

## A REALISTIC APPROACH TO THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF TORAJIRO YAMADA AND HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH TURKEY\*

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### ABSTRACT

*By the end of the 19th century, no official relationship was yet established between Japan and Turkey. At that time, Torajiro Yamada's affirmative contributions to Japanese-Turkish relationship like an honorary consul cannot be neglected. The claim that Yamada dedicated his life to the development of Japanese-Turkish relationship is, however, just a humanistic approach which mythicizes Yamada. A factual way to understand Yamada's relationship with Turkey from a realistic perspective is to consider the motivation that led him come to Turkey. This paper dealt with Yamada and his social, economical, and cultural relationship with Turkey. In the end the possible motivations that let him move to Turkey were indicated.*

**Keywords:** *Torajiro YAMADA, The Battleship Ertuğrul, trade in 19th century İstanbul, Toruko Gakan, Taiyō.*

## TORAJIRO YAMADA'NIN TÜRKİYE İLE İLGİLİ FAALİYETLERİNE GERÇEKÇİ BİR BAKIŞ

### ÖZ

*Torajiro YAMADA'nın henüz resmi ilişkilerin kurulmadığı 19. yüzyıl sonunda İstanbul'a gelmesinin ardından, fahri konsolos gibi Japon-Türk ilişkilerine katkı sağladığı gerçeği göz ardı edilemez. Ancak, Yamada'nın yaşamını bu ilişkinin gelişimine adanmış söylemi duygusal bir yaklaşım olup Yamada'yı mitleştirir. Yamada'nın Türkiye ile ilişkisini anlamının gerçekçi bir yolu, onu Türkiye'ye getiren motivasyonu saptamaktır. Bu yazıda Yamada'nın Türkiye ile ilişkisi ele alınmış ve onu Türkiye'ye getiren olası motivasyon belirlenmiştir.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Torajiro YAMADA, Ertuğrul Fırkateyni, 19. yüzyılda İstanbul'da ticaret, Toruko Gakan, Taiyō.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The beginning of the Japanese-Turkish relationship is understood to be very much concerned with Torajiro Yamada, as he played a major role in the cultural exchange between the two far distant countries. Many studies have concluded that during the Meiji Era when Japanese people knew very little about Turkey, Yamada introduced Turkey to Japan, especially by writing the book *Toruko Gakan* and some articles on Turkey published in *Taiyō*<sup>1</sup>. No one can deny his affirmative contributions to the Japanese-Turkish relationship.

On the other hand, to deal with his achievements in relationship to Turkey using only a humanistic perspective is misleading. To apply a realistic approach to Yamada's achievements is necessary because the motivation that influenced Torajiro Yamada to move to Turkey is still open to conjecture.

First, this paper examines misleading information about Yamada. Second, general knowledge about Yamada: his family, childhood and education. Then, this paper explains the disaster that befell the Battleship *Ertuğrul*, and Yamada's charitable activities related to the disaster. Next, this paper describes trade conditions in 19<sup>th</sup> century Istanbul, Yamada's personal relationships and his practical knowledge about trade between Japan and Turkey and the effect of governmental issues in Istanbul. The next section argues that Yamada's activities related to Turkey demonstrated his intention to move to Turkey. Last, the two possible motivations—Yamada's personal sympathy to the Ottoman Empire and his trade ambitions—are clarified.

## 2. MISLEADING INFORMATION

Except for the tendency to make Yamada's achievements in Turkey mythical and claim that he dedicated his life to the improvement of Japanese and Turkish relationships, such as Terada (2002) claims him to be "the founder of the relationship between Japan and Turkey", there is another misleading point. It is also said that Yamada converted to Islam (Komura, 1988, p.41). Lee (1988, p.218) supports this claim. However, their claims lack acceptable proof. Nagaba (1996, p.49) notes it is a fallacy to suppose that Yamada was a Muslim because of the extract below by Yamada:

I got very close to the Turkish people soon, and talked to hodjas. Although I could not find enough time to study Islam, I exactly understood Muslims' mentality and customs, and I felt the same close feelings with them. (Yamada, 1939, p.157)<sup>2</sup>

This statement makes clear that Yamada felt sympathy towards Islam, but he did not accept Islam as his religion.

