

# GPJ

**GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES  
ON JAPAN**

**A Yearly Academic Journal**

**Nº 2**

**Japan's Interaction with  
the Turkish and the  
Muslim World**

FORUM TAURI PRESS



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## GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES ON JAPAN (GPJ): A Yearly Academic Journal

Publisher: FORUM TAURI Press

Osmanağa mah. Vişne sok. No:50 K.2 Kadıköy / İSTANBUL [www.forumtauripress.com](http://www.forumtauripress.com)

Sponsored by: Toshiba International Foundation (TIFO)

[www.toshibafoundation.com](http://www.toshibafoundation.com)

Partner Institution: Japanese Studies Association

Japonya Arastirmalari Dernegi (JAD)

[www.jad.org.tr](http://www.jad.org.tr)

Editor-in-chief: Erdal Küçükyağın (Ph.D.)

Assistant Editor: Merve Yahşi

Native Language Editor: Jennifer Norris

Graphic Design: Merve Çay

ISSN: 2687-6132

Editorial Board: Ayşe Selçuk Esenbel (Em. Boğaziçi Üni.), Oğuz Baykara (Boğaziçi Üni.), Ali Akkemik (Yamaguchi Üni.), Altay Atlı (Sabancı Üni.), Ahmet Öncü (Boğaziçi Üni.)

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Print: Cemil Baskı Çözümleri Mühürdar Fuat Bey Sk. No:10 Kadıköy / İSTANBUL

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# Ethnographic Essay of the Japanese Turkologist Okubo Koji as a Historical Source about the Life of the Turkic-Tatar Community in Harbin

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## **Abstract**

The article tells about the ethnographic essay “On the Life of the Turkic People in Harbin”, written and published in 1924 in the Japanese magazine “Tōyō” (東洋) by the Japanese Turkologist Okubo Koji (大久保幸次), who later became the founder of Islamic and Turkic academic research in Japan.

This essay is considered to be among the first essays in Japanese Turkology regarding the Turkic peoples of Russia. It provides valuable information about various aspects of the lifestyle of the Turkic-Tatar emigrant community in Harbin during the period from the beginning of the construction of the Chinese Eastern Railway until 1924. It illustrates Okubo as a mediator in the Tatar-Japanese (Turkic-Japanese) relations in the pre-war period and allows us to draw conclusions about Okubo’s views on the Turkic-Tatar people and their national movements. The essay consists of seven parts: 1) Turkic-Tatars as a nation, 2) the gradual advancement of the Turkic peoples to the East and their appearance in Manchuria, 3) national organs of the Turkic-Tatar community, 4) racial stereotypes, 5) Turkic language, 6) religion of Turkic-Tatars, 7) daily life of the Turkic-Tatar community in Harbin. This essay highlights the important, yet underestimated and little-known role of Okubo in supporting Turkic-Tatar emigrants in the Far East. It is alleged that this essay prepared the Japanese reader to accept the Turkic-Tatar people as a possible political ally in the future.

**Keywords:** Okubo Koji, Harbin, Russia, Japan, Turkey, Turkic studies, Islamic studies, Turkic-Tatar emigration

### **Koji Okubo - one of the First Japanese Turkologists**

When we talk about contacts between countries and cultures, summarizing the long-standing experiences and relations between the two, we must not forget that these contacts are usually carried out by specific individuals, whose bright characters and fates are worthy of being described not only in scientific articles but also in fiction. In Russian-Japanese, Tatar-Japanese, and Turkic-Japanese relations, there are such heroes and mediators, who played the main roles in the establishment and existence of intercultural contacts. One of such names forgotten in Japan, Russia, and Turkey is the name Okubo Koji (大久保幸次、1887-1950), who was a pioneer of Turkic and Islamic studies in Japanese academic science.

According to his biography, Okubo was initially interested in European culture, primarily German. In 1910, he entered the German language department of the Tokyo School of Foreign Languages. After graduating with honors in 1913, he enrolled as a student in a special course at the Faculty of Eastern History at the same school. Perhaps, while studying German culture, he developed his interests in Muslim culture through the work of European scholars. In particular, in his articles on Turkic peoples, he refers to the works of French and German anthropologists.<sup>1</sup>

In 1915, along with publications and translations from German, he publishes his first article on the Quran. In 1921, he follows with the publishing of his translation of the Turkic tale of Khoja Nasreddin. It was the first Japanese translation of a Turkic folklore story. In 1923, he became a teacher at Sotosyu University (later known as the Komazawa University). This period of his life coincides with political and ideological changes in Turkey. The creation of the Republic of Turkey becomes a turning point in his academic and personal biography.

Professor of the Toyo University, Misawa Nobuo and researcher of the Agency for Cultural Affairs of the Ministry of Education and Science of Japan, Osawa Hirootsugi, worked on research of Okubo Koji's work. They believe that K. Okubo completely devoted himself to Islamic and Turkic studies after 1922, shifting from his former specialization in German language and German literature [Misawa: 3]. Undoubtedly, his interest in the

<sup>1</sup> In the essay to which this article refers, Koji Okubo cites the work of the French scientist Deniker Joseph and the German scientist Bihan.



Turkic-Tatar emigrants in the Far East was caused by his scientific interest in Turkey and the Middle East. Most likely, he met with the first Turkic-Tatar emigrants during their settlement in Japan in 1922-1924. Okubo independently studied both Turkish and Tatar languages. His interaction with the Turkic-speaking emigrants gave him the possibility to expand his knowledge and practice. According to his ethnographic essays in which he describes in detail his experiences of interaction with the first Turkic-Tatar emigrants, he presumably even lived within the Turkic-Tatar community in Harbin in 1924.

