became Muslims of their own volition.⁴ When we consider the history of the Japanese Muslims, it is necessary to clarify how they came to believe in Islam and their understanding of the harmony between Shintoism and Islam. I am convinced that there were unique Japanese Muslims such as these during the interwar period.

II. The Emergence of Japanese Islam

Due to the isolation policy of the TOKUGAWA Shogunate Government, very limited information on Islam reached Japan between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. The government strictly restricted foreigners from coming to Japan and the Japanese people from going abroad. Therefore, we cannot find any traces of foreign Muslims in Japan during this period. The Japanese people had very limited information on Islam.⁵ No Japanese tried to convert to Islam.

The government gave up this policy due to strong pressure from the American government, and opened the country to foreigners in 1854. Furthermore, after the Meiji Restoration in 1868, the new Japanese government under the *Mikado*, or *Tennô* (the Emperor), facilitated the mending of relationships with foreign countries. This positive policy of the new government allowed foreigners to enter Japan and Japanese people to travel abroad.

As a result of this drastic change of circumstances, some foreign Muslims entered Japan and some Japanese people encountered Muslims in foreign countries. As is stated in the many narrative sources of the Japanese people who visited European countries via the Suez Canal in Egypt in those days, the Japanese people inspected Islam firsthand. Although they were then very astonished, they did not maintain this interest in Islam after their short stay in Egypt. Apart from the pyramids and the Sphinx, they did not find anything exotic in this Islamic country. As a result, we could not find any Japanese people who had converted to Islam in Egypt at that time.

Among the Japanese who visited various foreign countries, Buddhist priests began to collect information on Islam. In 1878, Mokurai SHIMAJI, a famous Japanese Buddhist priest and a member of the IWAKURA Mission, visited Istanbul to inspect the center of the Islamic world. His report, which recorded his impression of Islam, stimulated the interest of Japanese Buddhist priests. In 1891, some young Japanese Buddhist monks, who had practiced asceticism in Ceylon, visited Istanbul. They traveled aboard the Japanese frigates Hiei and Kongô, after the tragedy of the Ottoman frigate Ertuğrul, to study Islam and the Muslims of the Ottoman Empire.⁶

On the other hand, foreign Muslims such as the Indian merchants were

beginning to come into Japan. However, we cannot find evidence of any large-scale missionary movement in Japan to convert the Japanese people to Islam. After Japan's incredible victory over Russia in 1905, many active foreign Muslims such as the Indian Muslims, the Egyptian Muslims, and the Tatars wished to utilize Japanese power for the worldwide Pan-Islamism Movement. There is no evidence, however, of the existence of any Japanese Muslim in Japan who converted at the persuasion of these foreign Muslims.

From the existing source material on Japanese Muslims, we find Shôtârô NODA (1868–1904) to be the first Japanese Muslim; he converted to Islam during the time of his residence in Istanbul in 1891. He was appointed as the Japanese teacher at the Military School of the Ottoman Empire when he came to hand over the Japanese donation for the Tragedy of the Ottoman frigate *Ertuğrul* (which was in French francs collected by the newspaper company that he worked for as a permanent reporter).⁷ European countries feared that he would become an Islamic missionary activist in Japan.⁸ However, when he returned to Japan in 1893, after two years' residence in Istanbul, he abandoned the Islamic lifestyle. It is not correct to criticize him as being a “bogus Muslim” with selfish intentions. It is suitable to say that his conversion to Islam was a temporary measure during his life in Istanbul. In this way, until 1909, from our source material, we do not find any cases of conversion to Islam among the Japanese people.

As the second Japanese Muslim, we mention the cases of two Japanese military officers, Takeyoshi ÔHARA and Mitsutarô YAMAOKA (1880–1959). It is also possible, from the source material, to state that they were the first Japanese Muslims who converted in Japan. During the Russo-Japanese War (1904–05), ÔHARA worked as a captain under Major General Yasumasa FUKUSHIMA (1852–1919), who was famous for his military intelligence activities on the Eurasian continent. After the war, ÔHARA officially left the army but maintained a connection with it as an activist of the Pan-Asianism Movement. During his career in China in the Russo-Japanese War, the rumor circulated that he had become a special agent of the army for behind-the-scenes maneuvers.

In 1909, when ÔHARA attempted to organize the Pan-Asianism Movement, the famous Tatar Muslim Abdürreşid İbrahim (1857–1944) visited Japan. After ÔHARA became an acquaintance of İbrahim's, he converted to Islam in his presence. He took the name Abû Bakr, the name of the first caliph in the history of Islam, as his Muslim name. ÔHARA later introduced to İbrahim another Japanese who wanted to convert to Islam. This Japanese was

YAMAOKA, who had worked as a military officer of intelligence. YAMAOKA converted to Islam in the presence of İbrahim, and took the name “Umar” as his Muslim name, which was the name of the second caliph in the history of Islam. It is said that YAMAOKA became a Muslim for the pilgrimage to Mecca on the order of ÔHARA. Both ÔHARA and YAMAOKA are said to be “bogus Muslims,” who utilized Muslim power for the Great Asianism movement under the Japanese nationalists. With this intention, ÔHARA established the association with Abdürreşid İbrahim under the name of *Ajia-Gi-Kai*.⁹

It is correct to assume that ÔHARA and YAMAOKA were “bogus Muslims” in the Japanese government and military intelligence service. They were not the exceptions. Before the end of World War II, there were more Japanese Muslims who converted to Islam with the intention of Pan-Asianism, and who had strong connections to the Japanese government and military.

