

Area Studies Must Be the Foundation of New Scholarly Knowledge

ITAGAKI YUZO

Tokyo Keizai University

1. WORLD VISION IN JAPAN, AND MIDDLE EASTERN AND ISLAMIC STUDIES

The traditional image of the world that Japanese people had in the pre-19th century era comprised *Kara* (China), *Tenjiku* (India), *Namban* (homelands of Spaniards and Portuguese), and *Komo* (homelands of the Dutch and the British). Studies on *Kara* and *Tenjiku* were started during the 7th century, when Japanese Buddhist priests went to China to study Buddhism. During the 16th century, Christianity was introduced to Japan at the same time as guns. Japanese at the time identified Westerners as either *Namban* or *Komo*, but they did not know that the literature from Andalusia originally belonged to the Arabs. Since the latter half of the 19th century, Japanese people have strived to assimilate Western science and world vision. As a result, the Japanese became familiar with such dichotomies as East and West, and the Eastern and Western Blocs, the latter involved in a Cold War. Until the first oil crisis, the majority of Japanese paid little attention to the Middle East, since, in the Japanese interpretation of the dichotomized world, the Middle East was mistakenly thought to be negligible. The first oil crisis, the Iranian Revolution, and the Gulf War had significant effects in changing Japanese attitudes towards the Middle East, as well as on Japan's own role in the world. Today, the "threat" of "Islamic resurgence" and worldwide ethnic conflict are stimulating the Japanese public's interest in the Middle East and Islamic world. However, despite such changes in their attitudes the Japanese still preserve a conventional, dichotomized world image in their minds: a stereotyped world vision, instead of creating a new world vision.

Japanese researchers of the Middle East are aware that their tasks include developing a new world vision. I would now like to explain this issue from the following four angles.

First, in Japan, researchers of the Middle East have been particularly enthusiastic in establishing liaison and cooperation with academic circles of various other areas in the world. This is because Middle East studies also involve studies of various other parts of the world. Most problems in the Middle East have their origin in other parts of the world; at the same time, many global issues have their origin in the Middle East. For instance, the Jerusalem Question cannot be addressed within the domain of the Middle East alone. Middle East history cannot be

explained without reference to the Crusades and the Mongolian invasion. The Palestinian Question cannot be discussed without reference to Jewish communities in Eastern Europe, Russia, and America. Also, Muslim influence originating in the Middle East spreads to China, Southeast Asia, India, Central Asia, Africa, and Europe. The riot in which the holy mosque (Haram) in Mecca was occupied had a direct impact not just in Saudi Arabia but all over the world. Accordingly, researchers of various areas other than the Middle East may find it necessary to study the Middle East. At the same time, researchers of the Middle East always feel the necessity to study the whole world. This is why they are eager to establish global studies and to create a new world vision.

Second, the current world confusion indicates that the modern world order is collapsing. I call this confusion the “global expansion of the third world.” The current confusion features an increase in dissensions; the crisis of nation-state systems; the explosion of ethnic conflicts; and the intermingling phase of penetration, successional transfiguration and fuzzy aggregate. In recent Middle East studies in Japan, discussion focuses on Islamic impact on the post-modern world as well as on the decadence of ‘modernity’ in Islam. Many Japanese researchers have given particular attention to the complex identity of Middle Eastern societies, which built and developed cities prior to any other society in the world. As I have already stated, many researchers are aware of their own complex identity as scholars. They know that Middle East studies mean not just studying the Middle East but also other parts of the world. They also know that to study the subject thoroughly, interdisciplinary approaches are important.

Third, middle East studies in Japan during the past decade highlights the fusion of Islamic and urban studies. As well, multifaceted, comparative studies have been promoted concerning urbanism in Islam. In a joint study project on urbanism in Islam, for instance, the fusion of cultural, social, and natural sciences and technology were necessary (and realized) in such studies on urban planning; ecological settings for intramural and external networks; plague; garbage and sewage treatment; water resources; earthquake damage; the “Informal Sector”; religious movements; cosmology; *Waqf* (trust) system; the application of communication science; and informational processing of historical documents. By demonstrating the cooperation among various academic fields, the researchers participated in this study project implied their academic message that Islamic civilization, featuring urbanism, must co-exist with the natural environment rather than being involved in ruinous competition.

Fourth, the Japan Association for Middle East Studies has been endeavoring to promote academic cooperation with academic societies in the Middle East. In recent years, the Japan Association also reinforced cooperation with the China Association for Middle East Studies (CHAMES); Korea Association for Middle East Studies (KAMES); and researchers in Southeast and Central Asian countries. I hope that the relation will be reinforced between the Asian network on Middle East studies and related academic societies in the U.S. and Europe, so that Middle East

studies will become innovative and not bias toward Orientalism.

2. KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM RECONSTRUCTION AND A NEW UNIVERSALISM

I would now like to progress to the main theme of my presentation. What I have said previously can be applied to area studies of other areas. In order to promote the integration of the different fields of area studies, I would like to propose the following four goals.

