

Muslims in Japan and China during the Second Sino-Japanese War

Atsuko SHIMBO

Introduction

In Japan, due to its geographical location, there is a lack of understanding and a feeling of distance among its people towards Islam or the various ethnicities which practice Islam. Systematic research of Islam only began in the 1930s due to concerns about the state of Islam at that time⁽¹⁾. This direct opportunity came from the military strategy of creating the so-called “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere” during that time.

In 1931, after the Manchurian Incident, the Japanese military fostered the establishment of the Manchukuo government, which divided the North China region and further continued its encroachment of China. Not only that, but the Japanese military also fostered the “Mongol Military Government” in Inner Mongolia, in a vain attempt to control the northwest area of Xinjiang. Northwest China is connected to Central Asia, which was populated by Muslims. The Uighurs living in Xinjiang, and the Hui people living in Gansu and Ningxia (with Chinese as their mother tongue, and developed from the core of Persian and Turkish Muslims) had a certain amount of power in the region.

There had continually been conflicts between Muslims and Han Chinese due to their differences in religious beliefs and living habits. The Japanese military took advantage to this sentiment to fulfill its goal of tying up the control of China by the Han Chinese. Therefore, research on minority Muslims in China and also the whole Islam religion started to prosper in this period. The war became the objective force which pushed for research on Islam.

Especially after the Lugou Bridge Incident, the Japanese military obtained the occupation rights to Beiping (now Beijing), and in December 1937 the provisional government of the Republic of China puppet regime was established. Work on Islam was considered early in the process of establishing the regime, and in February 1938 the Islamic organization, All China Muslim League (thereafter referred to as “Muslim League”), was founded.

The objective of the Muslim League during that time was to support the puppet regime and oppose communism, and to train Muslim youth using the name of the “Young Muslim Association”. Without

doubt, under the guise of supporting Islam, the Muslim League became a tool for using religion to serve politics. Nevertheless, with its aim to support the war, objectively compared to ethnic minorities in other countries, independent thinking in culture and religion was developed considerably in a passive manner.

On the other hand, minorities in Japan, the Ainu people, were under the policy of complete assimilation, and their rich ethnic culture was completely forgotten. Based on this fact, the suppression of religions of ethnic minorities in countries other than China and heresy within Japan by the Japanese government at that time goes without saying. When thinking about the religions of ethnic minorities under the background of the Sino-Japanese war, the history of education exchange of the heavily burdened Muslim League was naturally considered as an extremely important research topic.

In this paper, I will elaborate on the relationships between various historical facts, such as the background of the founding of the Muslim League, its development process, and training aimed towards Muslim youth⁽²⁾. Moreover, I will investigate the topic of using ethnic minorities to serve politics for preparation of the occupation policy.

1. Islam in pre-war Japan

The year of 1938 (13th year of the Showa period) was an epochal year for Islam in Japan. In April, the Institute of Islamic Area was founded. In May, the mosque Tokyo Camii was built. In September, the Greater Japan Muslim League was established. Other than that, the “Islamic Area Monthly” by the Institute of Islamic Area, the “Islamic World” by the Greater Japan Muslim League, and the “Islamic Affairs” by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Research Department, all began publication. From this year, research on Islam started to develop rapidly in a short period of time.

In the Institute of Islamic Area, the research work was started by Professor Koji Okubo, an Islamic researcher at the Komazawa University. Researchers such as Kobayashi, Nohara and Takeuchi in the institute all conducted field trips to areas populated by Muslims in Northwest China. Not only that, but within Japan, because there were very few materials on the new topic of Islamic studies, a trend of translating and introducing European and American papers on Islam took off.

After the Tokyo Camii, in 1935, the second largest mosque in Japan, the Kobe Mosque, was also built. At that time, there were about 600 Turkish and Tatar Muslims who fled to Japan due to the Russian Revolution. The Akhoonds (Muslim clerics) among them all actively mingled with the financial sector such as Mitsubishi, and obtained their support and assistance⁽³⁾.

In the completion ceremony, dignitaries from many countries, from the prince to the religion minister of Yemen, from the representative of Saudi Arabia to the consul of Iran, from the Republic of China (Provisional Government) to Manchukuo, all attended⁽⁴⁾. The visits by dignitaries from Arabic countries

had strong repercussions among many sectors in the society, such as the foreign ministry, army, navy, and especially the mass media. The younger brother of the Emperor of Manchukuo, Puhuang (whose wife had converted to Islam), also attended the ceremony, and after Japanese General Iwane Matsui's remarks "Long Live Muslims", he flatteringly replied "Long Live the Emperor".