We can identify another type of Japanese Muslim among the intellectuals before World War II. They were very different from the aforementioned “bogus Muslims.” It is wrong to classify all Japanese Muslims in a single category. Some Japanese Muslims tried to be genuine Muslims through the process of syncretism with the old Japanese Shintoism. Among these Japanese Muslims, the case of Nur Muhammad Ippei TANAKA (1882–1934) provides us with details of his understanding of Islam and his unique way of syncretizing Shintoism and Islam.¹⁰

III. Nur Muhammad Ippei TANAKA

1. Encounter with Islam

Nur Muhammad Ippei TANAKA was born into a family that believed in the *Rinzai Zen* School, one of the two sects of Japanese Zen Buddhism.¹¹ He also mastered Shintoism *Misogikyô* (or *Kikkyô*), which are the ablutions of Shintoism, during his childhood.¹² In Japan, *Shinbutsu Shugô*, literally the “syncretism of Shintoism and Buddhism,” was a well-known phenomenon. When Buddhism was introduced to Japan through China in the sixth century, the Japanese people did not discard the old Shintoism but tried to reconcile it with the new, assuming both beliefs to be true. During the first stage of the Meiji Restoration under the Japanese emperor *Mikado* in 1868, the *Haibutsu Kishaku* Movement, which literally meant “abolish Buddhism and destroy *Shâkyamuni*” took place. The excitement cooled down in very short time, however, and the Japanese people restored the old syncretism *Shinbutsu Shugô* movement. The Meiji Government intended to separate the *Kami* (God) of Shintoism from the *Shâkyamuni* of Buddhism in order to establish recognition of the new

government under *Mikado*, the present *Kami*. However, their attempt failed. The Japanese people showed respect for *Mikado* and Shintoism while maintaining respect for *Shākyamuni*. Furthermore, some Japanese mixed the two kinds of religious respect. It was not unusual for young TANAKA to have simultaneously mastered *Rinzai Zen* Buddhism and Shintoism *Misogikyō*. It may have been just these spiritual circumstances of his childhood that affected his conversion to Islam and the later syncretism of Islam with Shintoism.

In 1900, TANAKA entered the School of Taiwanese Association (now Takushoku University) in Tokyo to learn Chinese and Confucianism. When the Russo-Japanese war broke out in 1904, TANAKA went to China with the army, as an interpreter; he stayed on in China after the war to study Confucianism as a private scholar. He was very attracted to *Kai-ju* or *Hui-ru*, literally “Islamic Confucianism.” He was specifically interested in the famous Chinese Muslim scholar, Liu Zhi (ca.1660–ca.1739). Liu Zhi had been born into a Chinese Muslim family and had learned Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism in his childhood. Liu Zhi admired Confucius (BC 551–BC 479), the founder of Confucianism, and Mencius (BC 372?–BC 289) as the “Sages of the East” and Muhammad as the “Sage of the West.” At the age of thirty, he began to interpret and expound on the Islamic scriptures, using Confucian studies, for over twenty years. Islam and Confucianism coexisted in his faith.

Under the influence of his works, TANAKA translated one of Liu Zhi’s interpreted works, *Tianfang Zhisheng Shilu*, “the Real Record of the Last Prophet of Islam” a biography of Muhammad, into the Japanese.¹³

He understood Islam in the context of *Kai-ju* or *Hui-ru*. He was familiar with the understanding of Islam not through the original, pure context, but through its syncretism with Confucianism. He could easily accept the idea of syncretism between two other religions as a result of the religious situation in Japan.

Through various published articles, TANAKA later introduced in Japan knowledge of the Chinese Muslims.

When Islam spread to China, unlike other areas, it happened to syncretize itself with Confucianism. The Chinese people admitted that there was no difference between the way of Muhammad and the way of Confucius and Mencius. The old Chinese faith is equal to the old Arabian faith. So some Chinese intellectuals began to convert to Islam.¹⁴

About three hundred million people in the world introduced themselves as Muslims and their religion as Islam. Only the Chinese Muslims introduced themselves *Kai-kais* (or *Hui-huis*) and their religion as *Kai-kyô* (or *Hui-kyô*) or *Seishin-kyô* (pure truth). Although Islam is difficult to compromise and assimilate with other religions, this case suggests that it was possible to syncretize Islam with the Chinese belief system, Confucianism.¹⁵

In this way, TANAKA began to publish many of his own articles on current affairs and religion in Japanese popular magazines. He became a literary man in the Japanese media during the interwar period. Gradually, his name became famous in both popular religious circles and Pan-Asianism societies.

2. Conversion to Islam

In 1924, after he had completed the Japanese translation of *Tianfang Zhisheng Shilu* in 1922, TANAKA traveled to China to convert to Islam. He was fascinated with Islam through the various works of Liu Zhi.

In January 1924, he visited a Chinese Mosque in the province of Shandong and asked an *Aheng*, the religious leader of the mosque, to oversee his conversion to Islam. Thus, he became a Muslim and was accorded his Muslim name: Nur Muhammad.¹⁶ When he offered his first prayer at the mosque, he found that the ritual of purifying himself with water was similar to the ablutions of Shintoism, which were familiar to him from his childhood. Furthermore, he found a similarity between the chanting of the verses of the Holy Koran and *nenbutsu* (or *nianfo* in the Sanskrit language), literally the prayer chant to *Amida Buddha* in Mahayana Buddhism, which was familiar to him as a religious act from his childhood. These simple affinities led him to develop the syncretism of Shintoism and Islam.

