

Japanese Studies

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Japan and transculturality

Practitioners of Japanese studies have traditionally faced a choice between stressing either comparisons or connections. Both approaches have a long history in the discipline. Since the first European encounters with Japan, the country has been seen as an object of comparison *par excellence*. Indeed, one of the first European books on Japan ever written, Luis Fróis's 1585 *Contradictions and Differences of Custom between the Peoples of Europe and this Province of Japan*,¹ focused more on differences than commonalities. The latter, however, have also played their part, for instance in comparative studies on feudalism such as those pioneered in the 1920s in English by Asakawa Kan'ichi² or in German by Otto Hintze.³

Despite this focus on comparison, the alternative approach, which seeks connections, has also loomed large in Japanese studies. European scholarship has privileged research on the so-called Christian Century, i.e. the first period of contact between Europe and Japan from the 1550s onwards,⁴ and the impact of the West has long been identified as the main cause of the Meiji revolution of 1868 and the subsequent reforms.⁵ The only real alternative to the choice between comparison and connection has been the study of Japan as an autonomous isolated entity. Indeed, this conventional approach has been dominant in many ways and continues to be relevant in this era of hyper-specialized research. This is certainly true of Japanese scholarship on Japan: The wave of *Nihonjinron* studies, which were popular up to the 1980s

1 For a full English translation see Robin D. Gill, trans., *Topsy-Turvy, 1585: A Translation and Explication of Luis Frois S. J.'s Tratado (Treatise) Listing 611 Ways Europeans & Japanese Are Contrary* (Key Biscane: Paraverse Press, 2004), Luis Fróis, *Tratado das Contradições e Diferenças de Costumes Entre a Europa e o Japão*, (Macau: Instituto Português do Oriente, 2001).

2 Kan'ichi Asakawa, *The Documents of Iriki: Illustrative of the Development of the Feudal Institutions of Japan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1929).

3 Otto Hintze, "Wesen und Verbreitung des Feudalismus," *Sitzungsberichte der preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 20 (1929): 321–347.

4 Charles R. Boxer set the tone of postwar research with his classic *The Christian Century in Japan, 1549–1650* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951).

5 A representative work of the early postwar period is George B. Sansom, *The Western World and Japan: A Study in the Interaction of European and Asiatic Cultures* (New York: Knopf, 1950).

and stressed the uniqueness of Japan and the Japanese, is a clear example, but even without such an outright political agenda, contemporary Japanese scholars of Japan tend to ignore non-Japanese primary material and secondary scholarship. One could argue, however, that the identification of research topics in this third, autonomous mode of scholarship has also mostly been driven by implicit comparisons (e.g. the belief that the Japanese group identity is interesting because it is obviously different from the role of the individual as the main locus of social change in the contemporary United States).

I would argue that a seemingly distinct fourth approach, the inclusion of Japan in systematic studies, is ultimately also driven by comparativist motives. One might think of the plethora of business management studies focusing on Japan, produced both within and outside of Japan, most notably in the United States during the economic boom of the 1980s.⁶ While the systematic inclusion of the Japanese example into these studies has reshaped the whole field of management studies, the reason for considering Japan was to identify (cultural) differences, to explain Japanese success vs. local (European or North American) failure. The same is true for early studies in cultural anthropology that set out to systematically include Japan, but ultimately aimed at explaining Japan's "difference" vis-à-vis "the West."⁷

The following essay will sketch some of these trends in the study of Japan since the second half of the twentieth century in more detail, but it will also argue that the time has come to go beyond comparison and connection. While both are important, they largely rest on the problematic assumption of distinct cultures. Reifying Japanese culture as unique—a staple of the popular perception of Japan—has done much harm by setting the country apart from changes that affect the rest of the world. Instead, we need to acknowledge the existence of global conjunctures that have historically prompted responses in different regions, relating them to each other in ways that go beyond direct connections. Instead of stressing the distinctness of cultures, I would therefore like to highlight the commonality of responses to worldwide developments, especially those of the modern age, in Japan and elsewhere. The respective reactions to and results of such global trends may of course be different, but they are reactions to the same problems and challenges.

