BETWEEN ORIENTALISM AND ISLAM: SHORTCOMINGS OF TOSHIHIKO IZUTSU

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ABSTRACT

Toshihiko Izutsu was one of the most important and salient figures who provided the area of Islamic Studies with new perspectives. He positively tried to draw the complete picture of Islam, which has been a difficult task for any scholar from its birth till today. There is no doubt that Izutsu’s written legacy has been a highly valuable contribution of Japanese effort to Islamic Studies. Izutsu embarked upon an important project trying to draw a thorough picture of Islam, which is evidently overwhelming and exhausting for one person to undertake.

However, he was not all that familiar with secondary and subsidiary Islamic literature that has been so far intrinsic to the cultures and languages of Muslim societies. In addition, another critic is that he did not consult a faith-based approach in his Islamic studies. Lacking this advantage, Izutsu’s written legacy was stained with a number of errors, unfamiliar to Muslim consciousness and maybe even unacceptable. For instance, it can be strongly argued that Izutsu was incorrect in his general perception regarding the Prophet’s marriage with Zaynab and the observation that the Prophet was a pagan before he received his prophethood.

Thus, it could be argued that with all these shortcomings, Izutsu, definitively can and should be placed within the category of being an Orientalist. However, considering the fact that most Orientalists seem to resemble liberal Muslim scholars, special importance should be assigned to Izutsu because of his considerably objective endeavor that he employed within Islamic Studies.

Key words: Toshihiko Izutsu, Orientalism, Islamic Studies

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Introduction

Knowing that every dictionary should be rewritten from the start when it was thought to have come to an end, the term Orientalism has been a much controversial issue over the last decades. Need to be rewritten, it was first a Western reaction in the face of Eastern scientific, economic and political advancement. However, there is no question that this enormous effort has an overall quality of being beneficiary both to the West and the East.

One should note that Orientalism has included Islamic Studies from the beginning since it can simply be defined as an effort of studying the languages, cultures and histories of the Eastern nations especially those of the Middle East. Every Orientalist was supposed to deal with Islamic Studies which, from a Western perspective, can also be seen as the Muslim (or Islamic) social sciences. The history of Islamic Studies in the West is unequivocally connected with the tradition of Orientalism. However, the realm of the Islamic Studies in the Western academic circles has so far produced at least some extraordinarily proficient figures who shared nothing with the explicit or implicit concerns and purposes of Orientalism when it first came out in its robust form. And given the title of this paper, Toshihiko Izutsu, a talented Japanese professor of Islamic Studies with an excellent command on both Arabic and English, was one of those figures whose works were so successful that they were employed abundantly in Islamic Studies circles both in the Western and non-Western world. Being the first Japanese to write on Islam in a Western language, Toshihiko Izutsu, who considered himself a semanticist first and an Arabist or Islamist second, provided a great deal of contribution to the overall field of Islamic Studies.

Toshihiko Izutsu mainly focused on Qur’anic Studies and in doing so he tried to come up with a complete picture of the Qur’an and thus that of Islam. This is an overwhelming endeavor when it is understood that majority of the scholars of Islam have been trying to attempt this since the time Islam commenced as a religion. It is also striking to find out that Izutsu, who was from Japan evidently with no Orientalist tradition, did a good job in trying to depict a complete picture of Islam. In other words, “one may perhaps be more surprised to find a Japanese scholar writing on Islamic subjects than to find that he does it well.”1 In terms of his Qur’anic studies that reached a pinnacle point in his God and Man, the core concept of Izutsu’s endeavor in trying to depict the overall picture of Islam can be summarized as the following: he “conducted a semantic analysis of the key terms of what he called the Qur’anic and conceptual Weltanschauung, measuring the semantic and conceptual fields of Qur’anic