He then decided to start on a pilgrimage to Mecca as a member of a pilgrim group of Chinese Muslims. Before he reached Mecca, he fasted for one month, from April 6 to May 5. Although it is permitted for Muslims to not fast during the trip, the pilgrim group of Chinese Muslims preferred to fast. This was TANAKA's first experience of fasting, and it made a deep impression in him. The religious austerity of the fast inspired him to think of the similarities between Shintoism and Zen Buddhism. As a believer in Shintoism, he regarded climbing Mt. Fuji, the highest mountain in Japan, to be an important religious practice. The religious austerity of this experience with primitive nature provided TANAKA with inspiration of the similarity between Shintoism and

Islam. Thus, the experiences of the pilgrimage to Mecca and the climbing of Mt. Fuji gave Tanaka the seed of the idea of the syncretism of Shintoism and Islam.

TANAKA expressed his discovery of the idea of the syncretism of Shintoism and Islam during the pilgrimage to Mecca, as follows.

When I thought about the view of the universe, which was the core idea of the old Chinese belief system, I could not help but see how the divinity of Muhammad resembled that of *Kami* (God) in Japan. I found a relationship between Confucianism and Islam as well as a relationship between Confucianism and Zen Buddhism; as a result, I discovered the connection between Islam and Shintoism.¹⁷

3. Syncretism of Shintoism and Islam

Although TANAKA converted to Islam, he did not give up Shintoism and Buddhism after he returned to Japan. He continued to practice prayer in both religions. His conversion to Islam did not mean the abandoning of his previous religions. From the aforementioned Japanese tradition of *Shinbutsu Shûgô* (syncretism of Shintoism and Buddhism) and the Chinese tradition of *Kai-ju* or *Hui-ru* (Islamic Confucianism), it was evident to TANAKA that Shintoism and Islam (as well as Buddhism) could coexist.

TANAKA said that when he compared Christianity and Islam, he had to admit that Islam was very similar to Confucianism and to the ancient Shintoism. He then expressed his true feelings, which were that Islam should syncretize with Confucianism and Shintoism for the Japanese people to revive Asia.

After he returned to Japan from Mecca, he expressed this idea of syncretism through various media.

Our sacred *Mikado* syncretized Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, and Christianity on the policy, “Absorb them, and do not abandon them.” This process recognizes the truth of our faith. But there was no chance of encountering Islam, which had been introduced by the sacred Muhammad in the West, and which contained a truth equal to our truth of the way of *Kami* (God).¹⁸

Compared with Christianity, Islam bears more resemblance to Confucianism and our old Shintoism. So the religion of Islam must syncretize with the Japanese people in the revival movement of Asia.¹⁹

The science of religion, especially comparative study, found a similarity among the three religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—in their Semitic Monotheism. However, TANAKA did not study the science of religion in the European style. This is the obvious difference between him and Shûmei ÔKAWA (1886–1957), who was a key figure in Japanese studies on Islam until the end of World War II. Although ÔKAWA was considered to be the most effective ideologue of Pan-Asianism, he insisted that Islam had a Western character, based on the various studies of the Orientalists.²⁰ In short, TANAKA's understanding of Islam was based not on original Islam but on *Kai-ju* or *Hui-ru* (Islamic Confucianism). Furthermore, his impression of the similarity between Shintoism and Islam was strengthened by his pilgrimage to Mecca.

In the last stage of this syncretism process, TANAKA established *Go-ichi Kai*, literally Five-One Society, in 1933.²¹ Five refers to five religions: Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity, and Islam; one refers to Shintoism. The goal of this society was to syncretize five religions with Shintoism.

TANAKA expressed the idea behind this society in the declaration of *Go-ichi Kai*, published in *Dainichi* magazine, as follows.

There is no boundary in ways; the lack of a boundary suggests the existence of a way.

In Eastern countries, martial arts, spiritual ideas, and religion are considered to be the “way.” His figurative use of “way” suggests that there is no boundary in syncretizing Shintoism (the way of *Kami*) with Islam.

According to the original doctrines of Islam, it is impossible for Islam to coexist with our core Japanese ideas.

This phrase is worthy of note. Although the syncretism of Shintoism and Islam was not directly denied, TANAKA noticed that this syncretism was not consistent with the original doctrine of Islam. This deviation, however, did not cause him to give up the idea of the syncretism of Shintoism and Islam. He sought the grounds for his idea in China.

When Islam entered China, Islam developed as “Mahayana Islam.”

This is his conclusion. He found that the syncretism of Confucianism and

Islam in China, *Kai-ju* or *Hui-ru* (Islamic Confucianism), resembled Mahayana Buddhism. He realized that the Chinese people came to believe Islam by syncretizing it with earlier religions. He referred to Chinese Islam as Mahayana Islam, or the Great Vehicle Islam. He concluded that if Islam could adopt the characteristics of Mahayana Buddhism, it was possible to syncretize Shintoism and Islam. He believed that the basic ideas of Islam were compatible with those of the Japanese people. TANAKA did not intend the simple syncretism of both religions but the absorption of Islam by Shintoism. He wished to dissolve Islam and four other religions into Shintoism.

This actually was heresy against Islam. TANAKA acknowledged that his idea was heretical to the original, orthodox Islam, but he could not abandon Shintoism.

Unfortunately, we cannot find any source material on the activities of this *Go-ichi Kai* Society. I wonder whether or not TANAKA's ideas were welcomed by Japanese intellectuals. His idea was unique enough to garner much approval. The absence of any further information from the Japanese media, however, suggests the failure of this society.

