Islamic Moderate Trends and Printing Media:
A Reflection on Modern Islamic Reformers in the Arab World*

HIRANO Junichi**

I. Afghānī and His Use of Printing Media

From the perspective of the Arab world, I will focus on the Arabic printing media especially in Egypt from the latter half of the nineteenth century to the first half of the twentieth century and point out how Islamic reformers like Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, Muḥammad ʿAbduh and Rashīd Riḍā paid attention to modern printing media including newspapers, magazines and so on.

First of all, I will focus on Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī. When we see or hear his name, the first thing that comes to our minds is the famous political magazine *al-ʿUrwa al-Wuthqā* which he published in Paris from March to October in 1884 with his Egyptian disciple Muḥammad ʿAbduh.

Al-ʿUrwa al-Wuthqā consists mainly of two components. The first is an analysis of the reason for the decline of Islamic world and the search for a method of overcoming it. This is the theoretical part. The second is an analysis of the movements of imperial powers. This second component consists of comments on current events, such as British government policy in Egypt, Mahdī movements in Sudan, the political situation of India, Afghanistan, Central Asia, and the Sino-French war from 1884 to 85. *Al-ʿUrwa al-Wuthqā*, which was distributed mainly through the mail to cities in Arab countries, Istanbul in Turkey, and other Islamic countries such as Iran, India, South East Asia, caused a great stir in the political arena. The British government feared the influence of *al-ʿUrwa al-Wuthqā* would mobilize Muslims against British colonial rule around the world, so its sale was banned [Kurita 2002: 266].

According to the introduction of first issue, *al-ʿUrwa al-Wuthqā* took its outward appearance from a bulletin of societies in Egypt, India and other countries, which had the same name (*al-ʿUrwa al-Wuthqā*). Actually, *al-ʿUrwa al-Wuthqā* invited Islamic intellectuals and notables in each area to join its membership and pay a subscription fee. As to the gathering of information and its translation, many intellectuals such as Mīrzā Bākir, Yaʿqūb Sannūʿ and Qāsim Amīn from the Middle East cooperated in an intellectual circle that supported the publication of the magazine in Europe [Kurita 2002: 266; Keddie 1972: 215–18; Pakdaman 1969: 100–01, 357–65; Afshār 1963: 62].

The term *al-ʿUrwa al-Wuthqā* derived from Qurʾānic verse; 'Whoever disbelieves in Satan and believes in Allah he indeed has laid hold on the firmest bond (*al-ʿurwa al-wuthqā*), which shall not break off, and Allah is Hearing, Knowing' (Sūra al-Baqara: Āya 256) [Kosugi 2006: 746].

Additionally, we cannot ignore his other exploitations of the print media, especially in Egypt. During his stay in Egypt from 1871 to 1879, he encouraged his Arab disciples to publish newspapers or magazines and contribute articles to them. He wrote and contributed many articles himself, and so many newspapers and magazines published by his disciples appeared [ʿImāra 1984: 56; Shāhī 2000: 21]. For example, one of his Jewish friends, Yaʿqūb Sannūʿ published a magazine titled

---

Abū Naẓẓāra Zarqāʾ in March 1877; Syrian Christians Adīb Isḥāq and Salīm Naqqāsh published a weekly magazine titled *Miṣr* in July 1877, and a daily magazine titled *al-Tijāra* in June 1878; Syrian Christian Salīm Anhūrī published a newspaper titled *Mirʾāt al-Sharq* in February 1879; and Adīb Isḥāq published a newspaper titled *Miṣr al-Fatā* in Alexandria [Keddie 1972: 96–97; Kudsi-Zadeh 1970: 134–37]. Along with the tide of the modernization policy advocated by the ruler of Egypt at that time, Khedive Ismāʿīl, his Arab disciples established many associations for publishing the teachings of their master while he was in Egypt. Afghānī and his Arab disciples called for a political movement against colonization, and for political reform to establish a government strong enough to resist the invasion of the colonial powers, especially Britain.

Second, I would like to refer to two of the most influential Islamic reformers in the Arab world at that time, Muḥammad ʿAbduh, and Rashīd Riḍā, who collaborated to print the magazine, *al-Manār*.