In the 1930s, as a unique specialist in the field of Turkology and Islamic studies, Okubo attempted to establish an academic department of Turkic and Islamic studies in Japan. His intentions were even supported by the state officials. In 1936, Okubo was sent to Turkey on behalf of the Association of Japanese-Turkish Relations. His mission was to attend the third congress of the Turkish Linguistic Society [Misawa: 7]. Ultimately, as part of the congress, he was invited to an official reception with the President of the Republic of Turkey, Kemal Ataturk. After the reception, Okubo became the first Japanese who received an audience with Ataturk without being a state or diplomatic official. Upon his return to Japan, he printed many articles in the Association's newsletter. He was very thankful for having received such an opportunity, which made him feel obliged to the Association and especially to its leader, Prince Iemasa Tokugawa (1884-1963).<sup>2</sup>

In 1938, Okubo created the Islamic World Research Institute (回教 圏 研究所 *Kaikyoken kenkyusho*), which contributed to the development of Islamic studies before the start of World War II. In 1939, he founded the Department of the History of Islamic Culture at Waseda University. With his assistance, in the same year, the subject of the "History of Islam" was included in the curriculum at the University of Tokyo [Usmanova 2015: 746]. From 1925 to 1941, he taught a class on the principles of Islamic culture at Komazawa University and Waseda University from 1939 to 1949.

Okubo's name is often mentioned in the documents of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, newspaper articles of Japan and Manchuria, as

2 Iemasa Tokugawa (03.23.1884, Tokyo - 02.18.1963, Tokyo) - Japanese politician. The 17<sup>th</sup> head of the Tokugawa clan (1940-1963). In 1937-1939, he was the ambassador of Japan to Turkey.

well as in the Tatar periodicals, which prove his close involvement with the Turkic-Tatar emigration. In 1935, he was present at the opening of the first mosque in Japan, which was constructed in the city of Kobe. He even wrote an introductory essay for the specially released collection of writing published for this event [Okubo]. He was a well-respected and fairly famous Japanese within the Tatar emigrant circles. He appears in numerous photographs of the Tatar emigration, where he stands among the leaders of the community [see photo 1]. Okubo also participated in the establishment of an organization that supported the independence of the Idel (Volga)-Ural Turkic Tatars in Kobe and Tokyo. He attended organizational meetings in Japan, in 1934, and Manchuria, in 1935 [Usmanova 2005; 2007].

Additionally, in 1919, Koji Okubo personally met Gayaz Ishaky when he came to Japan to obtain a European travel visa. Ishaky described his first meeting with Okubo in his diaries. On May 6, 1919, he wrote:

Today we will visit the American and English visa centers. First of all, in the morning, we are visited by one Japanese. Oddly enough, this Japanese speaks Turkish, his name is Koji, and his surname is Okubo. He understands Turkish. Now, he is a German teacher at school. [...] He had learned the Turkish language from books. He was helped by one Armenian and one Turk who lived here. Now, he speaks Turkish fluently. He himself graduated from university. He was especially interested in Turkic history and, therefore, became one of the first researchers of Turkology among the Japanese. To a great extent, he studied Turkology from a philological side. With him, I discovered that the Turkish language has a lot of words in common with the Japanese language. For example, in Tatar, “su” [water] - in Japanese “sui”, while “kara” [black] - could share common roots with the Japanese word “kuri”.<sup>3</sup>

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3 Diary of G. Ishaky. Tatarstan Institute of Language, Literature and Arts named after G. Ibragimov, Center for Written and Musical Heritage, F. 135, notebook # 2, pp. 61-76. - Translated by author from Khannanova, G., Garipova L. Gayaz Ishaky about Japan (according to daily memories of 1919) // Gasyrlar Avazi. Kazan, 2018. No. 3, pp. 102-112.

Okubo was also involved in the Muslim politics of Japan (回教 政策 *kaikyō seisaku*), which were carried out by the Japanese government, the army and pan-Asian activists, as well as the Muslim Association of Great Japan (大日本回教協会 *Dai Nippon Kaikyō Kyōkai*). In the postwar period, as a result of his connection with the Islamic policy, his name was forgotten and for a long time was not mentioned in the academic circles of Japan.

After the end of the war, Okubo was removed from teaching and publishing. He also was unfortunate to lose his house during extensive fires in 1945, which altogether put him in serious financial distress. As a gratitude for the friendship and support that he had shown during the war towards the Turkic-Tatar emigrants, they helped him to acquire a new house in the Yoyogi-Uehara region, not far from the Tokyo mosque. “Yana Milli Yul” magazine devoted an entire article to Okubo Koji<sup>4</sup>, where he was praised for his activities and his exceptional interest in Turkic-Tatar emigrants of Japan.

In recent years, ideological stands in Japan, Turkey, and Russia have changed, resulting in the possibility of reassessment of earlier forbidden topics of the Muslim politics of Japan in the 1930s. However, as noted by Japanese researchers, it was rather difficult to collect information about those activities [Misawa]. For example, it is still not clear when and under what circumstances Okubo became interested in Turkic and Muslim studies. His original intentions for the establishment of close contacts with the Tatar emigrants are unknown. Due to his early death following the end of World War II, many questions remained unanswered.