In a discipline in which most followers define themselves as students of "Japanese culture," it is particularly difficult, but also particularly important,

6 Ezra Vogel, *Japan as Number One: Lessons for America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979).

7 See e.g. Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1946).

to stress that this is first and foremost a category of identity that works through selfing and othering. “Japanese culture” is thus of interest to us as a focal point of identity discourses, but should not be a category of analysis for ourselves. “Transculturality” in this sense is sometimes acknowledged as an important point of reference in cultural anthropology, a sub-discipline of Japanese studies that has often promoted the image of a unique Japan.⁸ Yet this discussion seems to be largely limited to Western studies of Japan.

In contrast, within Japan, there has been great emphasis on the intercultural dimension in some disciplines, such as comparative literature, but little movement towards “transculturality” as it is understood in this themed section. This situation is exacerbated by a terminological polyphony, a result of the many ways a foreign term might be rendered into Japanese. The phonetic loan *toransukaruchuraru* トランスカルチュラル, for instance, seems to have been hijacked by business studies, as visible in book titles such as *Global Management in a Multicultural Age: Transcultural Management*⁹ or *The New International People: Challenges for the Age of Transcultural Mediators*¹⁰. As emphasized in the introductory essay, transcultural approaches were pioneered in practical fields, “mainly interested in background knowledge and techniques of communication.”¹¹ Other ways to express something similar to “transcultural” are new coinages like *tabunka-kan* 多文化間 (lit. “between many cultures”), *ibunka-kan* 異文化間 (lit. “between different cultures”), *kan-bunka* 間文化 (“culture(s) of between”), and, possibly closest to the literal meaning of “trans-cultural,” *ekkyō bunka* 越境文化 (“border-transcending culture”). The first two are found frequently in the academic fields of education/pedagogy, literature, the caring professions, and psychiatry (“transcultural nursing” is a frequently employed term in this field). A journal focusing mostly on non-Japanese literature, with the English subtitle “Trans-Cultural Studies,” but the much blander Japanese title *Sōgō bunka*

8 See David Blake Willis and Stephen Murphy-Shigematsu, eds., *Transcultural Japan: At the Borderlands of Race, Gender, and Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2008). Most of its chapters were written by anthropologists. Another prominent use of “transcultural” in a book title is in the more recent collection of essays by literary scholar Irmela Hijiya-Kirschner, *Was vom Japaner übrig blieb: Transkultur—Übersetzung—Selbstbehauptung* (Munich: Iudicium, 2013).

9 Funakawa Atsushi 船川淳志, *Tabunka jidai no gurōbaru keiei: Toransukaruchuraru manejimento* 多文化時代のグローバル経営—トランスカルチュラル・マネジメント [Global management in a multicultural age: transcultural management] (Tōkyō: Piason Edyukēshon, 2001).

10 Mitarai Shōji 御手洗昭治, *Shin kokusai-jin ron: Toransu karuchuraru mediētā jidai e no chōsen* 新国際人論—トランス・カルチュラル・メディエーター時代への挑戦 [The new international people: Challenges for the age of transcultural mediators] (Tōkyō: Sōgō Hōrei, 1994).

11 Daniel G. König and Katja Rakow, “The Transcultural Approach Within a Disciplinary Framework: An Introduction,” *Transcultural Studies* 2 (2016): 91.

kenkyū 総合文化研究 (lit. “general culture studies”) has been published since 1998 at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. These examples are all rather close to the conventional term “intercultural”; and in fact, *ibunka*, the second term mentioned above, has been the standard Japanese translation term for “intercultural” since the 1970s. There is also a clear practical bent to this term, as can be seen in journal titles such as *Ibunka komyunikēshon* 異文化コミュニケーション (“Intercultural Communication”) or *Ibunka keiei kenkyū* 異文化経営研究 (“Intercultural Business Studies”).