TANAKA next began to seek the syncretism of Pan-Asianism and Islam.

4. Syncretism of Pan-Asianism and Islam

It was natural for TANAKA to have approved Pan-Asianism. In accordance with his belief in Shintoism, he had a strong respect for *Mikado*. This is indicated in the establishment of *Go-ichi Kai*. Even though he converted to Islam, he intended to absorb the idea of Islam into Shintoism. He continued to believe in Shintoism and did not give a thought to abandoning Shintoism after he became a Muslim. Although it was easy for Shintoism and Islam to coexist in TANAKA's faith, Shintoism ranked higher than Islam, and he continued to show respect for *Mikado*. After the Meiji Restoration in 1868, *Mikado* was both present emperor of the state and the present God, according to Shintoism.

On the other hand, TANAKA criticized the Pan-Asianism Movement under the leadership of the aforementioned "bogus Japanese Muslims," which was supported by the Japanese military.

As our Japanese military pays attention to the Chinese problem on the largest scale, so have some of our Japanese military officers investigated the affairs of Chinese Muslims, through military intelligence, and negotiated with them. But there is no Islamic foundation in Japan. The Japanese military officers are not Muslims.

Their behavior has no effect on the Chinese Muslims. Specifically, one officer's theatrical action of calling Muslim attention to the Pan-Islamism Movement has had a harmful and serious effect on Indian and Chinese Muslims.²²

He criticized the actions of these "bogus Muslims" among Japanese. It is assumed that the Pan-Asianism Movement and TANAKA had the same goals. What was the difference, however, between TANAKA and these "bogus Japanese Muslims"?

Among interwar world affairs, TANAKA believed that Japan should adopt a positive attitude toward reviving Asian countries under *Mikado*. Although he criticized "bogus Muslims" of the Japanese government and army, he believed that all Asian countries could be rescued by Pan-Asianism under *Mikado*. It is possible to say that he pushed for the syncretism of Pan-Asianism and Islam in accordance with his own syncretism of Shintoism and Islam. At this point, TANAKA, as a private, popular Muslim, supported Pan-Asianism, which was welcomed by the Japanese government. According to TANAKA, Islam did not contradict either Shintoism or Pan-Asianism. This was similar to the ideas of the "bogus Japanese Muslims," who were supported by the Japanese army and government; TANAKA, however, did not consider utilizing Islam for Japanese national interests. He was serious about reviving all Asian countries in the public interest, based on his own syncretism of Shintoism and Islam.

TANAKA finally decided to promote the syncretism of Pan-Asianism and Islam. This idea was welcomed by the Japanese army and government. As mentioned earlier, TANAKA criticized any of the intelligence activities of the "bogus Japanese Muslims." He did not cooperate with them even when they tried to approach him. It is said that he was distressed by this situation and by the fact that the *Go-ichi Kai* Society had remained stagnant.

In 1934, TANAKA started on a second pilgrim to Mecca. He was the first Japanese Muslim to travel to Mecca twice. This time he visited not only Mecca but also Afghanistan and the African countries. Although the rigor of this pilgrimage made him happy and agreed with his sense of religion, the excessive schedule ruined his health. He died soon after returning to Japan.

The *Go-ichi Kai* Society became extinct after his sudden death. TANAKA could not persuade the interwar Japanese public to believe in his understanding of Islam.

IV. Ahmad Bunpachirô ARIGA

1. Encounter with Islam

There were other interesting Japanese Muslims in interwar Japan. For example, Ahmad Bunpachirô ARIGA (1868–1946) also intended to syncretize Shintoism with Islam in accordance with a different understanding of Islam from TANAKA's.²³ ARIGA's "Japanese Islam," with respect to *Mikado*, was a quite different doctrine from either TANAKA's or that of the "bogus Japanese Muslims."

ARIGA had had a unique career before he became a Muslim in order to propagate "Japanese Islam" through missionary activities. In his childhood, soon after the Meiji Restoration, he experienced the *Haibutsu Kishaku* Movement, literally the "abolish Buddhism and destroy *Shâkyamuni*" Movement. This experience taught him that neither the *Kami* of Shintoism nor the *Shâkyamuni* of Buddhism could harm human beings. In 1885, he became the principal of an elementary school, at a very young age. He found that speeches on Confucianism, Shintoism, or Buddhism had no effect on the pupils. However, when he made a speech on Christianity, the pupils listened. After this experience, ARIGA converted to Christianity.²⁴ In 1889, he gave up his job and travelled to Tokyo to propagate Christianity. Soon after, in 1891, he abandoned these missionary activities and set sail on the rough Pacific Ocean to the Southeast countries, as the member of *Kôshin*, the trading company established by the famous politician Takeaki ENOMOTO. In 1893, he began to engage in trade in the Indian Ocean. In 1896, he gave up the trade business and tried various businesses in Tokyo and Osaka.

In 1892, when ARIGA engaged in trade with India, he became acquainted with Hedarali, the Indian Muslim merchant. Hedarali made a strong impression of Islam on ARIGA. His interaction with Hedarali was ARIGA's first experience of Islam.

Fujio KOMURA, a famous Japanese Muslim, later considered this experience to be ARIGA's conversion to Islam. This can be greatly misleading without verification from any source materials. ARIGA himself made a definite statement of his conversion in 1932.²⁵

2. Conversion to Islam

In 1932, when ARIGA retired from business at the age of sixty-five, he decided to become a Muslim and engage in Islamic missionary activities among the Japanese people. He did not confess the reason of his conversion. This life path is reminiscent of the career of the Prophet Muhammad. It is possible to assume

that ARIGA's checkered life affected his conversion to Islam.

