

Research Project Report

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Re-Examining State Transformations in Historical Syria: Towards a New Paradigm of Area Studies

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Background and Significance of this Research

This research investigates the state transformations in Historical Syria, situated in one of the most unstable parts of the Middle East and also one of the most conflict-prone areas of contemporary international society. The scope of “Syria” here extends beyond its modern nation-states’ boundaries to encompass “Historical Syria,” which includes present-day Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, Iraq, and parts of Turkey. This region has long been shaped by complex political issues such as the Palestinian and Kurdish problems, the Gulf crisis and wars, and the Lebanese civil war.

Since the outbreak of the Syrian conflict in 2011, the region has witnessed developments that have fundamentally threatened the existence of the Syrian state, including the rise of the Islamic State (IS), and multiple interventions by neighboring and global powers. These events have resulted in mass displacement and the proliferation of transnational terrorism or global Jihad, posing global security concerns. As such, empirical research on “state transformation” within this Historical Syrian context has become both more urgent and socially relevant than ever before.

A key concept for understanding historical Syria is the persistent “imbalance between nation and people,” a condition that has underpinned much of the studies on Middle East politics. This research seeks to reevaluate this premise in light of recent state transformations initiated by conflicts, revolutions, and foreign interventions.

Objectives

This project aims to empirically clarify the mechanisms and causal factors behind the state transformations in Historical Syria since the 2010s by leveraging new analytical methods and data. We

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have examined whether the notion of discordance between nation and people remains valid in light of contemporary developments and empirical findings.

The project has three primary objectives:

1. To apply cutting-edge empirical methodologies to longstanding research themes in Middle Eastern studies, thereby uncovering causal effects and mechanisms.
2. To investigate the actual state transformations in Historical Syria—a topic often overlooked in both area studies and mainstream social sciences.
3. To propose a new paradigm for area studies that allows for comprehensive understanding of Middle Eastern regional political dynamism, incorporating causal inference frameworks.

Actual Activities

We have initiated comparative and empirical investigations into post-2010 state transformations across several polities in Historical Syria. This includes data collection from local communities, as well as the application of mixed methods that combine conventional area-based knowledge with recent causal inference techniques.

First, public opinion surveys were conducted multiple times in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Iraq, and Yemen, and experimental methods were used to obtain more accurate data. In Middle Eastern political environments essentially characterized by conflict and authoritarianism, people often find it difficult to express their honest opinions, particularly ones on politics and international relations. As a result, traditional public opinion survey data collected through direct questions has faced challenges in terms of the accuracy of responses. This research project overcame these challenges by employing the latest experimental methods, including list experiments, conjoint experiments, and natural experiments.

Second, with regard to quantitative text analysis, we developed a data collection and analysis program targeting local Arabic language materials. Specifically, in addition to downloading online news articles using machine learning, we collected over 10 million news articles from Dow Jones' Factiva database. This has enabled us to identify trends in discourse generated by large amounts of narratives that could not be identified through previous qualitative analysis, as well as their time-series changes.

In order to strengthen the research capabilities of young researchers and enhance their competitiveness in the labor market, we not only conducted various basic research activities (e.g., symposiums and workshops) but also promoted the sharing of data, methodologies, and theories for accurately analyzing the politics and society of the Middle East. As a result, over the course of three years, we were able to secure tenured positions at universities in Japan for three young researchers who worked for this project.

In addition, we have been working to promote the internationalization of research activities and outcomes, collaborating with the Centre for Middle East and Islamic Studies (CMEIS) at Ritsumeikan University to advance joint research, exchange young researchers, and present joint panels/sessions at international conferences with Middle East researchers from the CSS at the University of Jordan, SOAS at the University of London, Chung Hsing University in Taiwan, Shanghai International Studies

University in China and so on.

Result and Perspectives

The deterioration of the security situation in Gaza and neighboring countries in Historical Syria, due to the Gaza War that began in October 2023 during the grant period of this project, has significantly enhanced the social and academic value of this research. In contrast to popular narratives and perspectives that simplistically attribute the causes of conflict to religious differences or history itself, the findings of this research project have been able to present a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics of conflicts and state transformations through rigorous evidence-based analysis. In other words, conflicts and political rivalries in the Middle East are not fixed by primordial factors such as religion or ethnicity, but are structured by various actors' calculations and strategies for survival, and can change over time through events such as the outbreak of conflicts. This has the potential to overturn the static perceptions and discourses based on Orientalism that have long been problematic in understanding Middle Eastern conflicts.