### **Ethnographic essay about the Turkic-Tatar community in Harbin**

In 1923-24, Okubo wrote three articles on Turkic-Tatar emigrants [Misawa]. In addition to the essay on the community in Harbin, he wrote two essays on the stay of the Turkic Tatars in Japan: “Kurban Beiram in Japan” [*nihon no kurbansai*]<sup>5</sup> and “Russian Muslim Refugees Arriving at Japan” [*nihon e kita roshia no kaikaikyōto hinanmin nitsuite*]<sup>6</sup>. His close acquaintance with the Turkic-Tatar emigrants most likely happened in these years.

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4 Yana Milli Yul. 1934. No 9 (80). pp. 6-7.

5 Kokusai chishiki, September 1, 1923, No. 3-9, pp. 114-122.

6 Kokusai chishiki, February 1924, No. 2-3., pp. 108-119; No. 4, pp. 96-108.

Ethnographic essay “The life of the Turkic people in Harbin” [*Harubin ni okeru toruko minzoku no seikatsu*] (ハルビンに於けるトルコ民族の生活) was published in the Japanese journal “*Tōyō*” (East, 東洋). It was composed in Japanese on October 25, 1924, as evidenced by the signature at the end of the essay: [大正13年10月25日]. This essay is valuable due to its content that describes in detail the ethnographic and historical senses of Turkic-Tatars of the Volga-Ural region. It is also the ultimate source of information about the life of the immigrant community of the Turkic-Tatars of the Volga-Ural region in Harbin at the beginning of the twentieth century. In this essay, Okubo narrates to the Japanese reader the history and cultural traditions of the Turkic peoples and the Tatar people of Russia. The most remarkable thing is that he analyzes the Tatar national ideology of the early twentieth century, noting the possibility of Japanese interaction with the Turkic-Tatar nation in the future. Such interaction, indeed, took place later in the 1930s. Undoubtedly, we can say that during this period Okubo was one of the few, if not the only specialists in the field of nascent Turkology and Tatar studies in Japan. Presumably, the objectives of his articles were not only scientific and ethnographic but also political. The ethnographic essay is 42 pages long and it touches upon the important aspects of Turkic-Tatar emigration in the Far East. The essay consists of seven parts: 1) Turkic Tatars as a nation, 2) the gradual advancement of the Turkic peoples to the East and their appearance in Manchuria, 3) national organs of the Turkic Tatar community, 4) racial stereotypes, 5) Turkic language, 6) religion of Turkic Tatars, 7) daily life of the Turkic Tatar community in Harbin.

### **1) Turkic Tatars as a nation**

In the first part of the essay, Okubo thoroughly explains to the Japanese reader who the Turkic peoples and Tatars are. He writes about the history of the formation of the Turkic nations from Genghis Khan to Kemal Atatürk. Referring to the works of the French scientist Joseph Deniker (6.03.1852, Astrakhan - 03/18/1918, Paris)<sup>7</sup> and the German scientist Bihan, he gives the following classification of the Turkic-speaking peoples of the world:

---

<sup>7</sup> Deniker created the classification of human races.

A. Eastern Turkic peoples (Sharky Türkler<sup>8</sup>):

- 1) Yakuts (Yakutlar),
- 2) Altai (Altaylar),
- 3) various groups of Siberian Tatars (Sibiria-Tatarlary),
- 4) Turkic peoples of Western China (Tarachylar);

B. Central (Central Asian) Turkic peoples (Orta Türkler):

- 5) Kyrgyz (Kyrgyz Kazaklar),
- 6) Black Kyrgyz (Kara Kyrgyzlar),
- 7) Kipchaks (Kypchaklar),
- 8) Karakalpaks (Kara Kalpaklar),
- 9) Uzbeks (Üsbekler),
- 10) Sarts (Sartlar),
- 11) Idel (Volzhsky)-Ural Tatars (Idil (Volga)-Tatarlary), including Kazan, Ufa and Astrakhan (Kazan-, Ufa-, Astrakhan-Tatarlary),
- 12) Mishars (Misherler),
- 13) Tiptyars (Tipterler),
- 14) Bashkirs (Bashkurdlar),
- 15) Nogays (Nugaylar),
- 16) Crimean Tatars (Krym-Tatarlary),
- 17) North Caucasian (Shimaky Kafkaz Tatarlar) Tatars,
- 18) Chuvashs ( Chuwashlar);

C. Western (Garyby Türkler) and southern (Jenuby Türkler) Turkic peoples:

- 19) Turkmens (Türkmenler) living in Russian Turkistan (Türkistan) and Iran (Iran) and Afghanistan (Afganistan),
- 20) Azerbaijanis (Azerbeijanlylar) of the South Caucasus (Jonuby Kafkaz),
- 21) independent Turkic peoples (Türkler) or “Ottomans” (Osmanlılar).

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<sup>8</sup> The author's original spelling is given in parentheses.

According to his observations, Harbin is mainly populated with the representatives of Turkic peoples, especially from Idel (Volga)-Ural Tatars, including Kazan, Ufa, and Astrakhan, Mishars, Tiptyars and Bashkirs. He notes that a small group of Ottoman Turks also lived in the region.

Okubo considers it necessary to draw the attention of the Japanese reader to the fact that the Turkic Tatars of Harbin are not the so-called “Dattan” Tatars (鞑靼), known in Japan from the history of the Mongol Empire. He explains the origin of the term ‘Tatars’ from the ethnonym ‘Dattan’, emphasizing on the fact that the Mongolian and Turkic peoples are different, despite being close neighbors. The Turkic-speaking people made up one of the military units of Genghis Khan’s army called ‘Dattan,’ which resulted in the mixing of local peoples with the troops of Genghis Khan. Therefore, the appearance of Turkic-speaking descendants in Eurasia and Manchuria under the name ‘Tatars’ was natural.

