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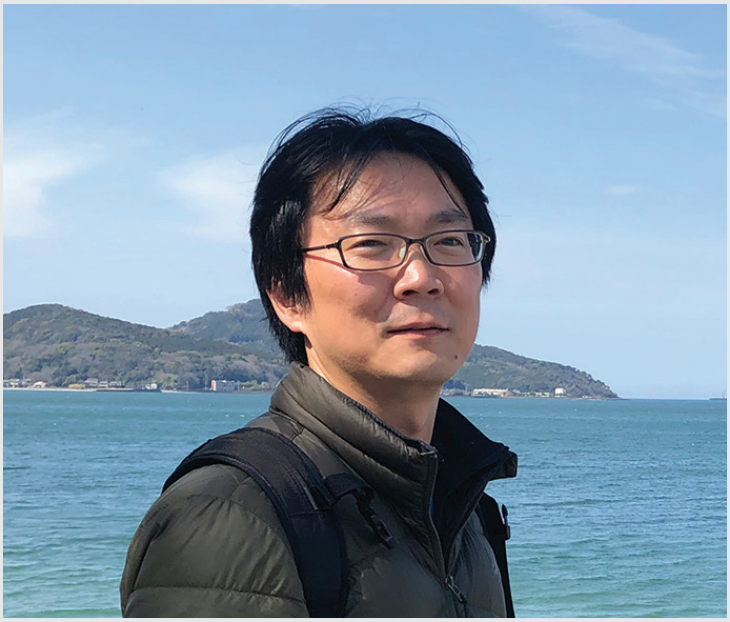
INTERVIEW

Japanese Turkish History Expert

Assoc. Prof. Ogasawara Hiroyuki

"The Turkish national struggle inspires the Japanese as well"



Assoc. Prof. Ogasawara Hiroyuki was born in Hokkaido in 1974. He graduated from Aoyama Gakuin University, the Faculty of Letters, in the Department of History. In 2008, he completed his doctorate at the University of Tokyo, the Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences. His works have been granted awards, such as the Japan Singular Research Society Award and the Kashiyama Junzo Award. He currently serves at the Institute of Humanities at Kyushu University and is a member of the Board of the Islamic Association of Japan.

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"After completing my doctoral thesis, I began research on historical writing starting from the Ottoman Empire's modern period up to the beginning period of the Republic of Türkiye. After researching Ahmet Mithat and Namik Kemal's thoughts on history and the education of history in the Modern Ottoman Empire after the Tanzimat period, I became interested in the history textbooks written in the first period of the Republic of Türkiye. While a new state named the Republic of Türkiye was being established, an attempt was made to create a new historical narrative to give the nation a new identity. The biography of Atatürk I have written is planned to be published in October 2023, on the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the Republic of Türkiye. Türkiye was in such geographical conditions that it had greater exposure to the intervention of the US and major European states. Ataturk and his comrades overcame all these difficulties and established the Republic of Türkiye. The national struggle process gives the Japanese great courage and hope, too."

Japanese Modern Turkish History Expert Assoc. Prof. Ogasawara Hiroyuki answered the questions of İnan Öner.[1]

You have been working on a biography of Atatürk. What issues have your interests focused on? What difficulties are there? When will it be published?

Ogasawara Hiroyuki: In 2019, as an editor, I published a book about the national formation of the Republic of Türkiye. (Ed. Ogasawara Hiroyuki "The Formation and Transformation of the Nation of the Republic of Türkiye", Kyushu University Press, 2019). In this book, we discussed history, archeology, music, and similar cultural policies in the first years of the Republic of Türkiye, and we have included articles on broad themes from Atatürk's funeral to international relations. Ten young and successful researchers contributed their articles.

Again, in 2020, with the editorship of Prof. Arai Masami and with the translation of Prof. Kakizaki Masaki, M.Şükrü Hanioğlu's book called "Ataturk: An Intellectual Biography", which discusses the intellectual development of Atatürk in detail, was published in Japanese. (Japanese title: "The Turkish Revolution in Terms of the Civilization History: Atatürk's Intellectual Development"). In this regard, the Japanese reader can now read about the intellectual development of Atatürk and the formation of the nation in Atatürk's period in Japanese.