Yamada also wrote to *Toruko Gakan* the following:

Muslims make it their first principle to keep their bodies always clean, according to their Holy book, the Koran. The founder Mohammed first propagated this to Arabia when the extreme heat was about to melt everything. He taught his followers that they had to clean their bodies in order to keep health, and protect themselves from illnesses. Therefore, this custom reached modern times, and the Muslims make it a habit to wash their bodies seven times a day. (Yamada, 1911, p.45)

Although he shows humility in the first quotation when he notes he did not study Islam, it is evident from the above sentences that he knows Islam well from a theoretical standpoint. However, if he was referring to ablution, purification by washing the hands and some parts of the body before prayer, his statement is wrong. Ablution is performed before praying, which occurs five times a day, not seven. Moreover, when a Muslim reads the Koran, he must perform ablution at that time, as well. On the other

1 *Taiyō* (太陽-The Sun) is the monthly magazine published by Hakubunkan Press from 1895 to 1928, representative of the Meiji and Taisho Eras. The writers wrote about various topics from politics, society to literature in this magazine. (*Super Sogojisho Kōjien*, Daigohan, Fujitsu, CD-ROM, 2006.

2 The quotations are translated from Japanese to English by the paper's author.

hand, if he does not mean ablution, there is no argument because Islam does not mandate a certain number of baths per day.

What is significant about his observation on Islam is the distance he keeps.

Taking the above quotations into consideration, it can be claimed that his theoretical knowledge of Islam is imbued with good feelings and respect. Nevertheless, these are not enough to claim he was a Muslim.

### 3. A JAPANESE INTELLECTUAL TORAJIRO YAMADA (1866–1957)

Torajiro was born to Nakamura family in Numata city. His father was the chief retainer of the Feudal Domain. He moved to Tokyo at the age of 7, and at 15 he was adopted as the lawful son of Sōju Yamada, the 7<sup>th</sup> Master of Sōhenryū Tea Ceremony<sup>3</sup>.

Since Japan was under the influence of Western thought and culture during the Meiji Era (1868-1912), learning a foreign language was necessary to understand foreign culture and thought. As Yamada was adopted to be a master, he had to learn a foreign language, understand a different culture, and manage to express the Way of Tea to foreigners. Therefore, he mastered Chinese, English, German and French at schools in Yokohama and Tokyo (Sanshō, 1957).

Writing articles for the newspapers, *Nihon Shimbun* and *Tokyo Nichinichi Shimbun*, Yamada had a chance to communicate with intellectuals of the time, such as Rohan Kōda, Nichinan Fukumoto and Ōchi Fukuchi. In this way, Yamada was believed to have enriched his intellectual worldview.

Thus, Yamada received a high standard of education mastering several languages and learning about foreign culture. In addition, he had intellectual friends around him. Taking these facts into consideration, to claim that Yamada was already an international man before moving to Turkey is not an exaggeration.

### 4. THE BATTLESHIP *ERTUĞRUL* AND CHARITY ACTIVITIES

It is known that Sultan Abdulhamid II (reigned between 1876 and 1909) showed sympathy and political interest in Japan. According to Sultan Abdulhamid II, Japan was an Asian country that achieved modernization by obtaining European industry while staying loyal to its traditions. Adding to this goodwill, Sultan intended to give a return salute to Prince Higashi Fushimi no Miya on his visit in October 1887.

Both Japan and Turkey had two common troubles during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The first was Russia's attempt to advance to the south, and the second was the unequal treaties concluded by Western countries. Abdulhamid II must have believed that Turkey and Japan should have agreed upon a common policy towards Russia. These two political circumstances were the political reasons for the visit of the Battleship *Ertugrul*.

Consequently, the Battleship *Ertugrul's* visit to Japan was settled. She departed from Istanbul on 7 July 1889, with a special envoy with on board including General Osman Pasha, Colonel Ali Riza Bey, Colonel Cemil Bey and a 600 men crew. It was May 5, 1890 when she reached Nagasaki, then traveled to Kobe, and finally arrived in Tokyo. On 13 June 1890, the Emperor Meiji granted an audience to Osman Pasha and six other members of the envoy. The signed letter of Abdulhamid II and the supreme medal of The Ottoman Empire were presented to His Majesty. Osman Pasha and the other six individuals received decorations. On that night, Prince Higashi Fushimi no Miya, the Prime Minister Shūzo Aoki and General Ikuro Ōyama also attended the dinner party (Nagaba, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> Sōhenryū is one of the Japanese traditional tea ceremony organizations in Japan. Its establishment dates back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century.