At least within Japanese historical studies, there is some acknowledgment of the need to go beyond old paradigms. This has come to the surface as a debate between global history and world history—similar to that carried out in the Anglophone sphere, but at odds with most definitions of these terms in the English debate. This is because the Japanese equivalent of “global history” (*gurōbaru hisutorī* ゴルーバルヒストリー) refers to the kind of “world history” approach exemplified either by post-Wallersteinian models with a strong focus on economic history¹² or to more recent “big history” approaches aiming at a history of the planet that includes its pre-human past. In contrast, the Japanese term for “new world history” (*atarashii sekai shi* 新しい世界史) is closer to “global history” as used in Anglophone countries, i.e. it looks at micro-level connections, border zones etc.¹³

Old and new approaches to the study of Japan

European and North American Japanese studies started out with much less Orientalist baggage than some of the other disciplines treated in this themed section. Unlike India, China, or the Islamic Middle East, Japan was not an important imaginary other in quests for European identities, nor was it an important object of inquiry in the age of armchair philology. A latecomer in Asian studies, research on Japan was almost exclusively conducted by long-term residents of Japan.¹⁴ The eminent Japanologists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were either diplomats (William George Aston, Ernest Satow), missionaries (Arthur Lloyd, Emil Schiller, Hans Haas), or had

12 The school at Osaka University around Saitō Osamu, Sugihara Kaoru, and Akita Shigeru is representative of this trend.

13 See Haneda Masashi 羽田正, *Atarashī sekaishi e: Chikyū shimin no tame no kōsō* 新しい世界史へ—地球市民のための構想 [Towards a new world history: A design for global citizens] (Tōkyō: Iwanami, 2011).

14 The only exception were the two early pioneers August Pfizmaier and Léon de Rosny, who were based at Vienna University and the École pratique des hautes études, respectively, but had other main fields of study besides Japan.

originally come to Japan to teach foreign languages (Basil Hall Chamberlain, Karl Florenz). This means that their views of Japan were dominated less by European agendas of fixing the Orient as the other, and more by their dialogues with Japanese colleagues and informants. In contrast, the academization of Japanese studies in European and North American universities took hold only slowly, beginning with Karl Florenz's Chair in Japanology at Hamburg University in 1914 and Serge Elisséeff's position in Far Eastern studies at Harvard University in 1933. Notably, both Florenz and Elisséeff had received a crucial part of their academic training not in Europe, but in Japan itself (namely at Tokyo Imperial University).¹⁵ Indeed, in many subfields the contribution of Japanese scholars to the formation of the discipline is a notable feature of Japanese studies. As early as the nineteenth century, Japanese participants contributed to European orientalist conferences, delivering papers on linguistics, religion, and history. Many of the early Western-language standard publications in Japanese history, literature, and religion were written by Japanese academics, thus complicating standard orientalist assumptions about European researchers and Asian objects of study.¹⁶

The tendency to treat Japan differently from other Asian cultures and societies, possibly exacerbated by the role of Japan as an enemy nation for most European and North American nations during World War II, survived into the postwar period. This is clearly visible in the dominant macro-theory in Western Japanese studies after 1945, modernization theory. That is to say, in order to explain modern and contemporary Japan, the assumption has been that Japan was the only Asian country to have modernized in a manner comparable to Western Europe and North America.¹⁷ The advantage of this modernist bias in the field was that from an early point in time, isolated studies of Japan were the exception (at least in the subfields of history and social science); instead, a rich comparative literature on Japan developed from the 1960s onwards. The object of comparison, however, was almost exclusively Europe or, even more

15 For more details on the role of Orientalism in the history of Japanese studies, see Hans Martin Krämer, "The Role of Religion in European and North American Japanese Studies," in *Religion and Orientalism in Asian Studies*, ed. Kiri Paramore (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 119–128. On the role of Elisséeff at Harvard University, see Rudolf V. A. Janssens, *Power and Academic Culture: The Founding and Funding of Japanese Studies in the United States*, USJP Occasional Paper 96–03 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 19–37.

16 For the case of religion see Hans Martin Krämer, "Orientalism and the Study of Lived Religions: The Japanese Contribution to European Models of Scholarship on Japan Around 1900" (unpublished manuscript, February 21, 2017), Microsoft Word file.

17 On the function of modernization theory within postwar historiography on Japan generally, see Sebastian Conrad, "'The Colonial Ties Are Liquidated': Modernization Theory, Post-War Japan, and the Global Cold War," *Past and Present* 216 (2012): 181–214.

prominently, North America; this meant that Japan was cut off from Asia. The significance of its historically close entanglement, especially with China and Korea, was downplayed in the quest to understand modern Japan. Even studies on premodern Japan discounted the East Asian context, under the assumption that some kernel of Japan's later modernization could be detected, comparable to Max Weber's Protestant ethic in Europe.¹⁸ Since the early 1970s, long after researchers had turned away from explicit modernization theory, the tendency to view Japan as separate from China and Korea proved to be a long-term legacy,¹⁹ with consequences not only on curricula outside of Japan, but also for the humanities and social sciences in Japan. This situation has really only been rectified in the last ten years or so by a stronger focus on the East Asian region, within which Japan is embedded historically and culturally.²⁰

