

Islamic Revivalism among Muslim Minorities in Asia

Introduction

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This issue of *JISMOR*, featuring “Islamic Revivalism among Muslim Minorities in Asia” includes the following two papers: (1) Masako Nakaya, “Islamic Revival under Socialist Regime of China: A Case Study of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region” and (2) Naomi Nishi, “Aspects of Islamic Revivalism in Thailand.” These two papers are based on lectures of the same title in the CISMOR Research Fellow Workshop; Memorial Workshop for Professor Dr. Samir Abdel Hamid I. Nouh, “Islamic Revivalism among Muslim Minorities in Asia” held on Saturday, January 11, 2020 at the Conference Room, Shikokan 1st floor, Karasuma Campus, Doshisha University. There is a great deal of interest in the current situation of Muslim minorities in East Asia and Southeast Asia, and the Workshop meeting of that day was attended by too many people to enter the room, and the question-and-answer session was lively.

Then I made comments on the presentation of the two speakers Dr. Masako Nakaya and Dr. Naomi Nishi, but after reading the two papers again, I will here introduce them with some supplementary corrections.

Regarding the phenomenon of Islamic Revivalism among Muslim minorities in Asia, Nakaya’s paper examines it in the socialist Chinese Communist Party’s religious policy, while Nishi’s paper places it in the history of Thailand.

The former reminds us of the relationship between the ideology of Marxist-Leninist Chinese Communist and religion, while the latter encourages us to consider the oppressed history of the Muslim region of four provinces on the southern border with Malaysia in the Buddhist country of Thailand, that is, the issues of Muslim minorities in Thailand, where most people believe in Buddhism, which is different from their religious faith.

Then, in reading the two papers, it would be necessary to understand the external phenomenon of Islamic Revivalism which the two papers presuppose.

In particular, a brutal murder of civilians, and abduction, kidnap and execution of foreigners (including Japanese) in the territory of “Islamic State” established by the effective

control of the area across Iraq and Syria under the 2014 Declaration of Khalīfa (the leadership title of Sunnī Islamic Community) made ambiguous and even obsolete the former meaning of the term Islamic Revivalism. Instead, the terms “Islamic Revivalism” which began to be used in the 1980s and “Islamism,” referring to the political Islamist movement aimed at seizing and establishing power, continued to be used at almost the same time and came to overlap with the image of Islamic extremists who committed indiscriminate killings during the Iranian Revolution (1979), the Soviet-Afghan War (Afghanistan Conflict 1979-89), expanding ethnic conflicts triggered by the collapse of the Soviet Union (1991) and the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York (2001). If you notice it, you can understand that the two papers are not in the context of the 2014 Declaration of the Islamic State. However, the terrorist incidents by Islamic extremist groups in Asia and Europe, who were stimulated and responded by the movement (or should it be called “behavior”?) of the Islamic State skillfully using the Internet were reported at the same time through media, making it difficult to immediately grasp the meaning of Islamic Revivalism.

Thus, I would like to briefly and very generally explain “Islamic Revivalism” and the “phenomenon of Islamic Revivalism”, and then point out the significance of the two papers.

Islamic Revivalism can be defined as follows: it aims at a prosperous life based on Islamic beliefs against the background that, after the integration of Arab nationalism into Islām, which was included in the cause of recapturing Jerusalem in the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, Persian Gulf (or Arabian Gulf) oil-producing states such as Saudi Arabia invited Muslim youths from Asia and Africa to study in their states, made them learn Islām in the language of the Holy Qur’ān, returned them as local religious leaders in the Islām community, eventually reminding them of the value of Islām.

And the “phenomenon of Islamic Revivalism” is defined as follows: the atmosphere of an era when migrant workers of Arab, Asian and African countries to Persian Gulf oil-producing states returned their home countries with a certain amount of income and believed that being Muslims and enriching their life were compatible.

Therefore, Islamic Revivalism or the phenomenon of Islamic Revivalism was neither a political movement nor a terrorist activity by Islamic groups since 2014. It certainly has an aspect that cannot be completely denied that it is a phenomenon that was stimulated by the “*jihād*” call through promotion of the Islamic State’s Internet media after 2014, but it can be understood not as a movement of Islamic Revivalism, but as psychological conflicts of Muslim minorities.