Due to the attention paid to Islam, by 1938, the status of Islam had reached a historical high. Owing to that, the status of Muslims in China was also considerably raised. Unfortunately this did not last long, and from 1939, those who held power in the Japan mainland government dealt a setback to this policy favorable towards Islam.

For example, the control over Ningxia in Northwest China was furiously repelled by the Hui warlord Ma Hongda, and the Japanese army was stopped at Inner Mongolia, and was forced to give up on its strategy of entering Northwest China⁽⁵⁾. Because of this reason, from the 1940s, Japan gave the cold shoulder to Muslims in China, causing reports related to China in "Islamic Area Monthly" and "Islamic World" to fall sharply. On the other hand, as Japan entered the Pacific War in 1941, and conducted invasions to countries in Southeast Asia, the interests of Japan veered from Islam towards Indonesia and India.

2. Muslims in China

The introduction of Islam into China can be traced back to the Tang Dynasty. Afterwards, accompanying the expansion of territory of the Yuan Dynasty into Central Asia, a large number of Muslims travelled from the Western Regions to the Central Plain Region. After the Qing Dynasty unified China, it enforced its rule on other ethnicities. Because there were many differences in the living habits of the Muslims with those of the Manchurians and Han Chinese (for example, their taboos towards pork), a gap between the ethnicities started to develop. This caused the resistance of the Hui people against the rule of the central government, and armed rebellions happened in Gansu, Ningxia and Yunnan, while the Qing government continued to pursue a heavy-handed policy.

Afterwards, in 1912, the Han Chinese regime Republic of China was established, and in 1927, the Nanjing government headed by Chiang Kai-shek was born. The Kuomintang's policy towards Islam was basically a policy of assimilation. It did not recognize Islam as a culture of ethnic minority beliefs, and strongly advocated Han chauvinism⁽⁶⁾. Under the rule of the Han Chinese, Muslims were often persecuted, arrested and imprisoned with groundless accusations, and even executed, where such examples could be found in many places.

However, from the Manchurian Incident in 1931, Chiang realized the importance and urgency of the problems of the ethnicities in Northwest China, and showed concerns towards the problems of Islam in China, and started working on those problems in Northwest China. In June 1938, aiming against

the Muslim League formed in the areas occupied by Japan, the Nanjing government established the Chinese Muslim Salvation Association, which formed a unified front among the Muslims in the whole country. They participated in the front lines of the resistance against Japan, and as the privileges of the Manchurians were abolished, the equality between ethnicities was starting to be realized. Objectively, the invasion of Japan pushed the Kuomintang government to reform its policy towards Islam.

On the other hand, the Chinese Communist Party also paid attention to the work on ethnic minorities in resistance bases and liberation areas. In the Shaanxi, Gansu and Ningxia regions away from the front lines, many areas populated by ethnic minorities existed, such as the Mongol and Hui people who practiced Islam, and the Communist Party recognized the autonomy of these areas⁽⁷⁾. The success of the ethnic policy of the Communist Party attracted the attention of the Muslims in Beiping at that time⁽⁸⁾. Afterwards, armed ethnic minorities played a large role in contributing towards the success of the war against Japan and the establishment of the People's Republic of China.

3. The Republic of China Provisional Government (Puppet Government) and the All China Muslim League

After the Lugou Bridge Incident, Japan occupied Beiping, and in 1937 fostered the puppet regime of the Republic of China Provisional Government. This new government actually comprised of the resurgence of feudal forces such as Manchurian bureaucracy and Beiyang Clique, and its political foundation was unstable. Therefore, the problem of ethnicity was particularly attached importance. At that time, the North China region was populated by Muslims, most particularly the Hui people. The Japanese military attempted to use the conflicts between the Hui and Han peoples to serve the aims of its rule. For example, the person in charge of work on Islam was described as “a tool and mouthpiece which uses the conflicts between Hui and Han peoples to protect the rule”⁽⁹⁾.

On 7 February 1938, the Muslim League held a large scale foundation ceremony. The Muslim League was considered by Major Shigekawa Hidekazu of the Beijing spying agency as the “biggest achievement of the work on Islam in North China”⁽¹⁰⁾.

The following provisions were present in the organization constitution of the Muslim League: 1. Coordinate the relations between Japan, China and Manchukuo; 2. Oppose communism; 3. Support the Republic of China Provisional Government; 4. Uphold inherent religions and spread the slogans above. Showing a clear anti-communism stance, and strongly spread slogans such as “accompanying the Russian Revolution, many mosques were destroyed and Akhoonds were killed”, “communism is the natural enemy of us the Hui people”. On the one hand, it urged the Kuomintang to not just show a mild anti-communism attitude, and on the other hand, it strengthened its propaganda that a friendly Japan supported Islam. Anti-communism could only be achieved with the help of Muslims and Japan⁽¹¹⁾.