In March 1932, ARIGA visited Kurbangali (Kurbangaliev), the leader of the Tatar exiles in Tokyo, to convert to Islam. Kurbangali introduced him to Shamguni, the leader of the Muslims in Kobe. In September 1932, ARIGA became a Muslim at the planned site for the Kobe Mosque, which was constructed in 1935.²⁶

It is interesting that ARIGA had quite a different career from TANAKA. ARIGA also had an interest in religion, as did TANAKA. However, ARIGA increasingly distinguished the old religions such as Buddhism, Shintoism, and Confucianism from one another. He decided to accept Christianity at last, but after his conversion to Islam, he mentioned in his autobiography his dissatisfaction with all the religions he had experienced until his conversion to Islam, as follows.²⁷

He first criticized Buddhism as being an old ceremony.

We Japanese did not study religion. We just blindly obeyed old Buddhism because our ancestors believed in it. We consider religion to be the ceremonies of Buddhism, as our ancestors did.

He then criticized Christianity.

In the name of the Father, the Son (Christ), and the Holy Spirit.... The Christians believe these to be the three faces of only one God. I suppose it is natural for three faces of God to represent three Gods. Why, then, is it called Monotheism.... Due to this strangeness, it should be impossible to have many believers.

He finally criticized Shintoism.

I would not like to comment on Shintoism. I assume Shintoism to be ancestor worship or hero worship. I agree to show respect for the tombs of our ancestors and heroes, but I cannot admit Shintoism as a religion.... *Amenonakanushi* is the only *Kami* (God) [among the various *Kamis* of Shintoism] equal to Allah of Islam. So I suppose that belief in *Amenonakanushi* equals belief in Allah.

This criticism of existing religions provides a clue to ARIGA's conversion to Islam. It is possible that ARIGA sought a monotheistic religion. He first found

Christianity, which gave him some satisfaction, but the famous Trinity problem (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) was a source of distress. He finally found real monotheism in Islam, and became a Muslim.

After he converted to Islam, he commenced Islamic missionary activities among the Japanese people. He first stayed in western Japan: Kobe, Kyoto, and Osaka. In 1933, he moved to Tokyo and set up a private office for Islamic missionary activities. He then tried missionary activities through publications. In 1934, he set out to publish a Japanese translation of the Holy Koran to distribute at a low price. He had found that the first Japanese translation of the Holy Koran was expensive for Japan. His version of the Japanese Koran was published in 1938. He also published a biography of the Prophet Muhammad in 1935.²⁸ In this way, he worked energetically to promote Islam among the Japanese people.

3. Syncretism of Shintoism and Islam

From his missionary activities, it is possible to call him a devout Muslim. However, actually, his understanding of Islam was quite different from that of normal Muslims. Although he sought real monotheism, he was not satisfied with Islam, or the so-called orthodox Islam. As a Japanese, he tried to mix the old Oriental religions with Islam, in the same way that TANAKA did. He finally chose Shintoism, through the aforementioned criticism on existing religions. He intended to syncretize Shintoism with Islam, but in a quite different way from TANAKA. He could not accept any of the gods of Shintoism except *Amenonakanushi*, one of the *Kamis* of Shintoism. He denied Shintoism as the worship of ancestors and heroes. He assumed *Amenonakanushi* to be equal to Allah, and, based on this idea, he declared “Japanese Islam.”

Unfortunately, since he did not leave a detailed record of his missionary activities, we must assume that he had this idea when he converted to Islam. The missionary office that he established in Tokyo was called “the Missionary Office of Japanese Islam.” *The Biography of the Prophet Muhammad*, his first book, was published in 1935 by this office.

In 1937, he began to distribute a small pamphlet (with the written oath of the conversion!), entitled *An Explanation of Japanese Islam*, which was a private edition.²⁹ This pamphlet elucidates the idea of “Japanese Islam” that ARIGA propounded. This pamphlet comprised four parts: “the purpose of the missionary activities of Great Japanese Islam,” “the beliefs of Islam,” “the morals of Islam,” and “What is Islam?” According to his understanding of Islam, “the beliefs of Islam” are acceptable, but “the morals of Islam” are not acceptable. ARIGA pointed out “the morals of Islam” in this pamphlet, as

follows.

We believe in only one God (Allah), we respect the Prophet Muhammad.... We respect *Tennô* (*Mikado*), Kôgô (the Empress), and the Royal family.

Before the description “*Amenonakanushi* is only *Kami* (God) [among the various *Kamis* of Shintoism], and is equal to Allah of Islam,” in the last part, “What is Islam?” ARIGA declared admiration for the Royal family of Japan. He apparently could not give up reverence for the Royal family of Japan. He did not indicate the reason of this reverence. In short, he either announced his reverence for the Royal family of Japan without reason or did not consider the coexistence of Islam with the Royal family of Japan (who are descendants of *Kamis* (Gods), according to Shintoism). Although he denied Shintoism, he maintained reverence for the Royal family. There was a great discrepancy between his ideas and his feelings. We can assume that ARIGA named this religion “Japanese Islam” due to this discrepancy. In comparison to TANAKA’s syncretism, ARIGA’s syncretism of Shintoism and Islam was not contemplative. TANAKA was terribly distressed to promote these two types of syncretism. Unlike the so-called “seeker after truth” or pessimistic TANAKA, ARIGA appears to have enthusiastically engaged in the missionary activities of “Japanese Islam” as an optimist.