At the end of 1987, in the same year as the death of Afghānī, Riḍā traveled to Cairo in order to work in partnership with ʿAbduh. Resolved from the outset to found a journal which he entitled *al-Manār*, he published the first issue under the influence of ʿAbduh at the end of March 1898. He was, over the course of the years, to include in it a number of articles by prominent Islamic reformers like Afghānī, ʿAbduh, and Kawākibī [Amīn 1955: 221].

As H. Laoust writes in his article "Le réformisme orthodoxe des Salafīya," its discreet expertise, its Islamic internationalism, and the reliability of its general documentation, directed *al-Manār* towards a liberal, cultured minority, and the serialized publication of ʿAbduh's *Qurʾanic Commentary* (*Tafsīr al-Manār*) gave it prestige. Its leading articles perfectly conveyed the progressive orthodox view, always well-argued and balanced in form, on the major contemporary Islamic questions. In addition, its judicial discussions, its critique of recently published books and its news on the Islamic world made it a link between correspondents from places as widespread as Indonesia, India, Syria, and North Africa [Amīn 1955: 222–23].

It is enough to see the first volumes of *al-Manār* to confirm that ʿAbduh received many letters from Indian Muslims. In those letters, they asked ʿAbduh about religiously right-guided deeds, the understanding of which they discussed with each other, and it is well known that ʿAbduh's famous religious work, *Risāla al-Tawḥīd*, was translated into the Urdu language in later years and taught as a religious text in Aligarh University, the modern university for Muslims established by the prominent Indian Muslim modernist Sar Sayyid Aḥmad Khān, and in other Islamic schools in India and Pakistan [Amīn 1955: 226–27].

The influence of *al-Manār* in Indonesia was reported by a prominent Dutch Orientalist Snouck Hurgronye. He pointed out that it was obvious that the reformative movement led by ʿAbduh had reached as far as East India and the publication of *al-Manār* in the area proved it [M.vol. 2: 872]. Riḍā himself also admitted that the Egyptian movements had influenced Malayan Muslims. They received great inspiration from the principles of ʿAbduh, and some Malayan religious scholars even started to teach Arabic and religious studies in their Islamic schools in ʿAbduh's style [Amīn 1955: 227]. Gibb reported on the widespread influence of *al-Manār* in this area as such; 'Persons who

accepted the principle of *al-Manār* in Egypt, upon returning to their own countries, formed small groups of *al-Manār* supporters' (*al-Manārāt*) [Amīn 1955: 227]. Another scholar said that after the dissemination of the Indonesian translation of ʿAbduh's *Tafsīr*, the Order of Muḥammad (*Ṭarīqa Muḥammadīya*) attempted to spread Islam as ʿAbduh had done [Amīn 1955: 228].[1]

Thus, we can judge that Afghānī, ʿAbduh, Riḍā and their friends, followers, and companions recognized the efficiency of the printing media for promoting anti-colonialism and spreading Islamic reformism all over the Islamic world at that time. In other words, positive attitudes towards moderate trends in Islamic thought were spread and encouraged in the late 19th and early 20th century using modern technology, particularly the print media.

II. A Comparison between al-Afghānī and Iqbāl

It is very interesting to imagine a dialog between Iqbāl's and Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī proposed by Dr. Amir's paper [Amir 2009: 31–32]. When we compare their thoughts we can find some common elements. There are three succinct elements which are categorized below.

The first is their opposition to racism. Iqbāl points out that the world should be free from discrimination against color and race. This represents his opposition to the discrimination and segregation of human beings based on their skin colors and their race [Amir 2009: 23]. In the same way, Afghānī stressed the importance of religious solidarity over nationalism and blood ties. He described the former bond as *taʿaṣṣub dīnī* and the latter as *taʿaṣṣub jinsī* many times [Afghānī 2002a: 131–39]. For example, he mentioned in an article ("al-Taʿaṣṣub") as follows; 'Arabs, Turks, Persians, Indians, Egyptians, and Maghribis had originally held onto their religious reins so tightly and kept so deep a kinship, that when one of their companions was troubled by misfortune or their country was being loosened and divided, they would all feel great sorrow' [al-Afghānī 2002a: 139].[2] This shows that Afghānī's religious solidarity went beyond nations and races.