While Nakaya’s paper includes in Islamic Revivalism the movement of the Islamic

State after 2014 and defection and migration of Uyghur activists and their families to Turkey, such a way of thinking is sensitive. I have no objection to it as reflecting one of phenomenal consequences, but it also overlaps with the influence of Islamic extremists and the Islamic State's media efforts, and it is because, as described in her paper, Islamic Revivalism began with the solution to social problems based on Islamic values. Consequently, the description linking Islamic Revivalism with the choice of solving social problems based on Islamic values is extremely accurate and seems to fit the historical background that Islamic Revivalism has not been violent.

Islamic Revivalism or the phenomenon of Islamic Revivalism and movements of Islamic groups or extremists can be listed in chronological order (though sometimes overlap) as below.

1. Integration of Arab nationalism into Islamism;
From the defeat of the Third Arab-Israeli War (1967) to the integration of Arab nationalism and the cause of Islam (recapturing Jerusalem), resulting in the Fourth Arab-Israeli War (1973) and the ceasefire (the Arab understood they substantially won the war).
2. The beginning of armed struggles based on Islamism that includes Arab nationalism;
During this period, disappointment and anger at the conclusion of the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty (based on the 1979 Camp David Agreement) created armed struggles, and moderate Sunnī, including the Muslim Brotherhood stimulated by the Iranian Revolution, sought to expand their power through parliamentary elections. This line was abandoned and hope became extinct after the Algerian Civil War (1991-2002), which began as a result of the Islamic victory in the Algerian general election being nullified in a French-backed coup.
3. Iraq-Iran War (1990-1988) after the Iran Islamic Revolution (1979), Arab militia's participation in the Soviet-Afghan War (around 1982-), Islamic propagation in Arab Gulf states such as Saudi Arabia (since the late 1970s-; and the support for mosque construction was accelerated after the collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991), and inviting and providing foreign students with educational support.
4. The terrorist attacks on New York (2001), the collapse of Afghanistan's Taliban administration (2001) and its recovery (2003-), and subsequent collapse of the Iraqi administration (2003) and the resurgence of Al Qaeda remnants, and the rise of Islamist extremist groups (the 1990s-around 2003).

5. The Arab Spring and Islamism, or collaboration between Islamist extremist groups and the remnant group of Saddam Hussein administration in Iraq (2010-), and frequent Islamist terrorism in Asia (2010-).
6. The movement to recapture territory of Iraq (later the Islamic State) by an alliance of Islamist extremist groups and the former Iraqi government triggered by US military withdrawal from Iraq, and the movement to overthrow Arab long-standing dictatorships. Spread of Islamic groups in Tunisia, Libya and Central Asia to Arab states and the West (2010-), and penetration of jihadism through Internet media to Asian Muslims.

Of these, the third point –Islamic propagation and educational support in Arab Gulf states such as Saudi Arabia -- is directly related to the two papers. After the Forth Arab-Israeli War (1973), crude oil export revenues (oil dollars) of Saudi Arabia and other Arab Gulf states increased dramatically from the late 1970s to the 1980s, which has become possible to support Asian Muslim minorities to study in Arab states and enhance their education system (including teachers, educational facilities, scholarships). In the case of China, after Deng Xiaoping's Reform and Opening policy in 1978, Chinese Muslims were promoted to study in Arab states as a spillover effect of strengthening diplomacy with those states to secure industrial energy.

As a result of directly studying Islamic studies, mainly Qur'ān, international students to Arab states have acquired the ability to handle the doctrine and returned to their home countries, and they were able to make their presence against traditional religious authorities. They also acquired the ability to discuss with Islamic scholars in the Arab Islamic world on an equal footing, enabling to issue fatwā on the basis of Qur'ān and the Prophet's Sunnah to address social problems of Muslim minorities and to maintain unwavering positions on their authorities. Instead of following their way of life as a minority, they were able to look at reality from Islamic doctrine. Moreover, in the case of Chinese Muslims, the collapse of the Soviet Union allowed them to interact with the Islamic countries within the former Soviet Union and obtain financial support for Islamic propagation activities in the Arabian Gulf states. China was tolerant of Christianity as well as Islām, during the Shanghai World Expo (2010) and the Chinese government also supported the construction of mosques (providing construction site free of charge and supporting construction costs). For China, the tolerant Islamic policy was also a diplomatic support measure to secure crude oil imports from Arab oil-producing states, which are indispensable for its economic and industrial development.