## **2) The gradual advancement of the Turkic peoples to the East and their appearance in Manchuria**

In the second part of the essay, Okubo talks about the Turkic-speaking people in Manchuria. He writes that their number exceeded a thousand people, residing in the cities of Mukden, Harbin, Pogradichnaya, and Manchuria. Mostly, they were representatives of the Turkic-speaking peoples from the south-eastern part of Russia, such as Kazan, Ufa and Astrakhan, the so-called “Volga-Ural Tatars”. The presence of Orenburg Tatars, Mishars, Tiptyars, and Bashkirs was also recorded. Okubo notes an interesting fact that although geographically Siberia is closer to Manchuria, the first Tatars to arrive in Manchuria were not the Siberian, but the Volga-Ural Tatars. According to Okubo, their appearance of Russian Turkic Tatars in Manchuria was primarily because of their ease of movement (動性). Because of that quality, they have always played the role of pioneers. Russians have always relied on this national feature of the Turkic Tatars, especially during the period of Russian development and expansion to the East.

The Tatars appeared in Manchuria even before the construction of the Chinese Eastern Railway began, arriving on horses and camels through Siberia and the Gobi Desert. When the construction of the road began in

1896, they came to Manchuria as entrepreneurs and traders. Okubo subjectively claims that “Russian Tatars love to trade. Even if they do not have capital, they start trading because of interest.”<sup>9</sup> Tatar merchants mostly specialized in the sale of fur products. Okubo explains the reason for the formation of these entrepreneurial abilities, linking them with the history of the existence of Turkic-speaking peoples in the Russian Empire. He writes that the Tatars, who once were the masters of Russia, cannot forget their historically deserved honor and dignity. Despite being under the yoke of the Slavic peoples for the past 400 years, they still preserved their culture, faith, and blood ties. Being currently in the position of a victim, they still retained their love of culture, educating the upcoming generations with love for their nation. They moved to Manchuria with the idea to build their own paradise along with a new place for national growth and entrepreneurship.

Okubo noted the peculiar features of national entrepreneurship among the Turkic-speaking peoples of Manchuria. Since they followed Islam, they traded according to Muslim rules (according to Sharia). In their lifestyles, they combined religious traditions with ordinary life; in trade, they complied with commercial ethics.

According to Okubo, entrepreneurship requires great physical effort and fitness, which the Turkic Tatars had. Since they could be proud of their rich history and were assured of their belonging as descendants of a large nation from antiquity, they were highly motivated to revive their former glory. Okubo cites the example of the struggle for independence that Indian Muslims had experienced, noting that to create a stable economic base and escape from the harsh pressure of the Russian authorities, the Tatars took the same strategy as the Indians and Jews.

Okubo presents to the Japanese reader a detailed picture of the recent history of the national revival of the Russian Turkic Tatars. He highlights two stages of the revival, the first being after the first Russian revolution of 1905 and the second after the February revolution of 1917. He calls the names of famous Tatars, leaders of the national movement, such as

9 Okubo Koji. “Harbin ni okeru toruko minzoku no seikatsu” (Life of the Turkic People in Harbin)// *Touyou*, 1924. No. 12. pp. 45-87. ハルビンに於けるトルコ民族の生活、東洋12、大正13年10月25日 - p. 52.

Ahmed Agaev (Ahmed Agaif<sup>10</sup>)<sup>11</sup>, Yusuf Akchura (Yusuf Akchura Ogly)<sup>12</sup>, Ismail Gaspinsky (Ismail Bek Gasprinsky)<sup>13</sup>, Gayaz Ishaky (Ayaz Ishaky)<sup>14</sup>, Fatikh Karimi (Fetkh Kerimi)<sup>15</sup>, Umer Teregulov (Umer Tirikol)<sup>16</sup>, Sadri Maksudi (Sadri Maksudi)<sup>17</sup>. He calls them by the Japanese term “Onjin” (恩人), which in Japanese culture means a person to whom you are indebted. Therefore, Okubo notes that the impact of these people on the lives of Turkic-Tatar people was so crucial that it is impossible to forget.

Okubo writes that during this time the ideas of “Turkism” (トルコ主義、‘Türklük’ - as written by Okubo) and “Pan-Turanism” started to develop in the Turkic-speaking world.<sup>18</sup> According to him, the Turkic-Tatars of Harbin were politically oriented. As an example, he cites that during the Friday sermon, the Harbin imam Giniyatulla<sup>19</sup> called for the support of Atatürk<sup>20</sup> and the establishment of the new Turkish Republic.

In the second part of his ethnographic essay, with a particular historical interest, he provides a detailed description of the Turkic-Tatar community in Harbin. According to his notes, the first Tatar settlement was

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10 The spelling of the names is modern, but the author’s spelling is given in brackets, referring to the original essay.

11 Ahmed Agayev (1868 - 1939) - an Azerbaijani statesman, journalist, and Turkologist.

12 Yusuf Akchura (2.11.1876, Simbirsk - 1935, Istanbul) - Tatar writer, publisher, historian, and an ideologist of Turkish nationalism.

13 Ismail Gasprinsky (03.08.1851 – 09.11.1914) - Crimean Tatar enlightener, publisher of the sole Turkic-language newspaper in Russia called “Tarjeman” (1883-1918), the founder of Jadidism and Pan-Turkism.

14 Muhammetgayaz Gilyazetdinovich Iskhakov (Ġayaz İsxayı) (02.23.1878, Yaushirma village - 07.22.1954, Ankara) - an outstanding figure of the Tatar national movement, writer, publicist, publisher, and politician.