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Toshihiko Izutsu was a prominent figure in the field of Islamic Studies as it is conducted in the West. It could be asserted that in Islamic studies, he did not employ a faith-based approach; instead, generally speaking, he used a social scientific approach. The question that is raised from this is that can Toshihiko Izutsu be considered among the main figures of the Orientalist tradition within Islamic Studies? In other words, in order to grasp an overall evaluation of Izutsu’s corpus and legacy, the answer to the question “where does he stand in terms of Orientalist tradition?” is crucially important. Izutsu, evidently, the most prominent figure of Japanese contribution to Islamic Studies, can not solely be placed in the Orientalist tradition because not only was his approach far from being a secular affair, his conclusions were so subtle that one can not get the impression that he presupposed Islam as a false religion, as it mostly was in the Orientalist tradition. On the other hand, considering the fact that his books were accepted and heavily used in Islamic communities all over the Muslim world, he was an exceptional phenomenon among the scholars studying Islam in the West. Moreover, also knowing that literature produced by scholars who belonged to Orientalist tradition has been beneficial to Muslim communities and thus “the divisions between Muslim and non-Muslim study are not as distinct as they once were,” a need to come up with a new classification to define scholars of Islam has arisen. Impressed by the impact by Izutsu’s legacy, I propose a general classification: scholarship based on Islamic methodology and scholarship based on social scientific methodology or scholarship based on faith and scholarship based on social scientific approach as opposed to Muslim and non-Muslim study or non-Orientalist and Orientalist study. If the need for a new classification such as the one I proposed is felt compellingly by Muslim communities around the world, one could state that Toshihiko Izutsu was the one who started it all.

From Orientalism to Islamic Studies

To classify the Western or non-Muslim scholars of Islam as Orientalist and non-Orientalist would be futile and not useful at all today. Although one might say that the emergence of Orientalism was out of malice and feelings of vengeance, the whole enterprise took in time, a different road that for the most part had an intrinsic value in itself.  

4 The following book is pretty much an inclusive account on both positive and negative aspects of the tradition of Orientalism from a Muslim scholar’s perspective: Hamdi Zakzuk, Oryantalizm, translated from Arabic into Turkish by Abdülaziz Hatip, (İzmir, Turkey: İşık Yayınları, 1993).
There are of course fierce debates about the purposes of Orientalism and what the whole tradition represents. First of all, it must be stated that “the Orientalist enterprise of Qur’anic studies” which is the hard core of Islamic Studies, “whatever its other merits and services, was a project born of spite, bred in frustration and nourished by vengeance.”\(^5\) In other words, the early Orientalist attitude in Europe where it first emerged towards Islam “was generally confrontational, and... a natural tendency in the face of a rival and presumed false religion was to examine its scripture.”\(^6\) However, the study of Islam in both Europe and North America, not only received a good deal of scholarly attention and now even some popularity, it also produced some outstanding works beneficial to both Muslims and non-Muslims around the globe. In this context, again, it suffices to refer only to the whole corpus and legacy of Toshihiko Izutsu, considering the fact that he wrote in English and produced most of his works in the West.

When talking about the nature of Orientalism questioning whether it is plausible to espouse a classification as Orientalist and non-Orientalist scholar of Islam, it is almost imperative now to mention the name Edward Said and his much famous, as well as controversial, book *Orientalism.*\(^7\) The whole book which was first published in 1978 was “a wide-ranging attack on the entire tradition of writing about the Middle East produced by scholars, travelers, and diplomats in Britain and France from the late eighteenth into the twentieth centuries.”\(^8\) Although the book gained a huge success becoming an academic best-seller, it actually had two major flaws. The book ignored the fact that “first, Germany, Austria, and Hungary were the major centers of scholarship concerning the Middle East in early modern Europe”\(^9\) simply because these countries do not represent imperial powers anymore. Secondly, “Said jumbled together in his book professional scholars of the region who possessed a mastery of its languages and culture and who had often lived there for some time with mere travelers, novelists, and diplomats who (with an occasional exception among the last named) seldom had the sort of mastery of philology characteristic of the academics.”\(^10\) In other words, Said’s *Orientalism* lacked the big picture of Orientalist tradition and made no differentiation between proficient and ineffectual Orientalists.