The second is their applause and commendation for *ijtihād* and their deep faith in human reason and subjectivity. Iqbāl declared his admiration for *ijtihād* with this metaphor; 'the difference between stagnant water and an ever-moving ocean is clear'…and Iqbāl put his trust in human reasoning [Amir 2009: 32–33]. In the same way, Afghānī also proclaimed his applause for *ijtihād* to accommodate Islamic law to the necessity of the times. In this context, he used the relevant ocean metaphor like this; according to him, the opinion that the gate of *ijtihād* to Qurʾān and Ḥadīth was closed at certain

---

1) The spread of the ideas of ʿAbduh to Turkey and Iran thorough translations of *al-Manār* into Turkish and Persian, see [Amīn 1955: 219–226].
   Prof. Yamane also reports that *Al-Manār* was smuggled into the Malay Peninsula where it spawned similar journals, such as *Al-Munīr* and *Al-Imām*. In Turkey, a journal entitled *Ṣirāt-i Mustakīm* was published, with many translations of articles by well-known modernist authors like Muḥammad ʿAbduh and Muḥammad Farīd Wāḥidī [Yamane 2009: 4].

2) However, the reality he faced in his time was quite the reverse. He complains about it bitterly in another article as follows; When the Indian Revolt occurred [in 1857], Afghan and Baluchi Muslims failed to help Indian Muslims, and when the Afghan-British War broke out [in 1878–81], they also did not participate in the political struggle against British encroachment. The key point in opposing the British occupation of Egypt lies in solidarity among the Indians, Afghans, and Persians, and that is the very expression of Muslim brotherhood and a clue to the revival of the Islamic Umma in the future [al-Afghānī 2002a: 123].
   For an analysis of the anti-racism of Afghānī and his advocation of religious solidarity, i.e. pan-Islamism, see my article [Hirano 2008].

point in the historical process does not have any intellectual basis. First of all, the Qurʾān is revealed by Allāh for human beings to understand using their own reason, so that they have to continuously use their intelligence to find what the appropriate interpretation of the Qurʾān is at any given time. However sophisticated and graceful the ancestors were, their interpretations were like a drop of rain in the ocean, and they could not possibly find the complete meaning of the sacred book. This is why the later Muslims must perform *ijtihād* for themselves eternally [al-Makhzūmī 1931: 176–78]. Then he criticized the passive attitude of Muslims towards this world and their belief, calling them *jabr*, and recommended them to hold to the principle of *kasb* in interpretation as advocated by a prominent Islamic scholar, Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn Ismāʿīl al-Ashʿarī, pointing out the subjective nature of human activity in this world [al-Afghānī 2002a: 142].

The third is their view of the relationship between religion and science. Iqbāl takes this conflict between science and religion not as a rationale for disparity in the general nature of science and religion; instead he finds it more appropriate to interpret it as a conflict between Christianity and science, referring to Draper's book *History of the Conflict between Religion and Science* [Amir 2009: 25–28; Draper 1875]. In the same way, Afghānī pointed out that Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and all kinds of religious dogmas would clash with scientific truth. However, he stressed also that when understood truly, Islamic teaching would never contradict scientific truth [ʿAbd al-Ḥāfiẓ 2005: 59–61]. That is why he also proposed the necessity of *ijtihād* in this context. Maybe it is better to turn our eyes to Muḥammad ʿAbduh rather than Afghānī. Like Iqbāl, ʿAbduh also refers to Draper's book and endorses his idea of a conflict between Christianity, especially the Catholic doctrine, and science in a book titled *Al-Islām wa al-Naṣrānīya maʿa al-ʿIlm wa al-Madanīya* [Katsuhata 2008].

However, I find that there are two main differences between the two Islamic reformists, al-Afghānī and Iqbāl.