15 Fatih Karimi (03.30.1870, Bugulma – 09.27.1937, Moscow) - Tatar writer, teacher, journalist. He was shot in the USSR in 1937.

16 Gumer Teregulov (1883, Ufa - 1938) - lawyer, Tatar public figure.

17 Sadri Maksudi (07.23.1878, Kazan - 02.20.1957, Istanbul) - Russian and Turkish lawyer, statesman and politician.

18 Pan-Turkism (Pan-Turanism) was a political movement of the late 19th-early 20th century, pursuing political unification of all the Turkish-speaking peoples of the Ottoman Empire, Russia, China, Iran, and Afghanistan. The movement began among the Turks of the Crimea and the Volga region of Russia, who initially sought to unite with the Turks of the Ottoman Empire. [Britannica Online Encyclopedia. Date of access on June 3, 2018. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Pan-Turkism>].

19 Giniyatulla Seliahmet (Ahmed) (1988 - September 4, 1926, Harbin) - imam of the Harbin mosque.

20 Atatürk, Mustafa Kemal (1881 – 11.10.1938) - Ottoman and Turkish statesman, reformer, founder of the modern Turkish state and the first president of the Republic of Turkey.



founded in the Staryj Gorod (Old Town). Their first shops appeared on the streets near the city garden. Among them were the fur shops of the Agishev (Agishef) brothers, who participated in trade in various regions from Mongolia to Japan. The mixed assortment stores of Virgazov (Wirgazof), Haji Agiev (Hajy Agiev), Tiniev (Tinief), and Abdulla Tairov (Abdul Haira Tairof), who also owned shops in Transbaikalia and Nerchinsk, were also located near the city garden.

Okubo gives detailed information about the most successful Turkic-Tatar entrepreneurs in Harbin, which were the Agishev brothers Umer and Ali. They traveled a lot due to commercial matters in the period between 1902-1911, eventually settling in Harbin. One of the two sons of Umer Agishev, Hussein, currently resides in Russia and works in the field of commercial affairs between Kazan and Moscow. Umer's second son, Zeidullah, owns a store in New York. After the death of Umer Agishev, his brother Ali Agishev, along with his son Abidulla Agishev (Abidullah Agishev), and Amrullah Agiev opened a store in the Novyj Gorod (New City), Harbin.

Turkic-Tatar shops are located on the Kitaiskaya and Konnaya Streets in Harbin. Okubo calls this region the region of the Turkic-Tatar bourgeoisie. He lists the names of Turkic-Tatar businessmen: Umer Agishev, Abidulla Agishev, Amrulla Agiev, Abdul Hakim Tairov, Haji Agiev, and the Deushevs. In 1914, when the first war actions began in Asia, Turkic-Tatar merchants traveled to Japan and Shanghai. In 1919, the emigrant businessmen appeared in Harbin. Among them were the Yaushev brothers, who owned manufacturing mills and shoe stores in Tashkent, Troitsk, and Chelyabinsk. At the same time, Agafurov arrived from Yekaterinburg and Shafiullin from Irkutsk.

In 1920, the Turkic-Tatar community of Harbin was populated by 807 people. Merchants created their large joint venture called "Idel(Volga)-Ural". Muhammedlatif Yaushef became the leader of the facility. They had several goals they wanted to achieve with their trade. The primary goal of this organization was the revival of the Turkic-Tatar national trade, focusing on the trade of fur products, natural resources, leather goods,

and retail. Their other goal was to expand their trade geographically from Mongolia to Turkestan, as well as from Harbin to Japan.

According to Okubo, the reason for the union of Turkic-Tatar merchants in Harbin was the change in the living conditions of the community. The increase of Turkic-Tatar refugees in Harbin, among whom were not only merchants but also teachers, imams, scientists, poets, artists, military servants, students, and others, led the community to experience difficult times. "They were capitalists, but indeed became victims," wrote Okubo in the conclusion of the second part of his essay.

### **3) National organs of the Turkic-Tatar community**

In the third part of the ethnographic essay, Okubo studies and analyzes the organization of the Turkic-Tatar community in Harbin. In 1924, the Turkic-Tatar community in Harbin exceeded one thousand people. At 33 Artilleriyskaya Street, a multitude of civic agencies were developed. They included a mosque, an elementary school, the community house, and a self-government office - the National Board of the Turkic-Tatars of Harbin (Harbin Turk-Tatarlarynyn Milli Idaresi; Harbin Musslmanlarynyn Milli Idaresi), created in 1906.

Until 1912, the community was governed by an elected leader, but starting in 1912, the community began to choose a Board of 7-8 people, which functioned as the governing body of the community. In 1922, the board included 9 people. The general meeting consisted of 45 people, and it was held every week on Thursdays. Amrulla Agiev was the head of the Board. The second highest authority was Imam Giniyatullah who was well respected by all residents of Harbin.

The community had a system of contributions, depending on income: from 5 yen to 300 yen. Those days, about 20-25 thousand yen was required to implement the plans and support the activities of the community. Funds were directed towards maintaining the library, helping the poor, improving student dormitories, education, and school maintenance (about 150 people study there). The community did not take money from poor families for basic living needs, therefore, the education for their children was free. A two-story civic building houses not only a school but also a student

dormitory, rooms for rent, and a mosque. In Turkish, mosques are called “jami”, while in Tatar they called “mechet”.