When talking about the tradition of Orientalism one should not overlook the main reason that gave rise to its birth in the first place. It was first a Christian

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9 Ibid, p. 509.
10 Ibid.
reaction in the face of Muslim advancement in Europe. Although “the classical Western form of Orientalism is an offshoot of the main tradition of European academic scholarship, which has grown up in the great universities of Europe in the Middle Ages,” its first emergence was out of fear of assimilation by the Muslim world. Through Orientalist effort the West also tried to gain some of the Muslim population back to Christianity. The prominent professor of Turkish Studies, Bernard Lewis, gives an illuminating account concerning the reasons behind the emergence of Orientalism and its preliminary goals:

“For almost a thousand years, from the first Moorish landing in Spain to the second Turkish siege of Vienna [1683], Europe was under constant threat from Islam. In the early centuries it was a double threat—not only of invasion and conquest, but also of conversion and assimilation. All but the easternmost provinces of the Islamic realm had been taken from Christian rulers, and the vast majority of the first Muslims west of Iran and Arabia were converts from Christianity. North Africa, Egypt, Syria, even Persian-ruled Iraq, had been Christian countries, in which Christianity was older and more deeply rooted than in most of Europe. Their loss was sorely felt and heightened the fear that a similar fate was in store for Europe. In Spain and Sicily, Muslim faith and Arab culture exercised a powerful attraction, and even those who remained faithful to the Christian religion often adopted the Arabic language.

It was this fear, more than any other single factor, which led to the beginnings of Arabic scholarship in Europe, to the discipline which centuries later came to be known as Orientalism. In the monasteries of Western Europe studious monks learned Arabic, translated the Qur’an, and studied other Muslim texts, with a double purpose—first, the immediate aim of saving Christian souls from conversion to Islam and, second, the more distant hope of converting Muslims to Christianity. It took some centuries before they decided that the first was no longer necessary and that the second was impossible.”

As is seen, though colored with the fear of assimilation by the Muslims, the whole enterprise of Orientalism did not emerge out of good intentions toward Muslims. Nevertheless, one cannot ignore some of the positive aspects and outcomes of Orientalism. First of all, aside from the new generation of Orientalist scholars, a considerable portion of whom are even Muslim, they cannot be put and evaluated under one single category in terms of the characteristic and the objective value of the work they produced. Not all of them were prejudiced against Islam and Muslim societies. In addition, some of them may also be even evaluated as being half objective and half subjective. What ignited the whole enterprise was ignorance about and prejudice against Islam; however, for the most part, the former turned in time into knowledge or at least

11 Bernard Lewis, Islam in History: Ideas, People, and Events in the Middle East (Peru, Illinois: Open Court, 2002), p. 49.
information about Islam and the latter vanished or at least were modified largely.

Since all the Western scholars of Islam cannot be evaluated under the single category of Orientalism, Hamdi Zakzuk, an Egyptian professor who is very articulate about the Western culture and the works of Orientalists, divides them into three groups. According to Zakzuk, most of them are Christian zealots searching opportunities to turn the whole enterprise into a complete attack against Islam. A second group would be those who are objective scholars and condemn their colleagues who are not. A third group would be those who are only ‘half objective’.

The search into the concept of Orientalism all comes down to this: Even though Orientalism emerged out of spite, fear, prejudice and as an enterprise of counter attack against Islam, both Muslims and non-Muslims benefited from it greatly. There are some monumental works produced by scholars of the same tradition, such as GAL (Geschichte des Arabichen Litterature) by a German Orientalist, Carl Brockelmann, Encyclopedia of Islam and Concordance (Al-Mucamu’l-Mufahras Li Alfazi’l-Hadisi’n-Nebevi), just to mention a few. Besides, the tradition of Orientalism, if nothing else, helped to preserve some of the Islamic literature.

To make this point more clear, it suffices to mention how, for instance, Philosopher Roger Scruton approaches the whole issue of Orientalism. According to Scruton, apologists of Islam invite people “to study the vital role played by the Muslim philosophers of the Middle Ages in the transmission of classical thought.” And then he asks and gives a quick answer: “But what has happened to the great and disputatious culture? Where, for example, will you find printed copies of the [Muslim] philosophers? In American university libraries, certainly.” In short, as Scruton who also says that “unlike the West, the Muslim world is crucially indifferent to the great achievements of Islamic civilization” implied, Orientalism has also a positive aspect stemming from the fact that it dealt with the vast Islamic literature to the benefit of everyone. Thus coining the term ‘Orientalism’ to denote a negative meaning and to employ a classification as Orientalist and non-Orientalist scholar, the former being negative and the latter being positive, would be futile. One should also keep in mind that there are a lot of potent and objective Western scholars of Islam who may be readily calling themselves Orientalist.