Some insist that ARIGA supported this reverence for the Royal family only as a strategy or tactic for furthering missionary activities, which was allowed in Islam. However, when we examine his ideas on the syncretism of Pan-Asianism and Islam, we can see that his reverence for the Royal family transcended this contradiction of idea and feeling.

4. Syncretism of Pan-Asianism and Islam

When we closely examine ARIGA’s short pamphlet, we find the reason for his reverence for the Royal family of Japan. The idea of “Japanese Islam” was constructed on the syncretism of Pan-Asianism and Islam. In the first section of the pamphlet, “the purpose of the missionary activities of Great Japanese Islam,” he detailed his understanding of the present state of the world, as follows.

Now the white races are scorning the colored races. The white races always weigh heavily on the colored races in order to divide them and keep them in their control. I suppose if the situation continues as such,

a world war will take place between the white races and the colored races in the near future. I believe that our Japanese people will be the leader of the colored races in this world war. But I worry that it will be impossible for us to continue this future war because our Japanese people number only seventy million. So we must prepare a spiritual alliance of powers. Why must we seek a spiritual alliance of powers? According to my studies over many years, we must first organize a community of Japanese Muslims through Islamic missionary activities. Second, we must connect this community of Japanese Muslims with the seven hundred million Muslims in the world. I believe that there is no other way to prepare for this future world war than through this great spiritual alliance. Some people insist that we can utilize Buddhism or Shintoism because there are so many believers in Japan. Nonsense! It would take more than a hundred years to spread Buddhism and Shintoism in foreign countries.

ARIGA was apparently more of a nationalist of Pan-Asianism than a Japanese Muslim. He did not insist on utilizing Japanese reverence for the Royal family of Japan, as in Shintoism. He insisted on utilizing Islam for Pan-Asianism led by Japan.

He denied the effectiveness of Buddhism and Shintoism because they require time to spread among the colored races. If Buddhism and Shintoism were effective in organizing an alliance against the white race, he would not have denied but would have adopted them. From this pragmatic viewpoint, he sought to utilize any religion to organize various colored races under the leadership of Japan.

Furthermore, ARIGA emphasized the reason for his missionary activities in a more direct manner, as follows.

The reason why the Japanese people need Islam:

Essentially, religion is the means of raising the spirit and culture. There is little to choose among religions because there is little difference among the doctrines of all religions. So it is clever to choose the most convenient religion for the present and future state of our Japanese people.

Over the past centuries, the white races of European countries have demonstrated power, insulted colored people, surpassed them, and deprived them of their territories. In this way, it seems as if there is no

human being without the white race. Against this situation, we Japanese rise in protest.

As a result of the Sino-Japanese War and the Russo-Japanese War, we have strong confidence in winning a war against any single country. But if we go to war against several countries, I cannot help but be doubtful of our victory. So we must seek a spiritual alliance. Which power would be suitable for our alliance? I believe that it is most reasonable to make some hundred million Muslims all over the world part of our Japanese alliance in order to create strong fighting power.

We can identify the fighting spirit and culture of Islam as being similar to ours. Muslims believe that Allah is always accompanied by believers, and they make every effort due to faith in an invincible army. I believe that such a religion is useful for the present and future of the Japanese people. So as soon as possible, we must organize a community of Japanese Muslims in Japan and cooperate with the hundred million Muslims all over the world. I cannot help but insist on these measures to compete with oppression by the white races.

In this declaration, ARIGA did not conceal his pragmatic idea of using religion for Pan-Asianism. He simply laid bare his heart. Although he recollected his studies of or experiences with other religions, he asserted that there was little difference between the doctrines of all religions. He regarded all religions as undifferentiated from each other. He was apparently not religious, as he had experienced the *Haibutsu Kishaku* Movement in his childhood.

ARIGA was a nationalist of Pan-Asianism who depended on reverence for the Royal family of Japan. It was natural for him to make a definite statement of reverence for the Royal family of Japan and to attempt to syncretize Pan-Asianism and Islam.

His missionary activities to spread “Japanese Islam” among the Japanese people were bogged down by eagerness. Japan declared war against America in 1940. Although ARIGA continued his missionary activities, they ended wastefully with the defeat of Japan in 1945. “Japanese Islam” did not take root among the Japanese people.

V. Conclusion

Both TANAKA and ARIGA were interested in Islam and converted to Islam as private intellectuals; they were unconnected to any of the intelligence activities

of the Japanese army and government, unlike the “bogus Japanese Muslims.” Furthermore, both TANAKA and ARIGA first tried to syncretize Shintoism and Islam in Japanese Islam and then Pan-Asianism and Islam.

To all appearances, TANAKA and ARIGA were the same kind of Japanese Muslim that tried to syncretize Shintoism and Islam. In actuality, however, their views were quite opposite to each other's. TANAKA was a religious man whereas ARIGA was not religious but patriotic.

TANAKA eventually arrived at the syncretism of Pan-Asianism and Islam after spending much time in deep contemplation of the syncretism of Shintoism and Islam.

ARIGA, on the other hand, was not concerned with the intelligence activities of the Japanese policy against the Muslims (called “*Kaikyô seisaku*”), which were supported by the Japanese army and government. Essentially, ARIGA's ideas on the syncretism of Shintoism and Islam, and of Pan-Asianism and Islam, were quite different from TANAKA's. In short, we can suppose that there was a homogeneity between ARIGA's ideas and those of the “bogus Japanese Muslims” supported by the Japanese army and government.