Having performed her mission successfully, the Battleship *Ertuğrul* started her return voyage on 14 September 1890 but never reached Turkey. Only 69 members survived after a violent typhoon rocked the ship near Wakayama Prefecture Oshima. The Battleship *Ertuğrul* was destroyed, Osman Pasha and more than 500 of the crew died. Oshima people did not hesitate to rescue the injured crew of the ship.

Sixty-nine Turkish survivors carried by Japanese Battleships *Hiei* and *Kongo* saw Turkey again on 24 January 1891. After the return, the newspaper company *Jiji Shinpō*, Japanese naval related organizations and other organizations such as *Seinenkai* held donation to support survivors' families. Individuals such as Torajirō Yamada held meetings such as *Cho Toruko Gunkan Ensetsukai* and *Toruko Gunkan Gien no Ensetsukai* to collect donations (Misawa, 2003, p.70). Yamada came to Istanbul carrying the second portion of the donation money<sup>4</sup> on 4 April 1892 (Gunma P.I.S., 2003).

Hence, it can be concluded that establishing the relationship between the Japanese and Turkish people began with the official visit of the Battleship *Ertuğrul* to Japan which is directly related to Yamada's coming to Turkey.

## 5. YAMADA'S PRIOR STUDY OF TURKEY

Clues are necessary to understand foreign culture for the first time because the first recognition of unknown objects is like a "blank sheet" as Hirayama (Okugawa, 2003, p.5) defines it. However, Yamada must have had information about Turkey as he did not hesitate to move to distant country whose religion and language were radically different from Japan's. Because a big fire in Osaka burned down his house (Terada, 2002, p. 98), there is no evidence that clarifies Yamada's first knowledge about Turkey. But two possibilities can be guessed.

First, it is assumed that Yamada read about Turkey and received introductory information.

According to Chinese history, Turks are the descendants of a people known as the Huns...(Yamada, 1911, p.1) Due to the influence of Islam, the Turks changed the boorish, harsh and evil customs they had inherited from their Hun ancestors. (Yamada, 1911, pp. 5-7)

The information above is second hand, taken from Chinese sources. What is more, it included negative images.

The second possibility is the Japanese journalists and intellectuals, mentioned in page 2 who were his friends.

## 6. 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY ISTANBUL: AN INTERNATIONAL CITY OPEN TO TRADE

Foreigners were not only attracted by Istanbul's natural and historic beauty but they also recognized the characteristics of city life during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Yamada observed this point well and noted the following:

If someone watches people on the bridge for a while, he/she can recognize many races —no need to say Turkish and Greek— from Asia, Africa, and European countries... A traveler called it the All Nations' Bridge... (Yamada, 1911, p. 8)

The bridge symbolizes the combination of two different substantial existences or two worlds (De Vires, 1974, p.84). In this sense, Istanbul could also be considered as a bridge to combine two continents where people from all over the world could live in harmony. Yamada was one of the foreign people who used that bridge.

4 "Although the activities of Torajiro YAMADA were very famous in later Japan, but quite uncertain in the detail." (Misawa, 2002; 105)

Istanbul that embraced many different kinds of people also enabled foreign citizens to have their own business. Yamada did not miss this point and remarked about the trade customs in Turkey with the following:

There are big bazaars established as trade centers take place in Istanbul. Mostly Greek, Armenian, Jews and a small number of Turks deal with trade of various merchandises. (Yamada, 1911, p. 49)

Yamada put his trade intentions into practice under the suitable conditions he mentioned above.

## **7. YAMADA'S PERSONAL RELATIONS IN ISTANBUL**

Yamada utilized the welcoming conditions to engage in trade in Istanbul. As he was educated to the next master of the *Sohenryū Tea Ceremony*, he must have been aware of business strategies. One strategy was gaining the trust of the local people.

Yamada had relationships with Turkish government officials as well as the intellectuals of Japan. The next quotation is a good example of his relationships and his role in Istanbul as a mediator between the Turkish and Japanese bureaucrats and intellectuals:

Today, I paid a visit to Ahmet Pasa in the government office, and I learned that he received your letter from Vienna, got your best regards. Also I got the same message from Speraki from Yenikoy. (Yamada, 1896)

In addition to the welcoming atmosphere for trade in Istanbul, Yamada's connections with Turkish and Japanese high society should have made it easy for him to become a professional businessman in Istanbul.