The first mosque of the Turkic-Tatars in Harbin was built in 1906. In 1922, there was the 1000th anniversary of the adoption of Islam by the ancestors of the Turkic Tatars of the Volga Bulgaria. In honor of this event, the community decided to build a new mosque that emphasized the continuity of the Islamic tradition of Russian Turks, carried by the Turkic Tatars of Harbin. On July 8, 1924, a communal meeting on this subject was held. As a result of the meeting, the Board announced that 20 thousand yen were needed for the construction of the mosque. It was decided that until the completion of the mosque, a large hall of the national school would be used as a prayer hall.

Imam Giniyatulla Ahmed arrived in Harbin in 1907. On April 8, 1923, he visited Japan. During his stay, he held the first Muslim preaching in Japan. He was also the director of the Turkic-Tatar Muslim elementary school in Harbin. The school was called “Mekteb Inayat”, named after the principal. It was a six-year-long program for both boys and girls above the age of seven. Along with secular subjects, religious subjects were incorporated into the curriculum. Classes taught at the school included: faith (Din), reading of the Koran (Kuran), and native language (Ana Tili)- which was Tatar (Tatarcha). During their third year of study, the Russian language (Ruscha) was introduced to the students. Since the Turkic-Tatars of Harbin were subjects of Russia, they felt obliged to study Russian. The classes were taught by Imam Giniyatulla himself, along with teacher Munir, poet Husein Abdushof<sup>21</sup>, and a former military officer Kemal. Tatar as a native language and English were taught by Abdul Aziz (Abdul Aziz), while Medina taught Russian<sup>22</sup>. After graduating from the national school,

21 Husain Gabdyush (1901, Troitsk - 1944, Harbin) - poet. After the revolution of 1917, he moved to Manchuria. From 1919, until his sudden death caused by a heart attack, he lived in Harbin, where he taught at the Tatar school “Ginayat” and collaborated with various emigrant periodicals such as “Yerak Shəryk”, “Milli Bairak”, “Yana Yapon Mohbire”, “Yana Milli Yul”. In the Far East émigré environment, Husain Gabdyush was one of the most active popularizers of Tukay’s work. In addition to his literary work, he was also known as a theater director and a playwright. In the 1920s and 1930s, he actively participated in major theatrical productions of the Harbin troupe (he played the main role in the play by G. Ishaky “Jean Baevich”).

22 Madina (Asyakaeva) Seliahmet (12.12.1897, Ufa - 05.22.1964, Istanbul) - active figure in the Turkic-Tatar emigration to the Far East. In 1915, she graduated from the Ufa women’s Ma-

children entered Russian gymnasiums in which they receive a profession within three years of study. Twice a week, “Ginayat” schoolteachers conduct special topic classes about religion, mother tongue, and national history (Milli Tarichy) for the community members. The importance of the national movement that started in 1905 was especially stressed during these classes. Also, they emphasized on the significance of such figures (*yolbashchylar*) as 1) Ismail bey Gasprinsky, in honor of whom the school had hosted a memorial event on September 24, 1924, 2) a playwright Gayaz Ishaky, who had visited Japan for a few years before moving to Berlin, and 3) a Tatar poet Gabdulla Tukay.<sup>23</sup>

The school had its own library which was located to the left of the entrance. The library contained books in Tatar, Turkish, Arabic, Persian, and Russian languages. The collection was expanded with the new books arriving from Russia and Turkey. The community also periodically published on its own. An example of community publishing is the weekly Tatar newspaper “Yerak Sharek” written in Arabic script.<sup>24</sup> The first issue of the newspaper was released on January 25, 1920. The community also had women’s and youth gathering clubs which were founded on cultural and traditional principles. The youth gathering (Yashlar Uyushmasy) was led by the brother of Imam Giniyatulla, Keshaf<sup>25</sup>, while the women’s gath-

riinsky gymnasium. In 1917, she became part of the faculty of natural sciences of the Higher women’s scientific and natural courses in St. Petersburg. In 1919, she emigrated to Harbin with her family, where she began teaching at a Muslim school. In Harbin, Madina married the younger brother of Imam Giniyatulla Seliahmetov, Keshaf. Together, they had a son, Ravil. In 1932, she moved to Shanghai. There, Madina became the vice-president of “Idel-Ural, Ukraine, the Caucasus Khalyklarynyn Milli Azatlyk Committees”, and was actively engaged in educational activities for Muslim women. She gave lectures and published in the Far Eastern Muslim press (“Milli Bairak”, Mukden, “Yerak Shəryk”) and Russian (“Shanghai dawn”). In 1941, her article “Russian Türks” in which Madina Seliahmet spoke of the fate of Muslims in Soviet Russia, was published in Shanghai magazine “XX Century”. (The Turks of Russia // The XXth Century. - Vol. I, November 1941.) In 1949, the Seliahmet family moved to Turkey.

23 Gabdulla Tukay (04.14.1886, Kazan - 02.04.1913, Kazan) - an outstanding Tatar folk poet, creator of the Tatar literary language.

24 The magazine was published in Harbin from 1921 to 1925 under the name “Yerak Shəryk” (“Far East”) and reflected on the position of Turkic-Tatar emigration to the Far East in the first half of the 1920s.

25 Selikhmetov (Ahmed), Keshaf (11.18.1892, Penza - 01.14.1963, Istanbul) - a businessman and a brother of the Harbin imam Giniyatulla Selikhmetov (Ahmed). He arrived in Harbin in 1914. He moved to Shanghai in 1932. From 09.07.1934, he became the founder and chairman of the board of the cultural society of the Volga-Ural Turkic-Tatars of Shanghai. He was also a delegate of the First Far Eastern Congress (Kurultay) of the Volga-Ural Turkic-Tatars from the

ering (Khanumlar Uyushmasy) was led by the wife of Imam Giniyatulla, Zahide.