Both TANAKA and ARIGA failed to widely spread their ideas of syncretism among the Japanese people. Although some Japanese Muslims hold onto their ideas until today, the total number of Japanese Muslims is still low in present Japan.

I would like to end my presentation by pointing out future tasks. Although the cases of TANAKA and ARIGA provide us with the unique process of converting to Islam, we must collect and investigate more detailed information about Japanese Muslims in the interwar period, especially about their understanding of Islam. When we jump to the hasty conclusion that all Japanese Muslims were “bogus Muslims” supported by the Japanese government, we make a mistake and lose an understanding of how Islam expanded in interwar Japan.

Notes

¹ Toshihiko IZUTSU, *A Comparative Study of the Key Philosophical Concepts in Sufism and Taoism: Ibn 'Arabî and Lao-Tzû, Chuang-Tzû*, Tokyo, 2 vols., 1966–67; do, *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts*, Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1983 (Berkeley, 1984).

² IZUTSU, *Sufism and Taoism*, 1-4. IZUTSU showed deep interest in Oriental philosophies. He also studied Zen Buddhism. See Toshihiko IZUTSU, *Toward a Philosophy of Zen Buddhism*, Tehran: Tehran Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1977 (reprint Boulder, 1982).

³ We find cases of religious syncretism not only in Japan but also in Korea (and China). For example, Korean *Donghak* (Eastern Learning), founded in 1860, sought to create a new Korean

- religion by syncretizing Buddhism and Christianity.
- ⁴ Some foreign Muslims defined Japanese Muslims before World War II as “bogus Muslims” or “pragmatic Muslims.” See REZRAZI el-Mustafa, “Pan-Asianism and the Japanese Islam: Hatano Uho: from Espionage to Pan-Islamist Activity,” *Annals of Japan Association for Middle East Studies* 12 (1987), 89-112. It is not correct to categorize all Japanese Muslims into the same single classification as REZRAZI did. There were some Japanese Muslims who actually sought Islamic religious beliefs. It is very difficult to distinguish the real Muslims from the bogus Muslims. We can find some real Muslims among the Japanese intellectuals before World War II. In addition, there is the great mistake of mixing up the two different HATANOs (Yôsaku HATANO and Shunbô (= Uhô) HATANO) in REZRAZI 1987.
- ⁵ Only the TOKUGAWA Shogunate Government enjoyed the privilege of foreign information, including information on the Islamic World; it received this information from Chinese and Dutch merchants. See Hideaki SUGITA, *The Japanese Discovery of the Middle East*, Tokyo: The University of Tokyo Press, 1995 (in Japanese).
- ⁶ See Hiroshi NAGABA, *The Modern Records of the Inspections in Turkey*, Tokyo: The Keio University Press, 2000 (in Japanese); Naoshi OKUYAMA, “The Voyage of the Hiei and Kongo to the Ottoman Empire as Observed by Japanese Monks who Studied in Ceylon,” *The Annual Bulletin of the Asian Culture Research Institute, Toyo University*, 43(2008) (in Japanese), 84-100.
- ⁷ See Nobuo MISAWA & Göknur AKÇADAĞ, “The First Japanese Muslim, Shôtârô NODA (1868–1904),” *Annals of Japan Association of Middle East Studies*, 23-1 (2007), 85-109.
- ⁸ For example, the French newspaper reported on NODA as a future threat who would convert Japan into an Islamic country. The Europeans overstated NODA’s influence. The Japanese media was puzzled by this strange news. NODA kept silent on his conversion to Islam and conducted no missionary activities in Japan. See MISAWA & AKÇADAĞ, “The First Japanese Muslim.”
- ⁹ See Toyo University, Asian Culture Research Institute, Asian Region Research Center (ed.), *The Bulletin of Ajia-Gi-Kai, DAITÔ (CD-ROM ed. Ver.1)*, Tokyo: Toyo University, 2008; Hisao KOMASTU, *Ibrahim, Trip to Japan*, Tokyo: Azekura Shobô, 2008 (in Japanese). We find some Japanese military officers and nationalists who converted to Islam with the same intention. We can find photographic sources of these bogus Muslims in the JSPS Scientific Research Project “The Establishment of the Data-base of Japan and Islam” and Waseda University, Faculty of Human Sciences (eds.), *CD-ROM The Photographical Sources of the Great Japan Islam Society, Ver. 1*, Tokyo: Japan Women’s University, 2006.
- ¹⁰ Recently, TANAKA’s works have been reevaluated by scholars at Takushoku University. His collected works were published in five volumes. See The Editorial Section of the 100th Anniversary of Takushoku University, *Ippei TANAKA*, Tokyo: Takushoku University, 2002–05, 5 Vols (in Japanese with an Arabic summary). We can study TANAKA’s ideas on Islam from these collected works. This university also organized a Study Circle of TANAKA.
- ¹¹ Zen Buddhism is a school of Mahayana Buddhism that was organized in China in the seventh century. It is said that Zen Buddhism was introduced into Japan in the thirteenth century. In Japan, there are two sects: the *Sôtô Zen School* and the *Rinzai Zen School*.
- ¹² Shintoism *Misogikyô* is the one of the schools of Shintoism that was organized by Masakane INOUE (1790–1849). This school worships the nine main gods, under the name of *Misogioshie-no-ookami*. According to Mori (Professor at Takushoku University), TANAKA found a homogeneity between Shintoism Misogikyô and Islam as a result of the respect for God. See Nobuo MORI, “Explanatory notes,” in The Editorial Section of the 100th Anniversary of Takushoku University, *Ippei TANAKA*, vol.1, Tokyo: Takushoku University, 2002 (in Japanese), 395.
- ¹³ This Japanese translation was published in 1941. See Liu Zhi (Ippei TANAKA:tr.), *Tenpô Shisei Jitsuroku* (original title: *Tianfang Zhisheng Shilu*), Tokyo: The Great Japan Islam Society Press, 1941. There were some Japanese translations of the biography of Muhammad written by