In this context, Islamism was not that of extremists, but an ideal and harmonious

phenomenon of Islamic Revivalism, which has enriched people's life, including business and employment, by valuing Islamic beliefs and has gained respect and prestige from local Muslims through learning Islamic studies and Arabic, leading to the formation of religious authority of returned students.

Today, the minority issue comes within the range of immigration to the West, but I would like to point out that it is less serious in East Asia and Southeast Asia where the two papers are covering than in the West.

Nakaya's paper "Islamic Revival under Socialist Regime of China: A Case Study of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region" is significant in that it clarifies the religious policy of the Marxist-Leninist Chinese Communist Party and Islamic issues, and it reminds us of the relationship between religion and the ideology of Marxist-Leninist communism, after an era in which interreligious dialogue had been constantly advocated for quite a long time.

Nakaya's paper first summarizes the current situation of the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region (hereinafter, Xinjiang or XUAR) as follows.

After the Urumqi incident of 2009, the Islamic Revival (hereinafter, Islamic Revivalism) has been accelerating in the XUAR. On the other hand, since Xi Jinping became General Secretary of the Communist Party of China in 2012, it has tightened control over religious activities in Xinjiang. Basically Xinjiang, bordering on eight countries, including Kazakhstan and Pakistan, is a special area where the three factors of Turkic minorities, Islām and socialism intersect. Since the Urumqi incident, issues have occurred such as social upheaval due to rapid economic growth, and conflicts, wealth gap and moral corruption due to mass migration of Han Chinese. For example, since the 1990s, the number of pilgrims to Makkah has increased in Xinjiang, mosques have been rebuilt and repaired, and Islamic Revivalism has been seen. After the Reform and Opening policy, the Baren Township riot occurred in 1990, which is said to be the first large-scale armed uprising, advocating Islamic beliefs. Four years later, the Religious Affairs Management Regulations was enacted in Xinjiang. Then, with the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001, the Chinese Communist Party reaffirmed the geopolitical risk in Xinjiang and pointed out the five characters of religion: (i) the international character that Islām is a worldwide religion; (ii) the ethnic character that Turkic peoples are concentrated in Xinjiang; (iii) the mass character that Muslims have formed their own *Ummah* or communities of believers; (iv) the long-term character that it takes time to urge Muslims to be de-religious; and (v) the complex character of religious issues. In addition, local Muslims were left out in the cold from the benefits of natural resources in

Xinjiang. Amid economic gap and lack of respect for culture and religion, the Urumqi incident broke out in 2009. Since the incident, the Islamic beliefs of local Muslims have become stronger, and movement to make the world better through Islamic values have emerged.

As a legal control, the XUAR Religious Affairs Regulations and China's Religious Affairs Regulations have been enacted, and the Chinese Constitution formally guarantees freedom of religion in Article 36. As a legal basis for control over religious activities, Article 36 of the XUAR Religious Affairs Regulations revised in 2014 stipulates control over minors' religious activities in Xinjiang and prohibits minors from joining group prayers (Friday prayers). And no unauthorized organization or individual is allowed to receive *zakāh* (alms-giving) from abroad (in Article 36 of the XUAR Religious Affairs Regulations). Political propaganda is mixed in with general sermons in Friday prayers. That is to say, Qur'ān and ḥadīth (a record of the words and deeds of the Prophet) are cited to explain the Communist Party's advocacy of respect for science, policy for ethnic minorities, patriotism and loyalty to the socialist regime. The sermons in Friday prayers, compiled by the China Islamic Affairs Steering Committee as an authorized subordinate organization of the China Islamic Association, are used uniformly in mosques across the country. Islamic beliefs mean loyalty and contribution to the "socialist state" in the context of China, such as economic development, hometown building, mutual unity and "Love Your Religion, Love Your Country."