#### **4) Racial stereotypes**

In the fourth part of the ethnographic essay, Okubo talks about different views on the phenotype of the Turkic peoples: among them were blondes with a European appearance and brunettes of a more traditional Turkic appearance. Harbin was a unique place because all of its citizens carried their own distinct traits, resulting in all phenotypes of the Turkic nation to be presented in one region. From Okubo's records, for example, the Sarts from Turkestan looked very similar to the Japanese. Bashkirs also looked similar to Asians, but taller and with a lesser presence of a yellow tint in the color of their skin. Tatars of Idel-Ural and Mishars, in turn, despite having an Asian component in their blood, shared more similarities in their appearance with North Europeans. Two distinctive types were distinguished among them: "sary" - the individuals with blond hair and "kara" - the individuals with black hair. Okubo came to the conclusion that the Idel-Ural Tatars were a mixed type of Asians and Europeans since they lived in the territory where both Asians and Europeans lived. Despite their European appearance, they differed from European people in their internal way of living and their unique perception of the world and traditions rooted in their rich history and culture. Okubo calls them "the eastern people" (東洋人).

#### **5) Turkic language**

In this section of the essay, Okubo writes about the system of Turkic languages. In his opinion, since there were a lot of dialects of the Turkic language and the difference between them was small, the Turkic individuals from different regions speaking different Turkic languages still were capable of understanding each other. Due to this unique quality of mutual understanding, the ideology of Turkism emerged naturally, uniting the entire Turkic-speaking people throughout various territories. Okubo believed that due to the unity of Turkic peoples, the study of Turkic

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Turkic-Tatar community of Shanghai. In 1949, he moved to Turkey.

languages and their culture was necessary from a political point of view. He noted that at the beginning of the twentieth century there was a recorded attempt to create a single language based on two Turkic dialects: the Tatar spoken in Kazan, Russia and Turkish, spoken in Istanbul, Turkey. Okubo conducted a grammatical analysis of those dialectical changes, providing a detailed overview of the Turkic language, highlighting various aspects of their linguistic system. His overview touched upon the topics of 1) pronunciation and intonation, 2) grammar, 3) common speech, 4) simplicity, and 5) alphabet.

### **6) Religion of Turkic-Tatars**

In the sixth part of the ethnographic essay, Okubo captures the religious life of the Harbin Turks. He writes that representatives of Islam from two different ethnic groups prevailed in Harbin. These were the Chinese Muslims and Turkic Muslims. Although they had a common religious foundation, they were ethnically different, which resulted in the differences in their daily social lives.

In this section of his essay, Okubo tells the history of the adoption of Islam by the Bulgars, who were the direct the ancestors of Tatars. He writes that officially, Islam became the state religion of the Volga Bulgaria on May 15, 922. He notes that particularly in honor of this event, the Harbin Tatars decided to build a new mosque in 1923, which again illustrated the desire of the Harbin Turkic-Tatars to express their continuity with the Russian Turks and their long historical and cultural background.

Okubo also briefly introduces the Japanese reader to the two main branches of Islam: Shiite and Sunni. The Turks in Harbin were Sunni. He also talks about other religions that are widespread among the Tatars. For example, there were Kryashen Tatars, who practiced Christianity because they were baptized in a certain period of Russian history. Okubo, additionally, explains the structure of Muslim communities called mahallas, Muslim rituals, and religious holidays. Okubo also talks about the characteristics of names. He notes that because Tatars are the citizens of Russia, their last names use the endings like “-ev,” “-ov” [-ef, of], while the

middle names use the ending “-vich” [witch], inherited by the influence of the Russian language.

### **7) Daily life of the Turkic-Tatar community in Harbin**

The last section of the ethnographic essay - “Everyday Life” - has sparked great interest in the historians who work on the Turkic-Tatar emigration. In this section, K. Okubo describes the daily life features of the Turkic-Tatar community of Harbin during the 1920s.

Turkic-Tatars of Harbin wore modest clothes of European cut. Elder men wore long shirts; younger generations wore shorter ones. The style of the shirts was similar to Russian folk-wear. On the streets and in public, they wore European hats, while at home and in the mosque, they wore national “skull-caps”, called “kepech” (for Mishars), and “kalyapush” (for the Kazan Tatars). On Fridays, religious tutors would wear a turban.

The clothes of Tatar women were not very different from the clothes other women wore at that time in Manchuria. Young girls did not leave fashion trends behind, also dressing in European clothes and hats. Popular headdresses that women wore at that time were scarfs (*yaulyk* in Tatar) and shawls. Girls sometimes also wore the Tatar national hat called *kalfak*.

The diet of Tatars was primarily based on bread, rice, vegetables, meat, butter, cheese, and milk. Being Muslim, they preferred lamb, beef, poultry, and rarely fish. All food had to be halal; no pork allowed. Alcoholic beverages were also prohibited. There was no place for alcohol in the homes of Tatars. They drank kvass, plain water, and tea. Okubo lists several dishes from the Tatar national cuisine: 1) *shurpa* (soup), 2) *pilmen* (dumplings), 3) *Pylaw* (pilaf of rice), 4) *belish* (meat and potato pie), 5) *peremyach* (meat pastry). Tea for the Turkic-Tatars of Harbin was the dish number one. Okubo repeatedly compares the customs of the Turkic Tatars - Kazan Tatars - with the Ottoman (Turkish) Turks. However, unlike to the Ottoman Turks, the Turkic Tatars of Harbin did not drink black tea or coffee.