## **8. YAMADA'S PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE OF TRADE BETWEEN JAPAN AND TURKEY**

Yamada was keenly aware of the import and export goods in Turkey's trade:

Let us have a look at the essential import and export goods in Turkey. The main imports are good grains, and sugar, coffee, macaroni, salted fish, caviar, wine, cognac, liqueur, starch, raw beef, silk, interior decoration goods, woman dresses, calico, glass items, weapons, indigo, pepper, clove, gold, silver, lead, iron, steel, shoe leather and sponge. The main exports are grape, tobacco, and sheep's wool, silk goods, raw silk, cotton, oil seed, olives, cereals, honey, horn, sheep fur, opium, Arabian gum, and rose oil. (Yamada, 1899)

However; he was not satisfied with the quantity of trade between Japan and Turkey and was disturbed by the Western pressure.

The Japanese goods exported to Turkey are mainly rice and miscellaneous goods. The amount of Japanese rice exported to Turkey is increasing every year... However, their Japanese rice is not imported by us, but by German and English hands... I researched every possible relation in order to return the import of Japanese rice to our hands, but still I cannot find a way to overwhelm these German and English traders. (Yamada, 1911, p. 206)

He continued his observations on Japanese trade as follows.

I would like to give an account of the situation of the Japanese market in Turkey. Pottery, lacquer work and general goods gained fame once. The demand was not small, but in our products there were defects... On the other hand, the imitation goods of ours produced in Germany and France have great deal of delicate design, therefore, their design is equal to our goods, and they are more adequate in practical use than ours. Hence, our market in Turkey is badly affected... (Yamada, 1911, pp. 206-207)

The above quotations made it obvious that Yamada did not only engage in trade but also alerted Japanese businessmen to possible problems.



## 9. GOVERNMENTAL ISSUES IN ISTANBUL

Yamada also explained how to procure a shop in Istanbul:

As the marketplace of the city belongs to the Ministry of Commerce, anyone who wants to open a new shop has to pay land tax to the ministry; then he/she can open it and start business. (Yamada, 1911, p.13)

His observation relates well to his experiences, which can also be seen in the following sentences:

When you (foreign officers) demand something from the Government, ... you will be told: "Come tomorrow. Come tomorrow," and after many coming-goings, you might get nothing. Still, when you ask, "At last, tomorrow?" you will hear characteristic Turkish reply; "*İnşallah* (If God wishes). (Yamada, 1911, p. 13)

In these excerpts, Yamada demonstrates that he understands the way and traditions of trade in Turkey.

## 10. YAMADA'S ACTIVITIES RELATED WITH TURKEY

As already mentioned, Yamada came to Turkey with the second half of the donation collected for families of the shipwrecked of Battleship *Ertuğrul*. After that, he lived in Istanbul almost twenty-two years.

First, he worked as a Japanese instructor at the Ottoman Navy. Then, he started trade between Japan and Turkey with Kenjirō Nakamura<sup>5</sup> at a shop called *Nakamura Shōten* in Istanbul most probably in Pera Street where it was not unusual for foreigners to manage similar shops (Esenbel, 1996, p. 241). Tobacco leaf, rock salt, sheep wool, cowhide and similar items were exported. On the other hand, pottery, crafts, and silk goods were imported. Yamada also obtained Japanese art pieces and crafts for Sultan Abdulhamid II, and arranged and classified the Far Eastern art objects at Topkapı Palace<sup>6</sup>.

Yamada founded *the Oriental Paper Making Company* with businessmen of the Kansai Region on 15 January 1906. He began to produce paper for tobacco, which is known as rice paper in Japan. He also worked as a patron of *the Mishima Paper Manufacture* in Ginza, Tokyo in 1941, *the Japan-Turkey Trade Association* was established in November 1925, and Yamada became the chairman of the board of directors. On 3 March 1929, *the Shopping Center of Japan* was established in Istanbul. It is clear that Yamada played a very active role in the trade relationship between Japan and Turkey.

## 11. THE POSSIBLE MOTIVATIONS THAT BROUGHT YAMADA TO TURKEY

There is not enough evidence to clarify the reasons that led Yamada to move to Turkey. However, two possible motivations can be presumed from his personal life and his achievements related to Turkey.

The first motivation is the possibility that he felt sympathy for Turkey and found similarities between the existing conditions of Turkey and events in his father's life back at home. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Turkey was the "sick man" of Europe and falling apart. As already mentioned Yamada's father was the chief retainer of *Numata Feudal Domain*, and he surrendered Numata Castle to the new Meiji Government; needless to say, he lost his official position too. This event should have affected Yamada deeply. He might have seen similarities between the old Japan of the Tokugawa Regime and the Ottoman Empire. He presented his father sword and armor to Sultan Abdulhamid II, which strenghtens this theory. In short, he might have felt the same sympathy for both the Tokugawa Regime and the Ottoman Empire.