On the other hand, although modernization theory has been discredited since the 1980s, no unifying grand theory has come to replace it. Instead, the dominant reaction seems to have been that at least outside of Japan, single-country studies, explaining Japan from within, have gained more credibility. The standard English-language textbooks for modern Japanese history, for instance, do little to situate Japan within East Asia, much less the world.²¹

18 An egregious example is Robert N. Bellah, *Tokugawa Religion: The Values of Pre-industrial Japan* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957).

19 On implicit and explicit views of China in Japanese studies, see Kiri Paramore, "Religion, Secularism, and the Japanese Shaping of East Asian Studies," in *Religion and Orientalism in Asian Studies*, ed. Kiri Paramore (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 129–143.

20 As a prominent example, two path-breaking eight-volume sets of essays were published by Japan's premier academic press at almost the same time. Kurasawa Aiko 倉沢愛子 et al., eds., *Iwanami kōza: Ajia-taiheiyō sensō* 岩波講座 アジア・太平洋戦争 [Iwanami course: The Asian Pacific war], 8 vols. (Tōkyō: Iwanami Shoten, 2005–2006) was about World War II, referred to as the "Asian Pacific War" and Ōe Shinobu 大江志乃夫 et al., eds., *Iwanami kōza: Kindai Nihon to shokuminchi* 岩波講座 近代日本と植民地 [Iwanami course: Modern Japan and the colonies], 8 vols. (Tōkyō: Iwanami Shoten, 2005). More recently, the same publisher has put out an eleven-volume set of essays on modern and contemporary east Asian history that treated Japan as a regular part of Asia, whereas older standard "histories of Asia" would usually have dealt with continental Asia, excluding Japan as a matter of course: Wada Haruki and 和田春樹 et al., eds., *Higashi Ajia kingendai tsūshi* 東アジア近現代通史 [A modern and contemporary history of east Asia], 11 vols. (Tōkyō: Iwanami Shoten, 2010–2011). Also, since 2002 a government-sponsored panel of South Korean and Japanese historians have been developing a joint history textbook for school use, although no textbook acceptable to both governments has yet emerged. See Kimijima Kazuhiko 君島和彦, *Nikkan rekishi kyōkasho no kiseki: Rekishi no kyōtsū ninshiki o motomete* 日韓歴史教科書の軌跡—歴史の共通認識を求めて [The path of a Japanese-Korean history textbook: Demanding a common historical consciousness] (Kawagoe: Suzusawa Shoten, 2009).

21 This is certainly true for the two textbooks on modern Japanese history that are probably used most often in the North American college classroom: Andrew Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Marius B. Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

At least two pronounced attempts have been made to go beyond modernization theory in the last twenty years—interestingly, both have come from outside of Japanese studies proper.

The first attempt aimed at overcoming the normative bias inherent in modernization theory, which, in its classical formulation, saw all societies converging in one model. Instead, the proposition was that one could posit the existence of “multiple modernities.”²² Most readily associated with the name of Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, the idea of multiple modernities follows on the notion of the axial age, which in turn theorizes that different macro-civilizations developed around 500 BCE as a result of a new tension between immanence and transcendence. Eisenstadt took this framework, first developed by Karl Jaspers, but emphasized the different patterns of reaction to this new tension in different settings, such as Confucianism, Christianity, or Buddhism. While modernity would develop in Euro-America partly as a result of the specific form that axial age civilization had taken in Europe, its further development was highly contingent on a number of factors. In other words, modernity as it actually developed in the various regions of the world was not necessarily identical to its original formulation in Euro-America; hence the idea of multiple modernities. Eisenstadt’s prime example of this was Japan, which he saw as a fully modern society with a modernity different from that of “the West,” or even a civilization of its own.²³