The Japanese, through the “internal guidance” of the Japanese advisors, completed the mission of fostering the Provisional Government as dictated by the occupation policy of the military spying agency⁽¹²⁾. The Muslim League was also controlled from the inside by a few Japanese advisors. Not until post-war that Islam was revitalized by Ryoichi Mita.

4. Activities of the All China Muslim League

The work started by the Muslim League was foremost to revitalize Islam. Specifically: to set up a training place for Akhoonds, to edit textbook for children, to conduct religious guidance for elementary schools, to operate Islamic libraries, to spread anti-communism beliefs, etc. Next were educational and cultural activities, for example, to train able master Akhoonds, to open Japanese schools of elementary and high school levels, to build youth organizations, to send students abroad to Japan, to hold various seminars, to publish magazines, etc. Moreover, it also held a few economic activities, and also made progress on surveys about research on Islamic history and the living conditions of Muslims⁽¹³⁾.

But the infiltration power of the Muslim League in North China was rather weak. As an organization, its power of independent activity was also restricted by multiple factors. It relied on the puppet regime of the Provisional Government which had a weak foundation and could not effectively organize the Muslims, not to mention receive the support of the people. Some Akhoonds recalled: Yang Mingyuan (later People’s Republic of China National People’s Congress Beijing representative, and Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference municipal representative), a disciple of the North China Chapter Chairman Wang Duan-lan, turned down the invitation to succeed his teacher as the Chairman using the excuses of sickness and illiteracy⁽¹⁴⁾.

Speaking about the Muslims in China at that time, they were generally quite poor. For example, in Beijing, there were about 50000 Muslims, most of them Hui people. Very few of them could reach a medium living standard. Instead, 20% of those were below the poverty line without enough food⁽¹⁵⁾. It goes without explaining why there were many frictions between them and the Han Chinese.

Based on the above reasons, the Muslim League also tried to solve some actual living problems. The Muslim League thought that to earn the support of the Muslims and to affirm the power of anti-Han Chinese, it was very essential to solve personal problems of Muslims. For example, they worked personally to help unemployed Muslims to negotiate with farmers in Manchukuo, and petitioned the government to exempt rent for mosques. They also helped the boarding students at the National Normal Institute to negotiate with the authorities on applying to build a cafeteria for the Hui people⁽¹⁶⁾.

On the one hand, the Muslim league worked hard to improve the lives of Muslims; On the other hand, under the rule of Japan, its heavy-handed occupation policy brought new disasters to the Muslims. In fact, the lives of Muslims did not improve, but reached new depths of dire straits. For example, many

Muslims made their living in slaughtering cows and selling beef, and they mostly operated by themselves. But in February 1937, after the Lugou Bridge Incident, the government prohibited slaughtering cows and selling beef without permission in the name of public health, in order to prevent the fall in the price of beef, and only permitted economically powerful beef corporate organizations to slaughter a certain number of cows, and this completely deprived the individual operators their right of surviving⁽¹⁷⁾. As the livelihoods of the Muslims were under threat, their social status was also relatively low. This contrasted with the authorities who spoke loudly of slogans about respecting ethnic minorities and improving their lives. Over-suppression finally caused the dissatisfaction and rebellion of the Muslims against the rulers.

5. Training activities of the Young Muslim Association in China

The education activities of the Muslim League were embodied by the organization of the Young Muslim Association in China, which was used to guide Muslim youths. The Young Muslim Association was established in 1938, and its aim was to nurture Islam youth cadres who trained general Muslim youths, in order to nurture the core to serve the military occupation.

To join the Young Muslim Association, one had to pass related examinations. Muslim youths in China had to graduate from high school or own an equivalent qualification. Their age must be above 20 and below 30 in order to take the examinations. The examinations included geography, history and tests on other papers. The training period was two months (later extended to four months), and all expenses during the learning period was paid by the Muslim League⁽¹⁸⁾. Half of the learning was military training, while the rest was so-called cultural lessons such as “anti-communism studies”, “internal regulations of the military” and Japanese⁽¹⁹⁾. Its fundamental goal was to nurture Muslims to invade China and oppose communism, and to establish a military-like organization to serve the military.

Until February 1940, the association set up five editions, where about 200 youths received training (not including the 6th edition in June and 7th edition in September). At the end of training, the youths were recommended for employment. For example, to work as Japanese Gendarmerie, Manchukuo Railways North Branch foreign affairs police spies, and staff at regional offices of the Muslim Association in China or the Muslim League. They served as minions of the Japanese invaders, but about half of the members were spared this because their training results were not good⁽²⁰⁾.