5 Born in Osaka, former Japanese navy officer. See Inaba (2008) for detailed information.

6 Ayse Erdoğan, Curator of Chinese and Japanese Porcelain in Topkapı Palace Museum about the Japanese items related to Torajirō Yamada informed us that it was not possible to distinguish the Japanese porcelains Yamada imported from the ones in the museum. (Interview, 2005 February)

The second motivation may be presumed on the grounds of his achievements related to Turkey. Having lived in Istanbul for about twenty-two years, mastering the Turkish language, having relationships with local people based on mutual trust enabled Torajiro Yamada to develop mutually beneficial trade between Japan and Turkey.

Considering his trade activities, it can be concluded that Yamada had intended to establish trade between Japan and Turkey before sailing to Turkey.

## 12. CONCLUSION

In an era that Japan and Turkey knew a little about each other, Torajiro Yamada contributed affirmatively to the Japanese-Turkish relationship. His interest in Turkey was occasionally explained with emotional reasons. He had, however, intention of trade which he fulfilled.

Mastering several foreign languages, writing for the famous newspapers, having a close communication with important Japanese intellectuals of his time, Yamada was already an international intellectual before he had moved to Turkey. This international character made him easy to live in Istanbul.

During the 19th century, Yamada was one of the foreigners who had business in Istanbul. He established good relations with the elit Turkish class and the Ottoman citizens in Istanbul, which let him gain support and trust.

There is neither enough information about Yamada's initial notion on Turkey nor the certain motivations that moved him to Turkey. The sympathy he felt to Turkey might be one of the possible motivations. The second one can be presumed from his achievements related to Turkey. Taking his trade activities into consideration -namely *the Nakamura Shōten* in Istanbul, *Oriental Paper Making Company*, *Mishima Paper Manufacture*, *the Japan-Turkey Trade Association*, *the Shopping Center of Japan* in Istanbul- it can be concluded that Yamada had the purpose of trade before arriving to Turkey.

## 12. Appendix

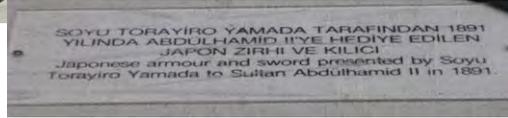
山田寅次郎 (1866-1957)



*Photos of the Japanese Objects in Topkapı Palace Museum Related to Torajirō YAMADA  
(February 2005)*



Yamada's father's armour and sword  
presented to Abdülhamid II in 1891  
(Topkapı Palace Museum)



Japanese Porcelains in Topkapı Palace Museum  
(*Matbahı Amire*: Palace Kitchens, The Exhibition Hall  
for the Chinese and Japanese Porcelains)

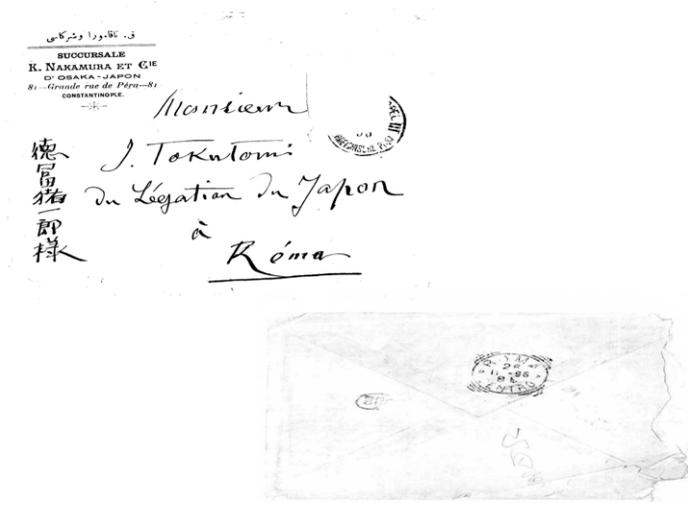


**Letter Addressed to Sohō TOKUTOMI by Torajirō YAMADA**

財団法人徳富蘇峰記念塩崎財団所蔵  
 徳富蘇峰宛 山田 寅次郎書簡 (全19通) NO. 2  
 明治・大正・昭和 29年 11月 20日

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