There was a brief moment around 1990 when the term “multiple modernities” seemed to catch on, although not necessarily in the loaded sense in which it had been devised by Eisenstadt, as witnessed by publications with titles such as “Japan: A Different Modernity,”²⁴ or a new sense of the inner multiplicity of “ideas or definitions of ‘modernity.’”²⁵ Yet Eisenstadt’s work was marked by a tendency to reify Japanese culture to an even greater degree than older works had done. In his view, the specific Japanese variant of modernity was due to a historically unique society consisting of groups shaped by Shintō ideas of belonging and allegiance to the Emperor. The latter idea was particularly anathema to most critical students of Japanese culture and society, and his work found little acceptance either in Japan or the West.²⁶

22 One of the few meta-treatments of this approach can be found in chapter 3 of Wolfgang Knöbl, *Die Kontingenz der Moderne: Wege in Europa, Asien und Amerika* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2007).

23 Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, *Japanese Civilization: A Comparative View* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

24 Irene Hardach-Pinke, ed., *Japan: Eine andere Moderne?* (Tübingen: Claudia Gehrke, 1990).

25 Sheldon Garon, “Rethinking Modernization and Modernity in Japanese History: A Focus on State-Society Relations,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 53, no. 2 (1994): 347.

26 Knöbl, *Kontingenz der Moderne*, 83–92, 104–105.

Another corrective to older views, although at the same time in many ways a new reincarnation of modernization theory, came from an entirely different direction, namely economic history, in the guise of the debate on the “Great Divergence.” Beginning in the 1990s, and clearly influenced by the rise of China as an industrial superpower, a re-evaluation has set in of Asia’s place in general, and China’s in particular, in the course of world history. This is partly a counter-reaction against the grand scheme of Immanuel Wallerstein’s World Systems Theory. Although Wallerstein’s theory had long been attractive to economic historians interested in larger contexts, the fact that he almost completely ignored Asia’s role in the development of the global economy since the sixteenth century has increasingly come to be regarded as a major lacuna, especially when China could no longer be ignored as an economic force in the present.

A side effect of the increased attention to the (economic) history of China has been a radical marginalization of Japan, despite some creative contributions to the larger debate by historians of Japan.²⁷ In their program of re-centering long-range world history, the classic authors of the so-called California School see China as the new point of reference, perhaps because of its eminent role as a purchaser of silver in the early modern era,²⁸ or because it alone is seen to have experienced advances in proto-industrial production, proto-capitalist commerce, and labor practices on a par with what happened in the most advanced areas of Western Europe;²⁹ or because only the Chinese empire is comparable to Europe in terms of geographical size.³⁰ Although all of these accounts relegate Japan to the footnotes, they have nonetheless found fairly wide acceptance within Japan,³¹ while scholars outside of Japan have

27 See especially the works of Saitō Osamu and Sugihara Kaoru.

28 Andre Gunder Frank, *ReORIENT: Global Economy in the Asian Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

29 Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000) and R. Bin Wong, *China Transformed: Historical Change and the Limits of European Experience* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997). For more on innovations in the commercialization of the early modern Japanese economy, however, see Saitō Osamu, “An Industrious Revolution in an East Asian Market Economy? Tokugawa Japan and the Implications for the Great Divergence,” *Australian Economic History Review* 50, no. 3 (2010): 240–261.

30 Jean-Laurent Rosenthal and R. Bin Wong, *Before and Beyond Divergence: The Politics of Economic Change in China and Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

31 Important works of the California School are not only read by specialized scholars, but have been translated into Japanese and thus made available to a broader readership. Among these are Frank, *ReORIENT*, translated as Andore Gundā Furanku アンドレ・グンダー・フランク, *Rioriento: Ajia jidai no gurōbaru ekonomī* リオリエント—アジア時代のグローバル・エコノミー (Tōkyō: Fujiwara Shoten, 2000) and Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence* translated as K. Pomerantsu ポメラントツ, *Daibunki*:

shown little interest in them. The marginalization of Japan through the Great Divergence Debate has yet to be noticed by Western scholars of Japan.

The Great Divergence approach has provoked surprisingly little criticism in historiography, perhaps because economic historians have been too interested in the details of argumentation. One of the few mild critiques of the California School has been voiced by Dipesh Chakrabarty, who has pointed out that economy is seemingly naturalized as an analytical category in the works of Pomeranz and others; the categories they employ (“land,” “labor”) seem transparent, but in reality they are not. “Land” meant something entirely different in eighteenth-century Australia, Britain, or China, and was connected to entirely different legal concepts of rule and ownership.³² In the final analysis, it is hard to deny that a teleology similar to that of the old modernization theory is still inherent in the works attempting to rehabilitate China’s role in the creation of the modern world economy: after all, China’s “success” is measured in terms of its progress on the path to industrialization, commercialization, and capitalism.