Therefore, while writing Atatürk's biography, I focused on these themes. I discussed Atatürk's development in his youth, his activities as a soldier, and his leadership in the national struggle. I also included the activities of Atatürk's comrades, particularly İsmet İnönü, Ali Fuat Cebesoy, and Kazım Karabekir, and their relationship with Atatürk. I touched on his life with his wife and with the daughters he adopted. I think the memories of Halide Edip especially are important to evaluate Atatürk objectively. As known, she published "The Turkish Ordeal" in English right after Atatürk held power. She had clearly outlined her thoughts about Atatürk. I also benefited from this work.

The biography of Atatürk I have written is planned to be published in October 2023, on the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the Republic of Türkiye.

The Universality of Atatürk's Thoughts and Actions

Regarding Atatürk's thoughts and the universality of his actions, we would be pleased if you share your ideas on the lessons we can take from Atatürk and the establishment process of the Republic of Türkiye.

Ogasawara Hiroyuki: Japan aimed to establish a modern state after the Meiji Reforms. Japan is a land of islands, and I think it faces less difficulty as it is geographically distant from the US and the major European states. On the other hand, Türkiye was in such geographical conditions that it was more exposed to the intervention of the US and the major European states. Atatürk and his comrades overcame all these difficulties and founded the Republic of Türkiye. The national struggle process gives the Japanese great courage and hope, too.

Together with your colleagues, you translated Yusuf Akçura's "Three Styles of Politics" into Japanese. What are your thoughts?

Ogasawara Hiroyuki: Together with my Japanese colleagues, we translated not only Yusuf Akçura's "Three Styles of Politics" but also the preface of Namik Kemal's "Ottoman History" and Ziya Gökalp's "Turkification, Islamization, Becoming Contemporary" into Japanese. Japan is a major translation country. Many works of Western thinkers and historians have been translated into Japanese. However, we do not often see translations of the works written in the Ottoman Empire. Because of that, I thought that the major works should be translated into Japanese and presented to Japanese readers and young researchers. We translated Yusuf Akçura, Namık Kemal, and Ziya Gökalp because we are interested in their thoughts about Turkism and history.

Prof. Akiba Jun (Tokyo University) and Prof. Ito Hiroaki (Teikyo University), whose areas of specialization were close to the publication of those translations, also participated in the projects as translators. Also, besides me, we see that Dursun Bey's "Târîh-i Ebü'l-Feth / The History of the Father of Conquest" has been translated into Japanese by Hamada Masami (Ryukoku University) in recent years. The historical documents of The Ottoman Empire are now being translated in Japan, too. Through these activities, we hope that the research on the history of the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Türkiye will increase in Japan.

Ogasawara Hiroyuki The Republic of Türkiye: Creation of the Nation and its Change.

When and why did you start studying Ottoman History? We would appreciate it if you could inform us about the historicity of your academic interests.

Ogasawara Hiroyuki: I've loved history since I was a kid. I was particularly interested in foreign countries' history rather than Japan's. This may also be related to my hometown Hokkaido (the island located in the northernmost part of Japan and became a part of Japan in the 19th century). I did not feel close to the history of Japan as there was no archaeological site or architectural work in Hokkaido related to the central history of Japan. (But of course, I also love Japanese History.)

On the contrary, I found the histories of other countries I read in the books interesting. In my high school years, while I was thinking of entering the history department, I read the book "The Ottoman Empire - 'Soft Authority of the Islamic World'" (Kodansha Publishing, 1992), written by Prof. Suzuki Tadashi (Tokyo University).

This book by Prof. Suzuki dealt with the history from the foundation of the Ottoman Empire to the reign of Suleiman the First. He put forward the thesis that the Ottoman Empire had a superior political and military system compared to Europe at that period. Again, he argued that after the 17th century, there was never a period of weakening but a period of structural changes responding to the new age.

The history of the Ottoman Empire, pointed out by Prof. Suzuki, greatly impacted me as a high school student. The history of the Ottoman Empire written there was very attractive, and I started to want to study the history of the Ottoman Empire by being attracted to that charm.

The historical narrative of the Republic of Türkiye and the nation-state/national identity construction

In recent years, you have also been working on the history of the Turkish Republic. What motivated you? What are your impressions?

Ogasawara Hiroyuki: I have always been interested in historical consciousness and historiography. For this reason, in my master's thesis, I discussed the institution of chronology established in the 18th century and the history books written by them. In general, it is said that the chronicling began with Naima Mustafa Efendi. However, as a result of my research, I learned that the chronicling began with Raşit Mehmet Efendi, who is generally considered to be the second generation, and I also learned that there is a possibility that it may even have started in the middle of his duty. (As an English article, I can recommend my following article: Hiroyuki Ogasawara, "The Official Historiographers in the Ottoman Empire: The Formation Process and Their Ideas", Orient (The Society for Near Eastern Studies in Japan), 2007).