Also, China's Religious Affairs Regulations of 2004 established a new chapter on institutions for religious education (Chapter 3), apart from a chapter on religious bodies (Chapter 2). Under the provisions of institutions for religious education in China's Regulations of 2017, "institutions for religious education can only be established by officially authorized religious bodies [in this case, China Muslim Association], but any other organization or individual shall not establish an institution for religious education" (Article 11). "Institutions for religious education shall implement specific systems for checking the qualifications of teachers, evaluating academic titles and making appointment, and awarding degrees to students, and the specific measures in this respect shall be formulated by the religious affairs department of the State Council" (Article 16). "To hire foreign professionals, an institution for religious education shall obtain approval of the religious affairs department of the State Council" (Article 17). In addition, "where a religious body [...] intends to train religious personnel for three months or more, it shall apply for approval to the religious affairs department of a local People's Government at or above the level of a city divided into districts" (Article 18). "Non-religious bodies, non-institutions for religious education, non-religious venues and non-designated places for temporary activities shall not organize or hold religious

activities” (Articles 41 and 44). And “where anyone, without authorization, makes arrangements for citizens to [...] conduct religious training, the relevant religious affairs department shall, together with other relevant departments, order it or him to stop the activity and may impose on it or him a fine of not less than 20,000 yuan but not more than 200,000 yuan concurrently; the illegal gains, if any, shall be confiscated; and if crime is constituted, criminal liability shall be investigated for in accordance with law” (Article 70).

Religious practice is constrained by law, but its target is minors, reflecting the Chinese Communist Party’s perception of Islām (the long-term character that it takes time to urge Muslims to be de-religious).

Nakaya’s paper also points out a situation in which religious activities of Muslim minorities have been forced to go underground, which was triggered by the emergence of Muslims trying to find solutions through Islamic values, leading to expansion of Islamic “movement to make the world better.”

Nakaya’s paper argued based on recent change in the Chinese Communist Party’s strict policy toward religion in general, including Islām. From 2010 to 2015, when the Chinese Communist Party was taking more tolerant policy toward religion, I visited Beijing University, the State Bureau of Religious Affairs in the suburbs of Beijing, mosques in Qingdao (one), Beijing (three), Shanghai (nine), Xi’an (nine), Beijing Institute of Islamic Theology, Xi’an Islamic Association and Shaanxi Normal University for research purpose, and I remember I felt that the atmosphere there reflected the contents of China’s Religious Affairs Regulations. A stone monument of “Love Your Religion, Love Your Country” was placed in the front entrance lobby of the Beijing Institute of Islamic Theology, but when I interviewed with the next and subsequent generations of people whose religious activities were suppressed and religious practice was banned by the Cultural Revolution, young Imams and the *ahon* (the Islamic leadership title of Chinese Muslims) did not warn me as a foreigner, probably because it was a period when economic development priority policy and religious tolerance policy were being implemented. And they frankly answered my questions without hiding their joy of resuming religious activities in public. Nakaya’s paper conveys the subsequent Chinese Communist Party’s stricter position toward religion.

Nishi’s paper “Aspects of Islamic Revivalism in Thailand” examines the transformation of relationship between nation, ethnicity and religion in the historical and social context which presupposes the history of the Malaysian border area conquered by Thailand. Muslims living in the conquered territories were defined as minorities while people in the three

southern provinces except Satun speak Malay and have a religious bond with Malaysian Muslims as Muslim Brotherhood.

The new Constitution enacted by the Thai Constitutional Revolution (1932) guarantees people's freedom of religion and stipulates that the Buddhist king is a defender of various religions including Islām, but in administrative practice, the government denies Islamic clothing culture. For example, it bans wearing a waistcloth called *sarong* (Satun) and suspends administrative services for Muslims wearing traditional Malay costumes (Patterney), and harasses Muslim women wearing *hijāb* and pilgrims to Makkah wearing the typical garb. The jurisdiction of the family and inheritance law, deeply linked to religion, was transferred from Islamic courts to prefectural courts in 1943, and the Thai Civil and Commercial Code is applied uniformly throughout the country. In 1945, the Royal Decree on the Protection of Islam, B.E. 2488 was enacted, aiming to build a hierarchical system with the Chularatchamontri at the top and mosques in villages at the end (Article 3). Under the Chularatchamontri, the Central Islamic Committee of Thailand was established as an advisory body to the Ministries of Interior and Education (Article 5).