The recruitment by the Youth Association was not limited to Beijing, and was also done in places such as Henan, but faced difficulties. For example, for the 1st edition it was expected to recruit 20 people, and only nine people actually joined, while for the 2nd edition it was expected to recruit 50 people, but only 41 people joined⁽²¹⁾. Not only very few people wanted to join, but the youth members often rebelled against the Japanese teachers and disobeyed their orders.

6. Jissen girls' junior high school

In 1939, the China Islam Association established Jissen girls' junior high school⁽²²⁾. Originally, in Beijing, Hui intellectuals had established the New-moon girls' junior high school, targeted at young Hui girls. It was closed down because of operational difficulties. The Japanese, following the foundation of the New-moon girls' junior high school, founded the Jissen girls' junior high school.

It may be noted that the Jissen girls' junior high school curriculum featured a home economics education, including sewing and embroidery. The curriculum focused on the development of good wives and wise mothers.

However, in China, upper-class women were never involved in household chores, such as cleaning, cooking, and washing. These were left to employees. Consequently, such female students were not interested in a home economics education.

However, under the Japanese occupation, the home economics education of the Japanese-style model was introduced into and emphasized in girls' secondary education institutions. For example, in Xing'an girls' high school, a secondary education institution for young Mongol girls in Manchuria, sewing, knitting, and cooking were emphasized⁽²³⁾.

According to Sobudo, who was a student at the school, they had to cook for their Japanese teachers and clean their houses as "home economics training." If they performed poorly, the teachers were critical. Dissatisfied with the system, one day the students went on strike. Only upper-class students from Mongolia might have gone to the school at that time. Their pride did not allow them to do housework at their Japanese teachers' home as employees.

In Jissen girls' junior high school under Japanese military occupation, household education was introduced as a feature at the school in an attempt to attract young women. However, household education was not attractive for Hui girls, so student recruitment was very difficult.

Jissen girls' junior high school thought highly of physical education activities. For example, in order to train the body of the student, a volleyball team was organized. Because of Hui control and unification under the Japanese government, the occupied government emphasized physical education.

Conclusion

After the founding of the Republic of China, it adopted the assimilation policy towards Islam, did not respect its inherent culture, and ignored the backward cultural education and poor living conditions of Muslims. The officers in charge of the work on Islam for the puppet regime Provisional Government served the Japanese authorities, the Han Chinese, and especially the politicians, and thus showed disdain and disgust towards the Hui people. The Japanese used the slogan "to solve the many conflicts

within China, to bury the dynasty of the Chiang family, and to dream about solving the ethnic problems in China". Under this background, the Muslim League formed at that time tried to improve the living conditions of the Muslims, and through the core trained by the Youth Association, searched for a fix for the employment of Muslims, actively advocated for the independence of religions, and worked hard to solve the worries of the Han Chinese.

However, what the Muslim League actually did was to chant for respect of ethnic minorities, while at the same time made a great effort to create ethnic conflicts. The apparent truth could not be covered by beautiful rhetoric, and it was used by Japan towards Muslims for the purpose of invasion.

Notes

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- (4) 大日本回教協会調査部『回教要覧』, 大日本回教協会, 1943 年, 46 頁。
- (5) 張承志『回教から見た中国』, 中央公論, 1993 年, 109 頁。
- (6) 回教圏攷究所『回教圏史要』, 四海書房, 1940 年, 274-304 頁。
- (7) 野原四郎「中共の少数民族政策」中国研究所編『現代中国辞典』, 現代中国辞典刊行会, 1952 年, 249 頁。
- (8) 三田了一『時局と回教問題』, 大東亜回教研究所, 1944 年, 38 頁。
- (9) 『回教工作カラ見た華北施政ノ一断面』, 1941 年 7 月, 9 頁。
- (10) 前掲片岡一忠論文, 34 頁。
- (11) 「中国回教総聯合会規約」『回教事情』, 第 1 巻第 1 号, 外務省調査部, 1938 年 5 月, 96-99 頁。
- (12) 安井三吉「日本帝国主義とカイライ政権」『講座中国近現代史』, 第 6 巻, 東京大学出版会, 1978 年, 161-187 頁。
- (13) 三田了一『支那に於ける我が回教対策に就いて』, 中国回教総聯合会, 18 頁。
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- (16) 『月刊回教圏』, 第 2 巻第 1 号, 1939 年 1 月, 17 頁。
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- (18) 『月刊回教圏』, 第 1 巻第 3 号, 1938 年 9 月, 38 頁。
- (19) 『回教月刊』, 第 1 巻第 3 期, 中国回教総聯合会華北聯合総部, 1938 年 7 月, 70 頁。

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- (20) 『回教月刊』, 第1巻第4期, 1938年7月, 56頁。『回教月刊』中国回教総聯合会第二周年年報, 1940年3月, 4頁。
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