The transcultural approach, applied in its many variants in the essays in this collection, may be a tool to overcome the modernization bias still inherent in most scholarship on Japan, at least as it is practiced outside of Japan. This is because it offers a way to relate Japan to the rest of the world without presumptions about the role of “the West” for modern Japanese society, whether as the inevitable yardstick or the source of Japan’s modernity. This also opens up the possibility of an appropriate consideration of Asia when talking about Japan, a perspective that is also highly relevant for research on Japan conducted within Japan. There are numerous examples in the historical and contemporary society and culture of Japan that lend themselves to the application of this approach. Instead of choosing one of the more obvious examples, such as Japanese Buddhism, an entity that is difficult to imagine outside of its Asian (and in modern times global) context, let me introduce a slightly more unusual case in the concluding section of this essay.³³

Chūgoku, Yōroppa, soshite kindai sekai keizai no keisei 大分岐—中国、ヨーロッパ、そして近代世界経済の形成 (Nagoya: Nagoya Daigaku Shuppankai, 2015).

32 Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Can Political Economy be Postcolonial? A Note,” in *Postcolonial Economies*, ed. Jane Pollard et al. (London: Zed Books, 2011), 23–35.

33 I have developed some lines of inquiry of the next section further in my essay “Pan-Asianism’s Religious Undercurrents: The Reception of Islam and Translation of the Qur’ān in Twentieth-Century Japan,” in *The Journal of Asian Studies* 73, no. 3 (2014): 619–640.

Islam in Japan as an object of transcultural research

In the past, the presence of Islam in Japan received no attention whatsoever in Japanese studies.³⁴ That some political activists and some intellectuals turned to Islam in the first half of the twentieth century has been either an embarrassment to proponents of modernization theory, irrelevant to those who see Europe as the prime object of comparison for Japan, or at best an obscurity to those trying to understand “Japanese culture” from within. Even for those few who studied Islam in Japan in the first half of the twentieth century, its incompatibility with “Japanese culture” was a given, leading them to view conversion to and serious engagement with Islam as mere political expediency such as the need for the Japanese state to send secret service agents to the Middle East or to be able to publish propaganda in Muslim parts of Asia.³⁵

Yet in the global movement of pan-Asianism, of which Japan was a crucial center, Islam was an important rallying point, one which could not be ignored in Japan. The pan-Asianism of Japanese activists became much more appealing to other Asians once they were seen to take Islam seriously. In the 1930s, there was a veritable “Islam boom” in Japan, in which a host of private and state actors founded societies for the study of Islam. In 1938, no fewer than three journals vied for a readership interested in Islam. At that time, three mosques had already been built in Japan, and some universities began offering their first regular classes on Islam. In 1942, the book “Outline of Islam” (*Kaikyō gairon* 回教概論) became a best-seller. It had been written by Ōkawa Shūmei, the doyen of pan-Asianist and ultranationalist circles in Japan, who was so infamous by the end of the war that the victors put him on trial; he was the only civilian at the International Military Tribunal for the Far East in 1946.

Ōkawa Shūmei would also become the third Japanese writer to publish a complete translation of the Qur’ān in 1950 (a fourth was begun in 1941, but not finished due to the translator’s early death). The fact that no fewer than three translations were available by 1950, in a country which never hosted more than a handful of Muslims of Japanese origin, clearly shows that there was a genuine interest in Islam, a religion that played no role for Japan proper. However, while the story of Islam in Japan may be of minor importance to

34 Even within Japan, it has only been of marginal interest to some sociologists since migrants from countries with Muslim majorities began entering Japan in modest numbers in the 1980s. See Sakurai Keiko 桜井啓子, *Nihon no Musurimu Shakai* 日本のムスリム社会 [Japan’s Muslim society] (Tōkyō: Chikuma Shobō, 2003).