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13 See: Zakzuk, Oryantalizm, p. 65.
15 Ibid, p. 11. (Brackets are mine).
16 Ibid.
A New Classification

The whole effort of Orientalism cannot be totally demonized and there is a need, as there always will be, to classify scholars of Islam around the globe. In this context, the following classification would be helpful: social scientific and faith-based approach as opposed to Orientalist and non-Orientalist approach. In terms of this new classification, Toshihiko Izutsu can be easily defined as a scholar who employed a social scientific approach in his Islamic studies.

These classifications seems to be useful since there will always be non-Muslim scholars of Islam and they cannot be forced to have a faith-based approach. The question that arises at this point is ‘how a person who does not believe that Islam is a true religion can study it claiming or being presumed to be able to grasp the subtle theological meanings and even occurrences that it presents?’ The answer to this question can be identical to that of Psychiatrist Thomas Szasz. A professor of psychiatry who does not believe in mental illness when asked how he could have become a professor of psychiatry, stated quite simply:

“Hearing me say that I don’t believe in mental illness, people invariably ask: ‘How, then, can you be a professor of psychiatry?’ My answer: ‘The same way that a person who does not believe in God can be a professor of religion. Such a person studies the history of various religions and their particular claims and rules; and writes about his own reflections on all this. That is what I do with “mental illness.”’

However, a scholar who does not believe Islam as a true religion might often make grave errors. There is no doubt that the ratio of errors would extremely rise when or if that scholar is an atheist or even an agnostic. When studying a religious text or the whole tradition of a religion one should keep in mind that the text in focus is something that is ‘believed’ to be the word of God. There is a subtle notion there that the main text of a religion cannot be studied as an ordinary one, i.e., it cannot be studied as a text written or ‘believed’ to be written by human beings. If the scholar does not believe that the text being studied is not the word of God then at least he/she should act as if believing, i.e., he/she should espouse a phenomenological approach. This kind of lack of quality might put a scholar of Islam who uses the social scientific approach in the category of early Orientalists most of whom were Christian zealots and did not believe Islam as a true religion and thus were doomed to have grave errors in their interpretations of the phenomenon of Islam. Using an analogy, let us give an example of how the judgment we have just reached might be the case. Jean-

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Paul Sartre’s famous dictum that “To read a book is to rewrite it”\(^{18}\) is valid for all kinds of books except one: the one believed to be the word of God. If the text in focus is, for instance, Qur’an, the dictum cannot be useful or functional in whatever context it is used; it can only be functional when altered accordingly. For example, the dictum can be used as the following: to read a book written by a human being is to rewrite it; but to read the noble Qur’an is an effort to have the same experience that the Prophet of Islam had.

While having this flaw, the social scientific approach is still presumed as being able to be unbiased to the religious tradition studied, whereas the faith-based approach is associated with not being able to be impartial to other religious traditions. The first kind of flaw makes a scholar with a social scientific approach less objective and more like a prejudiced Orientalist. On the other hand, the second kind of flaw makes a scholar of Islam more like an apologist of Islam.

Focusing on the overarching inquiry of this essay, we find two brazen mistakes in the corpus of Toshihiko Izutsu that have the potential to make him look like a prejudiced Orientalist whose main concern is to demonize Islam and pave the way for some kind of colonialism.

Two critical Mistakes in Izutsu’s Corpus

When we look at the corpus of Toshihiko Izutsu, who espoused a social scientific approach in his Islamic studies, we find two—but only two—grave mistakes that make him appear like a prejudiced Orientalist. But it must be immediately said that these two mistakes, alongside with his lack of objectivity toward Islam as a true religion, might have stemmed from the fact that it is extremely difficult to meet the stipulation of competency that the effort of depicting the whole picture of Islam focusing on its essential texts requires. Simply, it is absolutely impossible for one scholar to go through all of the secondary Islamic literature aimed at explaining and exploring the basic texts of Islam, Qur’an and the sound (sahih) corpus of hadith. Besides, that Toshihiko Izutsu was not born into an Islamic culture and thus he was not all the familiar with the oral Islamic literature functional to some degree in understanding the basic texts of Islam, might also be taken into account.

Izutsu’s first error is associated with whether the Prophet of Islam was a pagan before receiving prophethood. In exploring the Qur’anic classification of people, Izutsu mentioned Al-i Imran 3:20, and said the following:

“...the context itself makes it clear that, in this verse, ‘those to whom the Book has been given’ refers to the Jews and the Christians, while by ummiyûn the idolatrous Arabs are meant.”