The first is their differing views on the history of civilization. On the one hand, Iqbāl stated that there was no period comparable to the Dark Ages of Europe in the civilization which was based upon the teachings of Islam. He claimed that there was no dark period in the history of Islamic civilization [Amir 2009: 29]. On the other hand, al-Afghānī insisted that there was a dark period in Islamic history and he specified the period as *al-qurūn al-wasīṭa* (medieval eras) [al-Afghānī 2002a: 158]. Afghānī mentioned the decline of Islamic civilization after the 3 or 4 century of the *hijra* and he specified the main reason for the decline of the *Umma* as being the emergence of heretical schools of thought like the *bāṭinīs* [al-Afghānī 2002b: 164–76]. In this context, it should be noted that he accepted the European concept of *Civilization* through his reading of the *General History of Civilization in Europe (1828)* written by a prominent illuminist scholar in France at that time, François Guizot, who viewed civilizations as living things which had their own lives and deaths [Guizot 1828]. At the same time al-Afghānī, referring to Ibn Khaldūn's *Muqaddima*, used his *ʿasabīya* principle to gauge the solidarity of the Islamic community, and to explain the rising and falling of Islamic civilization [al-Afghānī 2002a: 104–05, 133]. This argument reflects on his use of the term *taʿaṣṣub* as mentioned above.

The second point of difference was their attitude towards the relationship between the spirit

of Greek philosophy and the spirit of Islam. On the one hand, Iqbāl said that the spirit of Greek philosophy clashes with the spirit of Islam, and he also said that as long as Muslim thought remained under the influence of Greek thought, it remained away from the agile spirit of the Qurʾān [Amir 2009: 23–25]. On the other hand, Afghānī appraised the conclusions of Greek philosophers like Plato and Aristotle and gave an affirmative evaluation to their acceptance in the Islamic world as the heritage (*turāth*) of preceding civilizations [al-Afghānī 2002a: 115]. For example in *Resāle-ye Neichērīye*, *Radd ʿalā Dahrīyīn* printed in Arabic, he argued what true happiness for human beings was, depending on Muḥammad b. Miskawayh's concepts in *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq* and the notions of Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī's, *Maḍīna al-Fāḍila* [al-Afghānī 2002b].[3] Both Miskawayh and Fārābī are the prominent ethic philosophers who were strongly influenced by the ancient Greek philosophers and their intellectual results. So I think it is clear that Iqbāl and Afghānī had different attitudes towards Greek philosophy and the philosophers.

III. Islamic Reformers and Modern Printing Media: Towards Spreading the Idea of Islamic Revivalism in the Modern Era

When the Islamic reformists like Afghānī, ʿAbduh, and Riḍā began discussing Islamic revivalism in the latter half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, most of the Islamic world was experiencing increasing influence from the West, which was transforming their political, economical and religious circumstances. In addition, media networks and transport systems had improved so that Muslim intellectuals all over the world were able to establish their personal and intellectual networks.

As for Islamic revivalism from the latter half of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century, Muslim intellectuals all over the world visited the Middle East, especially Egypt's most prestigious Islamic university, Azhar University, where they met Islamic reformists like ʿAbduh and Riḍā and absorbed the idea of their Islamic revivalism. Moreover, it is worth noting that *al-Manār* was imported to other areas by travelers, pilgrims and intellectuals who studied abroad. The background to the transmission of this knowledge was the modernization of transportation and postal systems and the promotion of personal interaction. Based on these modern infrastructures, Muslim intellectuals across the world were influenced by the intellectuals and printing media in the Middle East and played an important role in transmitting and advancing Islamic revivalist thoughts and movements in their own countries.

As to the relationship between Arab intellectuals and South Asia intellectuals in the modern era, I would like to introduce a symbolic case, the interaction between Riḍā and Abūl Kalām Āzād. In 1912, in response to the call from Nadwa al-ʿUlamā, a famous Islamic research center in Lucknow, Riḍā met Indian Muslim intellectuals like Āzād and then visited Dār al-ʿUlūm. In the same year, Āzād published the political magazine *al-Hilāl*, in which he included pictures of Afghānī and Riḍā

---

3) Afghānī uses traditional Islamic ethical terms systematized by Miskawayh to respond to materialistic people at that time. I focused on analyzing this point in [Hirano 2007c: 390, f. 43], and attempted the translation of *Radd ʿalā al-Dahrīyīn* from the Arabic into Japanese [Hirano 2007a, 2007b] and made a brief sketch on the relationship between modern western thought and traditional Islamic thought within the writing of Afghānī [Hirano 2007c].