35 See the work of Selçuk Esenbel, for example “Japan’s Global Claim to Asia and the World of Islam: Transnational Nationalism and World Power, 1900–1945,” *American Historical Review* 109, no. 4 (2004): 1140–1170.

the domestic history of Japan in the twentieth century, in the global history of pan-Asianism it is not marginal at all. Pan-Asianism itself was a response to the global conjuncture of quests for alternatives to Western material civilization, a quest that made Europeans turn to Asia, and led Asians to revive elements in their historical traditions that had suddenly acquired a new attractiveness. Questioning Western materialism; seeking alternatives in Asia; regarding Europe as decadent and (especially since the outbreak of World War I) as a failed civilization; and denying Europe's legitimacy in ruling over other parts of the world, all these factors contributed to strengthening the anti-colonial movement in Asia and converged into a strand of anti-colonialism that offered an alternative to the (dominant) socialist one. It was internationally represented by figures such as Rabindranath Tagore, who wielded considerable political influence in the first decades of the twentieth century.³⁶

Yet neither accounts of pan-Asianism in Japan, nor broader narratives of political history—even those centering on some of the central actors of the story of Islam in Japan—have so far taken note of the role of Islam in Japan.³⁷ For anyone who accepts the essentialist assumption of “Japanese culture,” Islam is clearly not part of this entity and thus irrelevant for an understanding of Japan. Even though pan-Asianism has received disproportionate attention in research on modern Japanese history in recent years,³⁸ the focus in these studies has been exclusively on politics, discarding religion as irrelevant.

However, by applying a transcultural approach which is open to the multiplicity of forces that have shaped modern Japan and which also looks for Japanese interactions with other societal actors from Asia and the rest of the world, Islam in Japan may for the first time constitute a research object, given its relevance to the global conjuncture of a spiritualized pan-Asianism. Perhaps “Islam in Japan” is even a misnomer because the crucial aspect of this phenomenon was a transnational meeting of minds and common ideas about the potential role of Islam in Asia overall, and not so much in Japan. “Islam for the Japanese” was a way out of a narrow understanding of Japaneseness,

36 See Stephen N. Hay, *Asian Ideas of East and West: Tagore and His Critics in Japan, China, and India* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970).

37 Compare the scholarship on *Qur'ān* translator Ōkawa Shūmei up to Usuki Akira 臼杵陽, *Ōkawa Shūmei: Isurāmu to Tennō no hazama de* 大川周明—イスラームと天皇のはざままで [Ōkawa Shūmei: Between Islam and the emperor] (Tōkyō: Seidosha, 2010).

38 See Eri Hotta, *Pan-Asianism and Japan's War, 1931–1945* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Sven Saaler and Christopher W. A. Szpilman, eds., *Pan-Asianism: A Documentary History*, 2 vols (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011).

and at the same time it offered a spiritual and political alternative to the West. The development was politically relevant, even though “Islam in Japan” never really gained ground. In this way, transculturality, rather than presenting a full-blown theory, can serve as a lens that offers unconventional views on seemingly familiar objects, opening up new avenues of inquiry.

Conclusion

The introduction to this themed section defines the task of the transcultural approach for area studies disciplines such as Japanese studies as calling “for an appraisal of the respective area’s role within a wider regional context.”³⁹ While this certainly has merit, this author hopes that the transcultural approach can do more for Japanese studies. Thinking in transcultural terms helps overcome the trinary opposition of autonomy, comparison, and contact, not just by situating Japan within the East Asian context—as important as that task is—but by confronting the concept of “Japanese culture” with elements from outside that East Asian cultural sphere, as the example of Islam in Japan served to show.

Ideally, the transcultural approach advances a forceful critique of conventional presumptions of Japanese uniqueness (i.e. the autonomy model), goes beyond an outdated form of binary comparison that tends to reify a historically modern West with a putatively timeless Asia, and does not limit the contact dimension to the West (as a teacher) and Japan (as a student), but looks at complex multipolar constellations of contact between Japan, other Asian nations, and Euro-American actors; it thus has the potential to force subfields that are strong in comparison, such as political science, to take connections more seriously. Indeed, taking the transcultural approach requires the researcher to look at economic, political, discursive, and material flows in such a way as to necessarily put pressure on established disciplines that have traditionally relied on only one of the three conventional approaches described above, and make them combine these approaches or start thinking beyond them.

39 König and Rakow, “The Transcultural Approach Within a Disciplinary Framework,” 96.