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It is important to notice that the pagan Arabs, before the advent of Islam are called here, as in many other places, ummiyyûn (‘non-Scripture people’). Properly speaking, they are not yet Kâfirs (kuffâr or kâfirûn), because as yet they have never been admonished to open their eyes to the marvelous work of God. Real Kâfirs are those who consciously show the most determined opposition to the Divine scheme, after the Revelation has made the truth clear to them. The Prophet himself was a pagan, an erring man (dâll), before he began to receive Revelation.”¹⁹

In a footnote put on the expression “an erring man (dâll)”, Izutsu also mentioned the seventh verse of the ninetieth Qur’anic chapter (sure) Duha, of which his translation is this: “(God) found thee erring (away from the right path) and guided thee.”²⁰ He mentioned this verse as supporting evidence that the Prophet of Islam was a pagan before he was granted prophethood. Here, Izutsu’s discursive thinking seems to have worked actually like this:

A: “The Qur’an divides the whole mankind before the advent of Islam into two major categories: (1) the People of Scripture and (2) those to whom the Book has not been given, people with no Scripture (ummiyyûn).”²¹

B: People with no Scripture were all pagans.

C: The Prophet himself was one of those people with no Scripture (an ummiyy).

D: The Qur’an also affirms that the Prophet was ‘away from the right path’ (as the literal or the first meaning of the word dall) meaning that he was an erring man before his experience of prophethood.

E: An erring man in this context could only mean one of those people with no Scripture as opposed to one of those people with Scripture.

F: Hence, the Prophet, as the noble Qur’an affirms, was a pagan.

The unfavorable characteristic of this way of thinking is obvious. It should be noted that being an ummiyy does not necessarily mean being a pagan. It is very well known that, however small, there was a group of people in the Meccan society who were not pagans at all. They were neither Jewish nor Christian but hanif (pl. hunafa), people who unify God or people who believe that there is only one God. The Prophet of Islam was one of those people and thus was not a pagan at all before he received prophethood. It should also be noted that the Qur’anic term ummiyy does not necessarily mean pagan; any hanif or muwahhid who does not worship idols could also be called an ummiyy meaning that he or she is not Jewish or Christian. On the other hand, the seventh revelation of the chapter Duha²² does not mean that the Prophet of Islam was a

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²¹ Ibid, p. 80.
pagan: being a *dall* is not identical with being a pagan.²³ The Prophet lived among people who were idolatrous before he received prophethood but he himself was not a pagan. Based on this verse, however, it is perfectly possible to come to the idea that the Prophet did not know about the things that could only be known through revelation. Az-Zamakshari, one of the prominent commentators of the noble Qur’an, said: “Those who said that the Prophet was living along with his society for forty years... If they meant that he was like them in that he was void of the sciences that could only be known through revelation, that’s right. On the other hand, if they mean that he had been on his society’s religion, that’s untrue and unacceptable, God forbid... the prophets are supposed to be before and after they receive prophethood away from big or small sins that are repugnant. Denial (*kufr*) and ignorance (*jahiliyya*) has nothing to do with the Creator.²⁴

That the Prophet was not a pagan before Islam, on the contrary, he was on a monotheistic belief of God is also the focal point in the account of another prominent commentator, Alauddin Ali b. Muhammad al-Bagdadi (Khazin):

“Those who say that the Prophet (puh) was before prophethood on his society’s religion and then Allah put him in the right path that is Islam are not considered credential. Because our prophet (puh) and all the prophets before him lived on tawhid (the belief that God is one) and iman (belief of God) before and after they received prophethood. And again they were spared of ignorance of God’s unity and divine attributions. In that respect, the fact that his pagan society (Quraysh) used every slander but the sin of paganism in trying to stain him is just another evidence in this case.²⁵

As shown in the account above, one should take into account, if nothing else, the fact that the Prophet’s pagan society did not blame him for an ostensible paganism nor did they even bring it up to make the point that he himself was a pagan too. Izutsu failed to take that into account. Besides, nowhere in the Qur’an and hadith is there any statement supporting the claim that the Prophet was a pagan before Islam. Consequently, the fact that Izutsu took refuge in a rough conclusion in this respect was a grave mistake.