and remembered the delight of meeting with Riḍā. Āzād assigned the spread of Islamic reformism around the Islamic world from the 19th century to the influence of al-Afghānī and his successor Riḍā. After World War I the Khilāfat movement, an anti-colonial movement for preserving the Ottoman caliphate, spread in British India. In such a political and social climate, Āzād wrote an article entitled "al-Khilāfa", justifying the Khilāfat movement. Subsequently, this article was quoted in *al-Manār* in 1922 [Kosugi 2006: 749]. This is a typical episode illustrating the deep co-relationship between intellectuals and the printing media in the Middle East and South Asia.

It is well known that although these Islamic revival movements began in different parts of the world, the spread of information by the print media and improvements in transportation facilitated a wide network of Muslim intellectuals across the Islamic world. In other words, we can conclude that it was not until the coming of the modern era that Muslims around the Islamic world could embrace the same feelings as their fellow Muslims and the same attitude towards the Islamic revival simultaneously, and the *Umma Islāmīya* was envisioned by virtue of the emergence of the print media. In this context, we might recall the concept of "print-capitalism" as proposed by the prominent nationalism research scholar Benedict Anderson, and his focus on the role of the media in the promotion of a community feeling among people who have never met each other face-to-face [Anderson 1991], although there are differences between a religious community and a secular nation-state.[4] That's why the scrutiny of the importance of the modern printing media not only brings into light the human network of Muslim intellectuals around the world, but also leads to a visualization of the process of constructing and spreading the idea of Islamic revivalism. The diffusion of the idea of Islamic revivalism around the Islamic world entails working relationships between Muslim intellectuals in every place and their effective utilization of modern printing media, and the postal and transport systems in general.

At last, our attention should be turned to the topic of translation. Modern Muslim intellectuals in Middle East generally spoke and communicated with each other in Arabic and published their articles or books in the Arabic language. These publications were transported all over the world by non-Arab intellectuals, who translated them into their local languages such as Persian, Turkish, Urdu etc, thus influencing Islamic revivalism in each area. During this process, it is possible to imagine that there may have been some different interpretations of the same terms according to each language. Dr. Amir has vividly pointed out that it is impossible to translate some words and notions from one language to another perfectly.[5] Hence, it is desirable that comparative studies on similar terms in each language from a historical perspective of Islamic thought should be embarked on,

---

4) The concept of an "imagined community" advocated by Anderson is originally designed to signify the "nation-state" itself. In this respect, Prof. Yamane explains within South Asian context vividly. "It is important to note that the development of the media brought Muslims to a new concept of Islam in South Asia. Muslims all over South Asia experienced a kind of "pan-national fraternity." Furthermore, prior to the introduction of modern forms of transportation, Muslims in South Asia had lived separately in their own regions with little or no contact between them due to the limited opportunities for travel and exchanging information. However, with the introduction of modern technology such as railroads and the postal system as well as new, far-reaching media, Muslims became aware, for the first time, of other Muslims living elsewhere in South Asia. This awareness bought about a sense of shared identity and sympathy for each other" [Yamane 2009: 6–7].

5) Dr. Amir discussed about this at general time for question and answer in the international workshop.

in order to more accurately analyze the spread of Islamic revivalism through printing media in the modern Islamic world.

References:

Japanese

Hirano, J. (tr.) 2007a. "Radd ʿalā al-Dahrīyīn (1)" in *Kyoto Bulletin of Islamic Area Studies*, 1(1) pp. 198–225.

——— (tr.) 2007b. "Radd ʿalā al-Dahrīyīn (2)" in *Kyoto Bulletin of Islamic Area Studies*, 1(2) pp. 377–407.

——— 2007c. "An Islamic Reformer's Response to Modern Thought in the Latter Half of the 19th Century" in *Kyoto Bulletin of Islamic Area Studies*, 1(1) pp. 198–202.