In Tatar culture, tea is brewed in a samovar and always ready to be served from morning to evening. Tea is served with sugar, lemon, milk, a lot of sweets such as various pastry, bread, chuck-chak, halva, jam, cheese, butter, honey, and Montpensier candies. In Tatar households, food is served

three times a day. Tea-drinking starts at about 3 p.m. On holidays, guests are invited for a celebration and feast. Men and women eat separately during Muslim holidays. After dinner, concerts or performances are often held.

Civic and domestic architecture of Turkic-Tatars looked European. Homes were furnished with European furniture as well. In Harbin, Turkic-Tatars mainly occupied the Kitaiskaya and Artilleriyskaya streets, along with the area from the Pristan (Quay) to Nakhlovka. According to the Muslim tradition, in the mosque, Tatars sit on the floor, which is also similar to Japanese customs.

According to Okubo, the Tatars, in comparison to other citizens of Harbin, were less rarely involved in crimes. Okubo believes that this was due to the upbringing and the importance of family for the Tatars. They cherish their family, children, and relatives by always putting them first. Okubo calls their lifestyle "home life" (*katei seikatsu*). Being domestic and appreciative of your family is a Muslim tradition. Okubo cites the proverb "paradise under the feet of mothers" as an example of the attitude of the Turkic-Tatars towards their mothers, being pleasantly surprised by the relationships between mothers and children. Turkic-Tatar women are calm and quiet, yet they have equal marriage rights with men. In this sense, the lifestyle of Tatars is similar to Japanese traditions.

In this section of his essay, Okubo also describes Tatar cultural traditions. Harbin is a city full of art, and the Turkic-Tatars never miss to seize the opportunity to be involved. They love music, dance, and theater. Tatars have many beautiful and unusual songs; moreover, different Turkic-occupied regions had their own unique melodies. Okubo mentions several old songs such as "Kara Urman" (Dark Forest), "Taftilyau", "Ashkadar". He notices that the lyrics of most loved Tatar songs happened to be taken from the poetry of Tatar writer Gabdulla Tukay. The songs mainly have piano accompaniment.

Another modern tradition of the Turkic-Tatars is their interest in theatrical production. Mostly they performed the plays from the Russian repertoire. However, this year, on August 30th, at 9 p.m., the plays performed at the theater were works of Tatar playwrights. "Young People" written by Galimjan Ibragimov (Alim Jan Ibrahim) (two acts), and the work of



Abdullah called “Actor” (one-act), were presented. The performance was played by actor Husein Uteshov (Husei Uchishof) and his wife, along with Husain Abdyushev and another 10 young individuals. The performance ended at midnight. Then, the youth started a concert accompanied by dance.

At the end of his ethnographic essay, Okubo draws the following conclusion:

「私は随分長くハルビンのトルコ民族の生活と、その大きい背景とを書いてみた。彼等はどうしてこの極東にトルコ民族の世界を作っているのであるが、同じく東洋人として、アジア人として、我が日本人に対しては特に敬愛の念を持っている。彼等は一般的に見て、健全にして且生産的な民族である。しかも彼等は西方からこの極東に移ったものであるがために、最初からこの地方に住んでみた周囲の民族に比して種々の特徴と利益とを持っている。彼等も、己が民族の運命づけられている東西接觸の仲介者問布歴史的な使命を、この極東に於ても果すことが出来るであらう。故に将来機会を得て日本人とトルコ民族とが何かにつけて関係を持つやうな場合があれば、手近にみる彼等は必ずやその地方的の役割を動めることであらうと信じる」。

I have been writing for quite some time about the life of the Turkic people in Harbin and its great past. In the Far East, they have been trying to maintain the past greatness of the Turkic people. Also, as Eastern people, as Asian people, they have special respect and love towards us, the Japanese. Simply said, these are healthy and productive people. However, moving from the West to the Far East, they have different qualities and advantages compared to the people who have lived in this region from the very beginning. They follow their national destiny, being intermediaries between East and West. Here, in the Far East, they can fulfill this historical mission. Therefore, if the Japanese and Turkic peoples prolong the opportunity to interact with each other in the future, I believe, they [Turkic-Tatars] will be able to fulfill of a bigger, wider regional role.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Okubo Koji. “Harbin ni okeru toruko minzoku no seikatsu” (Life of the Turkic people in Harbin)// Touyou, 1924. № 12. pp. 45-87. ハルビンに於けるトルコ民族の生活、東洋12、大正13年10

## Conclusion

The ethnographic essay of the Japanese Turkologist Koji Okubo, "On the Life of the Turkic People in Harbin," written and published in 1924 in a Japanese journal in the Japanese language, is perhaps the first publication in the Japanese scientific world that speaks about the Turkic-Tatars of Russia as a whole and their community in Harbin. The topics that Okubo explores in this essay raise both ethnographic and historical interest. According to Okubo and his analysis of the Turkic-speaking peoples of the world and their peculiarities, as well as their comparison with each other and with other nations, including the Japanese, a positive conclusion of political cooperation between the Japanese and the Turkic-speaking peoples has been made. Moreover, in the end, Okubo concludes that in the future the Russian Turkic Tatars could be able to perform their inherent historical role of mediators on a regional scale, particularly in the Far East. Therefore, it can be argued that this essay prepared the Japanese reader to see and accept the Turkic-Tatar people as a possible political and regional ally; in other words, proposing the likelihood of their mutual relationship in the future.

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**Picture 1.** Picture of Koji Okubo. From a newspaper *Milli Bairak*. # 141 (42). 28 October 1938. Nippon Torek-Islam Institute.