By clarifying the mechanisms underlying state transformations in Historical Syria, this project aspires to contribute to the development of an “alternative area study” or “Area Studies 2.0” model—one that merges detailed local knowledge with generalizable analytical frameworks. This will enable a more nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between external intervention, internal fragmentation, and community-level resilience.

Furthermore, the research seeks to inform contemporary policy debates, particularly in peacebuilding theory. In contrast to liberal peacebuilding models that assume the restoration of Western-style statehood, we explore context-sensitive paths to peace based on local practices and institutions. This aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially Goal 16: “Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions.”

Project Members and Roles

Name	Affiliation	Position	Field of Expertise
Project Leader	Kota SUECHIKA	Professor, College of International Relations, Ritsumeikan University	Syrian and Lebanese Politics, Conflict Studies, Survey Experiments
Project Member	Takuro KIKKAWA	Professor, Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University	Jordanian Politics, Social Movement Studies
Project Member	Dai YAMAO	Associate Professor, Kyushu University	Iraqi Politics, Conflict Studies, Quantitative Text Analysis
Project Member	Kensuke YAMAMOTO	Lecturer, University of Shizuoka	Palestinian Politics, Cultural Anthropology
Project Member	Shun WATANABE	Visiting Research Fellow, Kyoto University / Senior Research Fellow, Institute of Energy Economics, Japan	Jordanian Politics, GIS Data Processing
Project Member	Marie SATO	Assistant Professor, University of Tsukuba	Syrian Politics, NGO and Civil Society Studies
Project Member	Fukiko IKEHATA	Associate Professor, Kinugasa Research Organization, Ritsumeikan University	Jordanian Politics, International Relations
Early-Career Researcher	Aoi MOCHIZUKI	Research Fellow, Asia-Japan Research Institute, Ritsumeikan University ➡ Komatsu University	Jordanian and Syrian Politics, Refugee Studies
Early-Career Researcher	Midori KIRIHARA	Research Fellow, Asia-Japan Research Institute, Ritsumeikan University ➡ Kyoto Prefectural University	Islamic Thought, Food Culture and Halal Studies
Early-Career Researcher	Mika IGARASHI	Research Fellow, Asia-Japan Research Institute, Ritsumeikan University ➡ University of Toyama	Sociology, International Relations, International Law
Graduate Student	Yusaku YONEDA	Doctoral Program, Graduate School of International Relations	Egyptian and Syrian Politics, Islamic Studies
Graduate Student	Hitomi TAKAHASHI	Master's Program, Graduate School of International Relations	Egyptian Politics, Social Movement Studies

Selected List of Publications

Books

- 望月葵 (2023) 『グローバル課題としての難民再定住：異国にわたったシリア難民の帰属と生存基盤から考える』, ナカニシヤ出版, 252p.
- 末近浩太・松尾昌樹編 (2024) 『中東を学ぶ人のために』, 世界思想社, 304p.