²³ The renowned scholar of the Qur’an, Ragib Al-Isfahani, the predecessor—one might say—of Izutsu says that “it is appropriate to use the word *dalla* for people who made any mistakes. For that reason the word *dalal* was attributed to both Prophets and infidels (*kafirs*), though there is a huge difference between these two *dalals.*” See: Ragib Al-Isfahani, *Mufradat-i Alfaz-i Qur’an*, annotated by Safvan Adnan Davudi, (Dimashq: Daru’l-Kalam, 1997), p. 510.


The second grave mistake that Izutsu made probably not out of spite but because of the tiring difficulty to meet the overwhelming task of dealing with the vast Islamic literature including its secondary sources is his incorrect, unverifiable, and unfavorable reference to the Prophet’s marriage with Zaynab. In the context of explaining the word *khashiya*, Izutsu said the following:

“In so far as the Qur’anic Arabic is concerned, the verb *khashiya* almost invariably takes God as its object. Sometimes, however, the ‘fear’ happens to go in the wrong direction. And then it is Man, not God, that is the object of the verb. The following passage is of particular interest in that it emphasizes explicitly that the proper object of *khashyah*, should be God and not Man. The reference is to the occasion when the Prophet married Zaynab. Zaynab was the beloved wife of Zayd, the Prophet’s freedman and adopted son, one of the most loyal of all the early Muslims. One day, in Zayd’s absence, Muhammad saw Zaynab and visibly attracted by her superb beauty. She told her husband the impression she had made on the Prophet. Upon this, Zayd decided to divorce her so that Muhammad might marry her. Muhammad hesitated to accept this offer, because he was apprehensive of the scandal it would raise among the believers if it became known.

Thou [Muhammad] vast [when thou didst decline the offer] hiding in thy heart that which God was to bring to light [i.e. the desire to marry Zaynab]; thou didst fear (*takhsa*) men when it was rather God that thou shouldst fear. (xxxiii, 37) [Ahzab 33: 37].”  

As seen from the excerpt above, Izutsu’s account concerning the Prophet’s marriage with his aunt’s daughter, Zaynab, is based on a fabricated story that could only be inferred by prejudiced Orientalist from what really happened. Izutsu failed to mention a couple of things that are fundamental to the story. First of all, Izutsu did not mention that because Zaynab was his aunt’s daughter he always saw her since she was a little girl, not to mention that women did not avoid the Prophet. Second of all, Izutsu failed to mention that since Zayd was the Prophet’s adopted son, he was the one who mediated for him to marry Zaynab. In other words, if Zayd’s marriage with Zaynab was possible, it was only through the help of the Prophet. Third of all and most importantly, Izutsu failed to mention that since Zayd was the Prophet’s adopted son the whole sequel of events leading to the Prophet’s marriage with Zaynab was actually aimed at abolishing an ongoing pre-Islamic tradition that no man can marry a woman that his adopted son divorced. At the same time the development of these events ending in the Prophet’s marriage with Zaynab was likewise aimed at abolishing the phenomenon of adoption as a pre-Islamic institution. As Alauddin Ali b. Muhammad elaborately said: “Allah made it

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27 See Alauddin Ali b. Muhammad (Khazin), *Lubabu’t-Tawil fi Maani’t-Tanzil*, vol. V, p. 120.
possible that Zayd divorced his wife and the Prophet married her in order to abolish the tradition of adoption..."\(^{28}\)

Consequently, it is clear that Izutsu’s account regarding the Prophet’s marriage with Zaynab is contradicting with what actually happened. In other words, Izutsu overlooked the fundamental aspect of the story that could not in any way be ignored by a scholar of faith-based orientation. When reading the whole verse of which Izutsu mentioned only the first part, it becomes evident that the divine purpose in the process of the Prophet’s marriage with Zaynab was to abolish the adoption as a pre-Islamic institution: “And when thou saidst unto him on whom Allah hath conferred favour and thou hast conferred favour: Keep thy wife to thyself, and fear Allah. And thou didst hide in thy mind that which Allah was to bring to light, and thou didst fear mankind whereas Allah had a better right that thou shouldst fear Him. So when Zayd had performed the necessary formality (of divorce) from her, We gave her unto thee in marriage, so that (henceforth) there may be no sin for believers in respect of wives of their adopted sons, when the latter have performed the necessary formality (of release) from them. The commandment of Allah must be fulfilled.”\(^{29}\)