2.1. Integration and fusion of disciplines

It is evident that the existing disciplines have only a limited capacity. Although a particular discipline can explain a certain phenomena and resolve a certain problem, there are many more problems that cannot be addressed within the domain of a single discipline. In an increasingly multifaceted world, individual disciplines cannot handle the varying phenomena collectively amassed under a “general theory.” The system of modern scholarship is a product of area studies conducted by Europeans on Europe and other regions that Europeans have explored since the 16th century. Although modern scholarship has successfully concealed its Eurocentric character, disguised by an objective, general theory of universal validity, it can no longer do so.

I would now like to review how these disciplines were established. The knowledge system created in the time of classical Greece was inherited by the Arabs, who developed it, through exchange and fusion of knowledge with other areas of the world, into scholarship that incorporated systematic academic classification. Throughout the Islamic world, the Arabs established university-level education and research facilities called “madrasa.” In Europe, it was not until the 12th or 13th century that universities were founded by those who had learned the academic system of the Islamic world. According to a monologue in *Faust*, “Philosophy, Law, Medical Science, and even Theology” were transplanted from the Islamic world and assimilated by Europeans.

Modern scholarship, however, has its origins in the intellectual activities developed in Europe since the 16th century. Modern scholarship was originated in Natural History, a sort of area studies, in which various phenomena in a certain region were studied comprehensively, and details were described, concerning such natural environment as fauna, flora, and silva; ecology; topology; geology; ethnic groups; languages; cultures; and social systems. For instance, when Napoleon Bonaparte advanced into Egypt, about 200 French scholars accompanied him to conduct area studies, the result of which is shown in *Description d’Egypte*, a great work of Egyptian area studies. Accompanying the expansion of their activities throughout the world, Europeans obtained and accumulated knowledge and expertise that they then described and analyzed, and then generalized through the development of theories. Through such a process, various disciplines were created, including cultural, social, and natural sciences, and technologies. However, it was

soon forgotten that each discipline stemmed from Natural History; the close relative to area studies. Instead, each discipline, armed with a “general theory,” began insisting on its universal validity. With a multifaceted world, however, it is increasingly difficult to insist on the “objective and universal validity” of each discipline, since present disciplines are affected by extreme departmentalization, reduction, and unconscious orientalism.

Regarding laws and their practical application, how can we study the reorganization trends of Islamic law and Hindu law? How can we study the Chinese legal mind, and the changing consciousness of Chinese law? Regarding economics, what can we do if we cannot apply the theoretical values and models, which were developed to explain and analyze Western societies, to other areas of the world? To address such problems, we are now obliged to start over again through holistic studies of each area. This also applies to the study of politics, which covers conflict studies; religious studies, which surveys religious movements; various disciplines in the natural sciences, which address the issues of global environment; medical science, which tries to reveal the mechanisms of cancers and AIDS; and engineering, which seeks for the most effective adaptation of technology. In this current age, where knowledge integration is essential, researchers of area studies must not remain as mere specialists within their own discipline, but must extend their strategies. To fulfill this task, researchers must take trans-disciplinary action that cuts across conventional disciplines in order to deconstruct them, rather than take a mere interdisciplinary approach, extending only to the border of each discipline. It is worth noting that Japanese *chiiki kenkyu* (area studies) has traditionally regarded natural scientific approaches (studies on ecology, environment, and natural resources) as an essential element in integrating and fusing various disciplines.

2.2. Global studies through the dynamic reshaping of areas

According to Arthur Koestler, areas consist of “holarchic structures of spaces,” whose cross sections, no matter where they are cut, have both “entire” and “partial” characters. Also, an area is so flexible that it can shrink to an individual’s standpoint, and yet can also expand to the entire universe. Areas can be likened to hyperspace that absorbs detached territories and even domains of different dimensions. It is possible that the diagnosis of synchronicity can establish a new area. As a part of cultural research, area studies must withstand such drastic and dynamic reshaping. For area studies researchers, an area should not be a fixed territory, like an octopus pot. Researchers must include the search for ways to develop global studies, which is the integration of area studies, through the comparison of various areas.

2.3. Networking of area studies

In order to realize the aforementioned, cooperation must be promoted according to the following four levels: a) multidisciplinary collaboration; b) collaboration of inter-area studies, which will permit significant comparison of different

areas; c) global study networks that have domestic and international organizations at various levels; and d) theories of the multifaceted transactions and exchanges between “observers and the observed.”

2.4. Area studies as a foundation of scholarship

Area studies can be a foundation of scholarship, if the process always starts with the systematic integration and classification of concrete knowledge of the world, and proceeds to the establishment of general theories, comprehensive systems, and accurate structures. Some insist that in area studies, general theories generated in disciplines must be applied to local, and specific phenomena. This notion cannot be recognized due to its reversal of the relationship between basic approach and application. Other examples of this reversal include such notions that area studies are immature since they have no systematic methodology; that researchers of area studies must receive disciplinary training; and that area studies must prove its usefulness by applying the knowledge of an area in policy science. The integration of area studies is expected not just as an inevitable and effective breakthrough in actual recognition of the world, but also as a foundation of scholarship for the coming new century. Just as philosophy once played a role of midwife to the total system of knowledge and scholarship, area studies must at this time be a springboard for the emerging knowledge system of the coming century. I believe that “Doctor of Area Studies” will have a new significance, just as a Ph.D. has.

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