Journal Papers

1. 末近浩太・山尾大 (2022) 「「アラブの春」後のリビアにおける国家再建と民主化：2019 年実施の世論

- 調査の結果から」,『日本中東学会年報』,日本中東学会,38 巻 I 号, pp.31–60.
2. 佐藤麻理絵 (2022)「滞日ムスリムのネットワークとトルコを拠点とするシリア人 NGO の連携—大塚モスク・JIT を起点とするシリア難民支援」,『移民政策研究』,移民政策学会,14 号, pp.91–106.
 3. Takuro Kikkawa. 2022. Japan's Humanitarian Aid to Jordan and the Transformation of Aid Identities and Practices in New Security Challenges. *Prosperitas*, 9(1-2), 5, Budapest Business School, https://doi.org/10.31570/prosp_2022_0018
 4. Marie Sato. 2022. Refugee Settlement and Heat in Arid Regions: The Case of Jordan. *Journal for Arid Land Studies*, 32(S), pp.289–293.
 5. 渡邊駿 (2022)「現代ヨルダン権威主義体制におけるクライエンテリズムの頑強性：2010 年代の選挙制度改革の分析から」,『日本比較政治学会年報』,第 24 号, pp.151–174.
 6. 千坂知世・山尾大・末近浩太 (2023)「イスラーム革命防衛隊の海外派兵をめぐるイラン国民の認識：2021 年サーベイ実験の結果から」,『アジア経済』,第 64 巻第 1 号, pp.2–26.
 7. ハシヤン・アンマール・桐原翠 (2023)「イスラームは、豚肉と飲酒を禁じて何を得たか：日本におけるハラール経済研究の視座と展望」,『立命館アジア・日本研究学術年報』,第 4 号, pp.96–101.
 8. 末近浩太・山尾大 (2023)「紛争後の非リベラルな国家建設を市民はどのように認識するのか：2021 年シリア世論調査結果の分析から」,『日本比較政治学会年報』,第 25 号, pp.53–80.
 9. Kota Suechika. 2023. Measuring 'State-Diffusion' in Post-Conflict Authoritarian Syria: Evidence from the 2021 Public Opinion Survey. *Mediterranean Politics*, (online first).
 10. Yusaku Yoneda. 2024. Transformation of Salafist Political Attitudes during the “Arab Spring” Period: “Democracy” and “Parliamentary Politics” for Egypt's *al-Da'wa al-Salafiya*. 『イスラーム世界研究』,17 巻, pp. 25–45.
 11. 木下博子・山尾大 (2024)「Twitter からみるイラク人民動員隊に対する認識の変化」『日本中東学会年報』,39 巻 2 号, pp.1–31.
 12. 山本健介 (2024)「聖域をめぐるパレスチナ人の怒り：「アクサーの大洪水」を生んだもの」『現代思想（特集＝パレスチナから問う）』,青土社,52 巻 2 号, pp.41–49.
 13. 渡邊駿 (2024)「人工衛星で人間活動を測定する——夜間光画像を利用したラマダーンの分析」須永恵美子・熊倉和歌子（編）『イスラーム・デジタル人文学』,人文書院, pp.236–255.
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 17. Eileen Joan Magero, Koichi Unami, Osama Mohawesh, Marie Sato. 2024. Resource budget model with Duffing oscillator for dynamics of synchronized biennial-bearing olives in the Levant. *Journal of Theoretical Biology*, Volume 595, 9p.
 18. 山尾大 (2025)「ポスト紛争国におけるサービスの提供者と不安定化——計量テキスト分析からみる政府と人々の認識の乖離と抗議行動の拡大」,『日本比較政治学会年報』,第 26 号, pp.159–189.

Selected list of Research Funding/Grant

1. 末近浩太（代表）,吉川卓郎,山尾大,渡邊駿,山本健介（分担者）科研費〔基盤 A〕：『歴史的シリアにおける国家変容の研究：混合的手法による新たな中東地域研究の開発』（2023-2027）
2. 末近浩太（代表）,吉川卓郎,山尾大,渡邊駿,佐藤麻理絵,池端路子（分担者）科研費〔国際共同研究加速基金（国際共同研究強化(B)）〕：『危機下の東アラブ諸国における社会的レジリエンスの実証研究：ヨルダンの事例から』（2022-2024）
3. 山尾大（代表）科研費〔基盤 B〕：『中東における社会運動の実証研究：定性的・定量的研究の新たな有機的統合を通して』（2022-2025）

4. 山本健介（代表）科研費〔若手研究〕：『イスラエル政治の右傾化とパレスチナ人若者勢力の運動：エルサレム問題の事例分析から』（2022-2026）
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7. 佐藤麻理絵（代表）科研費〔若手研究〕：『現代中東における難民主導型組織の展開とレジリエンスをめぐる実証的研究』（2023-2025）
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10. 池端路子 2025 年度稲盛研究助成：『イスラーム的価値をめぐる競合と合意の国際政治：イスラーム協力機構を舞台としたイラン外交の事例から』（2025-2026）
11. 五十嵐美華（代表）科研費〔若手研究〕：『先端科学・技術ガバナンスにおける地域機構の機能：アフリカ連合の宇宙政策を事例に』（2025-28）
12. 米田優作（代表）科研費〔特別研究員奨励費〕：『中東地域におけるイスラームの保守転回と政治介入：サラフィー主義ネットワークの研究』（2022-2024）