Without going further into the story, it suffices to say that Izutsu made another grave mistake in his account regarding the Prophet’s marriage with Zaynab. In other words, Izutsu gave an account in this case which is identical to the kind of account that could only be described as “slander of some unknown narrators.”\(^{30}\) This account tends to make him look like a prejudiced Orientalist. In fact, one should expect from an objective scholar of Islamic Studies to cover all the aspects of the story for the sake of not jumping to unrelated conclusions or at least not to leave out the main-stream dimensions of the story as known in the Islamic tradition. Because no one “can find amongst the words narrated from the early scholars of Islam the context of the tafsir of this verse [Al-Ahzab 33: 37] or in any narration that is attributed to the Prophet, or Zayd or Zaynab or anyone –man or woman– from the companions of the Prophet. All the narration regarding this case [concluding that the Prophet married Zaynab simply because he saw and liked her and thus wanted to marry her] was nothing but fabricated stories, news, and tittle-tattle.”\(^{31}\)

**Conclusion**

When evaluating the case of Toshihiko Izutsu, so far the greatest Japanese scholar of Islamic and –particularly– Qur’anic Studies, one is

\(^{28}\) Ibid, vol. V, p. 120-1.


\(^{31}\) Ibid, vol. XI, p. 35. (Brackets are mine).
bewildered about how to place him in terms of Islamic Studies tradition. Just because he was not a Westerner in the classical sense, though he spent most of his academic life in the West, he does not fit in the classical category of Western Orientalists. Moreover, his corpus and overall legacy that he left behind has an intrinsic value to it: with his excellent command on Arabic, he focused on the most basic Islamic text, Qur’an, and tried to get a general picture of it through semantics. In other words, he did an outstanding job and left a legacy genuinely different from and generally unstained with prejudices of the Orientalist tradition.

Consequently, the case of Toshihiko Izutsu brings forth questions about whether the classification of Orientalist and non-Orientalist is useful anymore. It appears that rather than that classification, a new one as ‘scholars of Islam using social scientific approach and scholars of Islam using faith-based approach’ is more realistic, useful and objective. However, this new classification has its flaws too. Scholars of social scientific approach have the peril of leaning on the prejudices of Orientalism. On the other hand, scholars of faith-based approach might fall to a point where they look more like apologists of Islam rather than objective scholars.

Nevertheless, any scholar of this or that side of this classification can benefit from the other approach. While a scholar of faith-based approach can avoid being an apologist of Islam, any scholar of social scientific approach can grasp the true sense of how the companions of the Prophet or Muslim scholars over the centuries perceived the Revelation.

Toshihiko Izutsu was not an Orientalist in the now familiar sense of the term; rather, given that he was of Japanese descent, he was a unique and dedicated scholar of Islam who used the social scientific approach in his studies. However, considering the two severe mistakes in his corpus, it is precisely accurate that he also lacked the advantage of a scholar who directly uses –or is all familiar– with the faith-based approach.

ÖZET
İslam ile Oryantalizm Arasında: Toshihiko Izutsu’nun Kusurları

Toshihiko Izutsu İslam bilimsel çalışma alanına yeni bakış açıları kazandıran çok önemli ve seçkin simalardan biridir. Izutsu İslamın bütüncül bir resmini çıkarmaya çalıştığını ki, bu çaba İslamın doğusundan günümüze dek son derece zarar verdi. Öte yandan, Toshihiko Izutsu’nun yazılı mirası İslam araştırmaları alanına en başat Japon katkıını teşkil eden bu çabasında sarsılmazlık, yani Kur’an ve hadis...
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Sonuç olarak, Izutsu, maruz kaldığı bütün kusurlar dikkate alındığında mutlak surette Oryantalist kategorisinde değerlendirilmelidir. Bununla beraber, çoğu oryantalıstin muhafazakar olmayan Müslüman bilgินlere benzeme yönünü dikkate alırsak, İslambilim çalışmalarında istihdam ettiği üst düzey nesnel çabadan ötürü İzutsu'ya özel önem atfedilmelidir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Toshihiko Izutsu, Oryantalizm, İslamiyat