- Europeans. This was the first Japanese translation of the Chinese works of *Kai-ju* or *Hui-ru*.
- ¹⁴ Ippei TANAKA, "The development of the Chinese Muslims and Liu Zhi," *Japan and the Japanese*, 846 (1922) (in Japanese), 61.
- ¹⁵ Ippei TANAKA, "A Study on *Kai-ju* or *Hui-ru*," *The Great East Culture*, 5-12 (1928) (in Japanese), 2.
- ¹⁶ We can get detailed information on his conversion to Islam from his book about his conversion and his first pilgrimage to Mecca. See Ippei TANAKA, *The Travel Account of a White Cloud*, Seinan: Rekika Shoin, 1925. This book was recently reprinted with an editorial note. See Ippei TANAKA (Takahiko TSUBOUCHI ed.), *The Pilgrim of Islam: The Travel Account of a White Cloud*, Tokyo: Ronsô-sha, 2005 (in Japanese).
- ¹⁷ TANAKA, *The Pilgrim of Islam*.
- ¹⁸ Ibid, 2.
- ¹⁹ TANAKA, "A Study on *Kai-ju* or *Hui-ru*," 10.
- ²⁰ ÔKAWA's understanding of Islam was recently reexamined by various studies in Japan. See Akira USUKI, *Shûmei ÔKAWA*, Tokyo: Seito-sha, 2010 (in Japanese).
- ²¹ We can find the declaration on the establishment of this society in the religious magazine *The Great Sun* (= *Dainichi*) 1 (1931), 34. We cannot, however, find detailed information on the activities of this society. It is an important future task to clarify his ideas on "the Syncretism of Shintoism and Islam."
- ²² Ippei TANAKA, *Muslims and Muslim Affairs*, Tokyo: Tôhōshoin, 1935 (in Japanese), 2.
- ²³ There are two previous studies in the Japanese language on Ahmad Bunpachirô ARIGA; the first is by Fujio KOMURA, *The History of Japanese Islam*, Tokyo: Japanese Islam Friendship League, 1977 (in Japanese); the second is by Junya SHINOHE, "Ahmad ARIGA Bunpachirô (Amad)," *The Study on Religions*, 78-2 (2004) (in Japanese), 517-539.
- ²⁴ Tetsutarô ARIGA (1899-1977), the son of Bunpachirô ARIGA, later became a famous scholar on Protestant Theology.
- ²⁵ See KOMURA, *The History of Japanese Islam*, 152-157; Bunpachirô ARIGA, "As a Japanese Muslim," *Islam*, 6 (1939) (in Japanese), 34-39. We need to collect all of his works in order to analyze his understanding of Islam. SHINOHE mentioned his conversion in 1892 or 1896. See SHINOHE, "Ahmad ARIGA Bunpachirô," 517-524. However, when we read his own description, which was not mentioned by either KOMURA or SHINOHE, we see that he converted to Islam after his retirement from business in 1932. It is also our task to clarify the cases of ARIGA's and TANAKA's conversions.
- ²⁶ For details on Kurbangali, see Katsunori NISHIYAMA, "The Quest for Kurbangali, (1)-(2)," *The Study of International Relations & Comparison of Cultures*, 4-2 (2006a), 325-350; do. 5-1, (2006b) (in Japanese), 93-109; Akira MATSUNAGA, "The Exclusion of Kurbangali, The leader of the Tokyo Muslim Association, and the Development of the Japanese Policy for Muslims," in Tsutomu SAKAMOTO (ed.), *Islam and the Japanese War against China*, Tokyo: Keio University Press, 2008 (in Japanese), 179-232; Ali Merthan DÜNDAR & Nobuo MISAWA, *Books in Tatar-Turkish printed by Tokyo'da Matbaa-i İslamiye (1930-38)[DVD ed., Ver.1]*, Tokyo: Toyo University, 2010. The situation of Islam in Interwar Kobe, see Yoshiaki FUKUDA, "The Establishment of Kobe Mosque," *The Annual Bulletin of the Asian Culture Research Institute, Toyo University*, 45 (2011) [forthcoming] (in Japanese).
- ²⁷ ARIGA, "As a Japanese Muslim," 34-37.
- ²⁸ The first Japanese Holy Koran in two volumes in the publication series of the World Holy Books was translated by Kenichi SAKAMOTO in 1930. Ahmad ARIGA (ed.) & Gorô TAKAHASHI (tr.), *The Holy Koran*, Tokyo: The Publication Press for the Holy Koran, 1938 (in Japanese). TAKAHASHI translated the Holy Koran into the Japanese and ARIGA published this translation. Ahmad ARIGA & Miki NISHIMOTO, *The Biography of the Prophet Muhammad*, Tokyo: The Missionary Office of Japanese Islam, 1935 (in Japanese). For the translation of the Holy Koran into the Japanese, see Reiko ÔKAWA, *Illustrated Book on the World of the Holy Koran*, Tokyo: Kawade Shôbô Shinsha, 2005 (in Japanese).

²⁹ We can find the origin of this small pamphlet in his second book, entitled *Islam in Japan*, Tokyo: Tôhō Shoin, 1935 (in Japanese).