Kosugi, Y. 2006. *Gendai Isrāmu Sekairon*. Nagoya: Nagoya Daigaku Shuppankai.

Kurita, Y. 2002. "Katakikizuna" in *Iwanami Isurāmu Jiten*. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, p. 266.

Western Languages

Amir, Z. M. 2009. "Muhammad Iqbal's Concept of Islam" in *Kyoto Bulletin of Islamic Area Studies*, 2(2), pp. 22–35.

Anderson, B. 1991. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London and New York: Verso.

Aqeel, M. 2009. "Commencement of Printing in the Muslim World: A View of Impact on Ulama at Early Phase of Islamic Moderate Trends" in *Kyoto Bulletin of Islamic Area Studies*, 2(2), pp. 10–21.

Draper, J. W. 1875. *History of the Conflict between Religion and Science*. New York: D. Appleton.

Guizot, F. 1828. *Histoire de la Civilisation en Europe depuis la chute de l'Empire romain jusqu'á la Révolution française*. Paris: Librairie académique PERRIN et Cie.

Hirano, J. 2008. *Pan-Islamism Revisited: Al-Afghani's Ideological Contribution and his Innovative Legacy (Kyoto Working Papers on Area Studies No.4)*, Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, No. 4, 30 p.

Hourani, A. 1983. *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798–1939*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Katsuhata, F. 2008. "Muḥammad ʿAbduh and John William Draper", in Proceedings of *Islam and the Middle East: Dynamics of Social and Political Transformation*. Center for Islamic Area Studies at Kyoto University, pp. 257–272.

Keddie, N. R. 1972. *Sayyid Jamāl ad-Dīn "al-Afghānī": A Political Biography*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Kudsi-Zadeh, A. A. 1970. "Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and the National Awakening of Egypt: A Reassessment of His Role". *Vᵉ Congrès Internastional d'Arabisants et d'Islamisants*. Actes,

pp. 297–305.

Pakdaman, H. 1969. *Djamal-el-Din Assad Abadi dit Afghani*. Paris: G. P. Maisonneuve et Larose.

Yamane, S. 2009. "Special Features of Islamic Moderate Trends in South Asia: An Introduction" in *Kyoto Bulletin of Islamic Area Studies*, 2(2), pp. 1–9.

Middle East Languages

ʿAbd al-Ḥāfiẓ (tr.) 2005. *Al-Islām wa al-ʿIlm: Munāẓara Rīnān wa al-Afghānī*. Al-Qāhira: al-Majlis al-Aʿlā li-l-Thaqāfa.

al-Afghānī, J. D. 2002a. *ʿUrwah al-Wuthqā*. Ed. by Hādī Khosrō Shāhī, Al-Qāhira: Maktaba al-Shurūq al-Dawlīya.

――― 2002b. "Radd ʿalā Dahrīyīn" in *Rasāʾil fī al-Falsafa wa al-ʿIrfān, al-Rasāʾil wa al-Maqālāt*. Al-Qāhira: Maktaba al-Shurūq al-Dawlīya.

Afshār, Ī. & Mahdavī, A. 1963. *Majmūʿe-ye Asnād va Madārek-e Chāp-e Nashode Darbāre-ye Seyyed Jamāl al-Dīn Mashhūr beh Afghānī*. Tehrān: Enteshārāt-e Dāneshgāh-e Tehrān.

Amīn, ʿU. 1955. *Rāʾid al-Fikr al-Miṣrī al-Imām Muḥammad ʿAbduh*. Al-Qāhira: Maktaba al-Nahḍa al-Miṣrīya.

ʿImāra, M. 1984. *Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī: Mūqiẓ al-Sharq wa-Faylasūf al-Islām*. Bayrūt: Dār al-Waḥda.

al-Makhzūmī, M. B. 1931. *Khāṭirāt Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī al-Ḥusaynī*. Bayrūt: al-Maṭbaʿa al-ʿIlmīya.

Shāhī, S. H. Kh. 2000. *Al-Āthāl al-Kāmele: Seyyed Jamāl al-Dīn al-Ḥoseynī*, 9 vols. Tehrān: Majmaʿ-e Jahānī-ye Taqrīb-e Madhāheb-e Eslāmī.