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SPREAD OF ISLAM IN JAPAN

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In the second half of the nineteenth century, the development of transportation, political relations, and international trade also influenced religious relations and contributed to their development. On the eve of the twentieth century, although Christianity dominated in Europe and Islam in the Middle East, that is why when Japan was mentioned, the first things that came to mind were Shinto, which had existed there since ancient times, and Buddhism, which later entered Japan. In addition, there were also relatively few Christians compared to the population during the Meiji period.

Japan's acquaintance with Muslims has a history of approximately more than 150 years. During the 265 year Tokugawa period, when the country was ruled by the samurai, relations, trade, and travel with other countries were almost restricted, effectively closing the country's borders to the world. Due to its geographical position, this situation could be maintained for a long time. Although this ensured peace in the country during that period, it also significantly delayed its acquaintance with many countries, cultures, and peoples of the world. After the arrival in 1853 of American ships at the port of Yokohama, which demanded that the opening of the country to trade, Japan opened territory to the outside world in commercial, political, and cultural terms. It is believed that the first Muslims who came to Japan were also traders. Up to the present time,

Muslim migrations to Japan from different countries have occurred at different times and for various reasons [4, p. 737].

The reign of Emperor Meiji in Japan (1868–1912) is considered as a period of planned modernization. The wars conducted during this period ensured that Japan was recognized as a world power. During this period of political and military developments, the Japanese also began to become more closely acquainted with Islam. For the first time, in 1877, the Japanese learned about Islam and the life of Muhammad through translations from Western sources. Although interest in Islam in Japan initially emerged within the framework of Western religious thought, its main development manifested itself in Ottoman–Japanese relations in the 1890's [1, p. 672].

Islam came to Japan not only through trade but also through diplomatic relations established with Muslim countries. According to historical documents, the first significant contact occurred at the end of the nineteenth century after diplomatic relations were established between Japan and the Ottoman Caliphate. At that time, both Japan and the Ottoman Empire, as Asian countries, faced increasing pressure from the West. As a result, mutual official visits between the two countries began. Despite the tragic incident experienced by the Turkish delegation returning from Japan in 1890, positive outcomes were achieved regarding the future of Islam in East Asia [3, p. 304].

The Ottoman Empire played a special role in the spread of Islam in Japan. As early as 1890, a delegation of 700 military specialists headed by Osman Pasha was sent to Japan by Sultan Abdul Hamid II on the Ertugrul frigate. After holding several meetings in Japan, including being received by the Emperor of Japan, the ship carrying the returning delegation encountered a storm near Osaka and sank. In this accident, 550 people, including the Sultan's brother and Osman Pasha, lost their lives. The remains of the sunken ship were transported to Istanbul by two Japanese ships. The deceased were buried in Japan, and a memorial monument was erected in their honor. Even today, their memory is commemorated every five years in Turkey and Japan. In 1891, the Japanese journalist Oshotaro Noda collected aid to help the families of the Turks who died in the 1890 disaster and, together with the survivors of the shipwreck, traveled to Istanbul and presented this assistance to the Ottoman authorities. On the shores of the Bosphorus Strait, the Japanese journalist was also received by Sultan Abdul Hamid II. While in Istanbul, Oshotaro Noda met an English Muslim named Abdullah Ghulam and, shortly after this meeting, converted to Islam and took the name Abdulhalim. He is considered the first Japanese to recognize Islam. In 1893, another Japanese, Yamada, brought the funds collected to help the families of the Turks who died in the 1890 disaster to Istanbul and during this visit converted to Islam,

taking the name Abdulkhalil. He is considered the second Japanese to convert to Islam. At the request of the Sultan, he remained in the Ottoman state and taught the Japanese language at a military school. The third Japanese to convert to Islam was the Christian merchant named Ahmad Agira. He converted to Islam in Bombay and, after returning to Japan, engaged in the propagation of Islam and closely participated in translating of the Qur'an into Japanese [2, p. 260].

After the first Sino-Japanese War in 1895, the Japanese encountered Muslim populations in the territories they occupied and began to learn about the ideas and movements influencing Muslims. At that time, they observed that Pan-Islamism and Pan-Turkism had come to the forefront, especially among the Turks. Pan-Islamism, based on the idea of Muslim unity against the attacks of Western Christian states, spread across a wide geographical area and was accepted as a powerful instrument used by the Ottoman state against imperialist powers. Japan, which sought to expand its influence in Asia, also attempted to use the political situation and the religious and political inclinations of the people in the region for its expansionism and initiated certain activities through Islam. Toward the twentieth century, Japanese Pan-Asianists and Muslim intellectuals shared common ideals in opposing Western imperialism and in promoting modernization while preserving their own cultures. This common ideology led some Islamists to turn toward Japan for certain purposes. One of the prominent figures in these connections with the Japanese in this political and ideological environment was the Kazan Tatar Muslim Abdirashid Ibrahim. He was a personality who possessed various qualities as a teacher, judge, writer-publicist, traveler, and politician. At a time when Japan was increasingly demonstrating its power among Asian states, Ibrahim Efendi decided to undertake a long journey due to persecution by the Russian government. In September 1908, he set out from Kazan and traveled through Siberia, Mongolia, Manchuria, Japan, Korea, China, India, the Hejaz, and the Middle East, completing his journey in Istanbul in 1910. He played a special role in the recognition and acceptance of Islam in Japan. During his stay in Japan, Abdirashid Ibrahim met many influential personalities, promoted Islam, and advocated that Eastern peoples should act together against Western colonialism [1, p. 672–673].

If Islam had spread among the Japanese, an important achievement would have been realized from a religious perspective. From a political perspective, a Japan that had embraced Islam could have become a strong support for oppressed Muslims, a serious threat to Western imperialists, and a firm ally for the Ottoman state.

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