Also, in my doctoral thesis, I researched the family tree narrated to the Ottoman Dynasty in the history books of the 15th and 16th centuries. I revealed how people in the Ottoman Empire comprehended their origins, identities, and historical consciousness. In my research, I discussed what importance is attached to the Kayı tribe as the ancestors of the dynasty, how the Ottoman Dynasty family tree, which is connected to the characters in the Old Testament such as Noah and Yafes, underwent a transformation, and how the family tree relations with the Seljuk Dynasty and the Mongols were.

My doctoral thesis was later published as a book in Japanese, and I have published some parts of it as articles in English. (Hiroyuki Ogasawara, "Enter the Mongols: A Study of the Ottoman Historiography in the 15th and 16th Centuries," Osmanlı Araştırmaları, 51(2018); Hiroyuki Ogasawara, "The Quest for the Biblical Ancestors: The Legitimacy and Identity of the Ottoman Dynasty in the Fifteenth-Sixteenth Centuries," Turcica, 48 (2017).) I want to publish my doctoral thesis as a whole in English and Turkish, but I haven't been able to fulfill this wish yet.

After finishing my doctoral thesis, I started researching the historiography from the modern period of the Ottoman Empire up to the beginning of the Turkish Republic. After researching Ahmet Mithat and Namık Kemal's thoughts on history and history education in the modern Ottoman Empire after the Tanzimat period, I became interested in the history textbooks written in the first period of the Turkish Republic. As you know, while a new state was being established under the name of the Republic of Türkiye, an attempt was made to create a new historical narrative to give the nation a new

identity. Such attempts have been conducted in Japan and some other countries.

Therefore, I thought, 'Thinking about history education in Türkiye sets an important example when thinking about history education in Japan, too.' I published an article in the book called "The Comparative History of History Education" (Ed. Kondo Takahiro, Nagoya University Press) in Japanese in 2020. It is about the efforts of the Turks to learn their history through writing, starting from the last period of the Ottoman Empire up to the Republic of Türkiye.

You mentioned that you are interested in "history writing". What problems have you faced in "history writing" on Turkish history in Japan?

Ogasawara Hiroyuki: Among the history books and history textbooks read in Japan, the history of Japan takes place in the center. In addition, it can be said that Japan followed the history of the West, which Japan took as a model for modernization, and the history of China, under the influence of which for many years. The history of Türkiye and the Ottoman Empire was hardly read. In the last 30 years, significant improvements have been achieved in this situation through the valuable efforts of our Profs Suzuki Tadashi and Nagata Yuzo. Especially this year (2023), Prof. Nagata Yuzo's two-volume book titled "Turkish History" was published by Tosui Shobo Publications.

However, despite these efforts, the history of the West and the history of China has a dominant share in the history of Japan. Although very important, we cannot say that the history of the Ottoman Empire is read enough. For this reason, we still encounter a lot of misconceptions, such as that the Ottoman Empire was a backward state compared to the West. For this, I wrote a concise Ottoman History book for the general reader to help Japanese readers become more familiar with the history of the Ottoman Empire. ("The Ottoman Empire – A 600-Year History of Rise and Dissolution", Chuo Koron Publications, 2018). This book attracted attention and has sold 50,000 copies over six editions. Again, for the general reader, I published "The Lives of Heroes of the Ottoman Empire – Sultans, Artists, and Women Who Kept 600 Years of History Standing" (Gentosha). It is a book of biographies in which I dealt with the heroes of the Ottoman Empire, such as Hürrem Sultan, Mimar Sinan, Mehmet the Second, and Osman Hamdi Bey. The second book I published is "Harem" (Shinchosha, 2022), in which I dealt with the transfer of the harem and sultanate based on the latest research. However, these publications are books written to explain the history of the Ottoman Empire clearly to Japanese readers, and they are based on existing research in English and Turkish. They do not contain my original research results.

To conclude, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to your periodical's editorial team and İnan Öner, who conducted and translated the interview.

Note

[1] (July 1, 2023, at Kyushu University, Fukuoka, Japan)

Inan Öner was born in Berlin in 1974. He graduated from Ankara University, the Faculty of Language and History-Geography, the Department of Japanese Language and Literature. He completed his master's degree at Tokyo University, the Institute of Arts and Sciences, in the Department of Language and Information Sciences in 2001. Öner interviewed Ogasawara Hiroyuki in Japanese and translated it into Turkish.