A series of legal policies were implemented such as the Act on Application of Islamic Law in the Provinces of Pattani, Narathiwat, Yala and Satun (1946), the Islamic Mosque Act (1947) stipulating the mosque registration system and the appointment approval system for Imams, and the downgrade of Chularatchamontri position from a member of the King's advisory body to an adviser to the Religious Affairs Department at the Ministry of Education (1948). Such a traditional trend has been changed by Islamic Revivalism since the 1980s, and the influence of Salafiism can be seen there. At the core of this are those who studied in the Arab-Islamic world and returned their home countries with a degree, like Ismail Lutfi Chapakiya (1951-), an influential Salafist leader in the Deep South. Nishi explains as above.

There are several factors why they have become influential. The first is their ability to read and discuss the Islamic literature written in Arabic. If they can discuss the Islamic religion in Arabic, they can maintain an equal position with traditional scholars and intellectuals who continue to have religious influence in the Arab-Islamic world. It means they will be able to find solutions they deserve and to implement them actually, not only to the problems in their daily life, but also to Islamic political and economic challenges. This can be said to be a creation of local authority, but Nishi shows that it is not combative. The second is their direct diplomacy with Arab oil-producing states with abundant crude oil revenue and institutional investor funds, that is, their direct connectivity with governments and businessmen in Middle East countries without going through the Thai government. This will allow them to collaborate

with local businessmen and act as supportive intermediary for migrant workers. To be Islamic helps business in this world. The third is *ḥalāl* business (issuance of *ḥalāl* certificates). The fourth is the promotion of educational projects funded by Saudi Arabia and other states and the dispatch of international students to those states.

In other words, being Islamic and being wealthy in this world were actually compatible.

Islamic extremists' influence in the Middle East since 2010 has probably made Muslims radical. This is common view with Nakaya's paper, and their influence on general Muslims is not based on the cause of *jihād* they explain, but Qur'ān verses and the Prophet's words and deeds (*ḥadīth*) that show the way Muslims should live, and also the heaven that Muslims seek to find in the afterlife at the level of personal belief.

While the angels are removing the souls of those who have wronged themselves, they will say, "What was the matter with you?" They will say, "We were oppressed in the land." They will say, "Was Allah's earth not vast enough for you to emigrate in it?" These—their refuge is Hell. What a wretched retreat! Except for the weak among men, and women, and children who have no means to act, and no means to find a way out. [Qur'ān 4:97-98]

"I am innocent (no legal liability) of conduct of Muslims living among the *muṣrik* (i.e., deniers of Islām in Makkah who worship with their equivalents as Allāh)." [Ḥadīth]

Both verses are teachings that Muslims should not live their life among *kāfir* or non-Muslims.

The quotes from Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* resonate with each Muslim in southern provinces of Thailand and Uyghur who was forced into a minority status, and those, at the same time, are easily tied to minorities' situations by arbitrary interpretation. A similar phenomenon is found among Muslim immigrants to the West. Dr. Wahbah al-Zuhaili (1932-2015) — as a leading Islamic law scholar in the modern Islamic world, he was Dean of Shariah at Damascus University and taught at universities in Arab Islamic countries. His Qur'ān interpretation book entitled *Tafsir al-Munir* and other 140 books as well as his translations have been widely read among Asian Muslim scholars and have many supporters. He received the Best Islamic Medal from the Malaysian Government in 2008. He also visited Japan twice and gave a lecture at Doshisha University. — said, "Muslims in the Arab-Islamic world are living in an almost completely Muslim society, so even if they are under pagan rulers, there is no problem as long as the freedom to practice Islamic beliefs is guaranteed." And Muhammad Sayyid Ṭanṭāwī (1928-2010) — he was an Egyptian national law judge and president of Azhar University. — said, "It is at the discretion of the French government to decide whether to implement a policy banning wearing burqa [in public places]." These remarks would show that they still have

room to breathe. However, if Muslims obtained a degree in Islamic studies in the Arab-Islamic world and then return to their home countries where Muslims are minority in a society, the verses of Qur'ān and ḥadīth mentioned above become religious challenges that need to be overcome immediately.

The urgency of everyday life, which is in a different dimension from interreligious dialogue, creates a psychological state that responds to Islamic extremists.

It is right to say that Nakaya's and Nishi's papers are significant in that they academically demonstrated a difference between Islamic Revivalism and political Islām (Islamism) by giving detailed examples in East Asia (China) and Southeast Asia (Thailand).