

タイトル：2006 Middle East and Multi-Cultural Studies in Japan: The State of the Art

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“The Parliamentary Experience of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt”

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There are quite crucial links between Japan and the Islamic world. These links are very much related to the growing number of Japanese scholars who have been doing invaluable researches on the Muslim world and Japan's relations with the Middle East in recent years.

One aspect that has been receiving a fair amount of attention is the educational link which is built and based on exchanges of research experiences, short and long terms of exchange programs between students from Japan and the Middle East, and the growing number of conferences held annually in Japan and other Middle Eastern countries sponsored and funded by Japan. These great efforts of expanding knowledge of the third world countries help to bridge the gap of disparity between Japan's heavy dependence on the Middle East and the low level of knowledge and involvement in that region.

Among these activities was a workshop titled “Middle East and Multi-Cultural Studies in Japan” held at Bogazici University in Istanbul, Turkey. A variety of participants and lecturers, from Keio University, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies and the Institute of Energy Economics in Tokyo took part in conducting reports, giving presentations and discussions on current issues of Middle Eastern studies in Japan. The commentators came from universities in the Middle East like the American University in Beirut, Istanbul Bilgi University, Bilkent University and Bogazici University.

My presentation focused on the parliamentary experience of the outlawed mass movement in Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood. I tried to present an historical analysis of the Islamic trend in the political life of Egypt and how the Islamic trend's attempt to integrate in the political system has changed its relation with the political authority in Egypt. In order to highlight this relation I explained the gradual tendency of the movement through different stages in order for the movement to have more involvement in politics since it was founded in 1928 by Hasan al-Banna.

The paper focused farther on the new developments in the political thinking of the Muslim Brotherhood, which are embodied in the movement's decision to participate in

parliamentary politics as sometimes an organized bloc in alliance with other secular parties and sometimes as individuals.

I showed how the Brotherhood, despite being outlawed by the Egyptian regime, has been able to gain a legitimate and mass recognition through their social activities and its active engagement with the local community as councilors, preachers, social workers and lecturers at universities or schools such as giving lectures and participating in public debates and discussions. These efforts resulted in the movement's success to secure seats in parliament during four elections in 1984 in alliance with the al-Wafd party; in 1987, in alliance with Labor and Liberal parties; and as independents in 1995, 2000 and the last 2005 elections with 88 seats out of 454 in the legislature.

The movement's influence is not only limited to Egypt but it has long since its foundation spread to other Arab and Islamic countries. The paper also tried to show how important it is to include the Islamic trend in the democratization and reform process, which should be gradual in order to bridge the gap between the regime and its people.

Professor Hilal Khashan, from the American University in Beirut, commented and made some invaluable remarks on my paper. His remarks were on the structure of the paper in general and on other specific issues related to the history of the Muslim Brotherhood and in particular to its violent acts against the regimes of both presidents, Jamal Abdul Nasser and Anwar al-Sadat. Professor Khashan also tried to argue that the movement's peaceful participation strategy in politics might be short lived and once the Brotherhood gets hold of the country it would go away with democracy and the rights of other minorities like the Christian Copts as well as applying the Islamic Shari'a law on Muslims and non Muslims without distinction. Professor Khashan also alluded to present political situation in Egypt and how the ruling regime is preparing the son of President Mubarak to take over his father in the future and how this strategy is affecting the plans of the opposition's attitudes, especially the Brotherhood. The remarks and comments made on the presentation have been very helpful for my research and future study on the Islamic trend in Egypt.

These activities conducted by Japanese scholars overseas will definitely demonstrate much more understanding by the Japanese students of crucial issues in the Middle East and hence make a high level of presence of Middle Eastern Studies in Japan.