

Title	<Article>Taha al-Hashimi and the Origins of the Iraqi Elite's Approach to Japan
Author(s)	Mahmoud, al-Qaysi
Citation	イスラーム世界研究 : Kyoto Bulletin of Islamic Area Studies (2016), 9: 79-96
Issue Date	2016-03-16
URL	<a href="http://dx.doi.org/10.14989/210345">http://dx.doi.org/10.14989/210345</a>
Right	©京都大学大学院アジア・アフリカ地域研究研究科附属 イスラーム地域研究センター 2016
Type	Departmental Bulletin Paper
Textversion	publisher

## Taha al-Hashimi and the Origins of the Iraqi Elite's Approach to Japan

Mahmoud al-Qaysi\*

### 1. Introduction

The paper is an attempt to examine the beginning of cultural and economic ties between Iraq and Japan before the start of official diplomatic and political relations in the late 1930s. It is a part of an academic project to study Iraq's growing interest in the Japanese experience of modernization. The authors were making important progress in understanding the Japanese model of modernization, but the political problems in Iraq after 2003 have frustrated our long-term dream for Iraq to follow Japan's path.<sup>1</sup> It is disappointing that Iraq is returning to the difficult disputes of 2007, after seven years of attempted rebuilding.<sup>2</sup> The present work tries to understand why Iraqi elites and institutions took an interest in Japanese culture, history, and economic experience even before the rise of the modern Iraqi state in August 1921, and within four years of its emergence, through studying a member of the political and intellectual elites who contributed to building the new nation-state in Iraq. The paper, thus, attempts to trace how Iraqis came to be inspired by Japan and Japanese culture.

This work shows the contribution of an Iraqi officer and politician who tried more than eight decades ago to follow "the Japanese Renaissance" and its "spirit of nation" as a model for a strong and modern Iraq. Having worked for 10 years for an Iraq following the Japanese path, can we succeed as political and intellectual elites in protecting Iraq and thwarting the internal and external agendas for division? We will cherish the idea of a united Iraq to the

---

\* Professor of College of Arts, University of Baghdad.

1 The Iraqi sociologist 'Alī al-Wardī had focused in his writings on the internal factors for the reform and renaissance, in addition to the external impacts. Other scholars refer to the external influences and borrowing from the western and developed countries as the basic factors for modernization, change, and renaissance. Several cases have proved the role of external factors on reform, such as Egypt's Muhammed Ali, Iraq's Midhat Pasha, and the western influences on Japan since the second half of the nineteenth century and the Japanese influence on Korea, Malaysia, and Indonesia in the twentieth century. The third president of the Republic of Korea, Chong Hee Park (1961-1979), had indicated that "the developing country could not have implemented the progress by itself, because it was running in a closed circle. The developing countries have fallen into a deepening lethargy, their days dominated by talking and sleeping, and the neglect is a feature of their work without any inspection. To achieve progress and modernization, it is necessary to import new ideas and systems from abroad and apply them by force." See 'Alī al-Wardī, *Lamaḥāt Ijtimā'īya fī Tārīkh al-'Irāq al-Hadīth* ("Social Glimpses of Modern Iraqi History"), 10 volumes, 2nd ed., Beirut, Dār al-Rashīd, 2005; *Dirāsa fī Ṭabī'a al-Mujtama' al-'Irāqī* ("A Study of the Nature of Iraqi Society"), 1st ed., Beirut, Dār wa Maktaba Dijla wal-Furāt, 2009; *Wi'āz al-Salāṭīn* ("Preachers of Sultan"), 2nd ed., Beirut, Dār wa Maktaba Dijla wal-Furāt, 2013; Mahmūd al-Qaysī, *Alī Alwardī and the Historical Sociology*, 1st ed., Beirut, Adnan, 2014; Muḥammad Amīn Shilqāmī, *Fahm al-Tajriba al-Kūrīya wa-Subul al-Istifāda min-hā: Dalīl 'Ilmī* ("Understanding of the Korean Experience and Benefit of It"), *Awraq Asiyawīya* ("Asian Papers"), No. 36, February 2001, p. 24.

2 For more details on the present Iraqi elite and its approach to Japan, see Mahmūd al-Qaysī, *al-Tajriba al-Yabānīya Ru'ya 'Irāqīya* ("The Japanese Experience Iraqi Standpoint"), 2nd ed., Baghdad, Bayt al-Ḥikma, 2013.

last moment of our lives, and Japan and its experience will be our model. However, the situation now is very dangerous. The paper is, accordingly, a study of a member of the Iraqi political elite during the Monarchy (1921–1958), who was the first Iraqi politician and officer interested in studying the Japanese experience of modernization. Taha al-Hashimi (1888–1961) served as Minister of Defense (1938–1940) and Prime Minister of Iraq (1941), in addition to other positions during his professional career.

Although al-Hashimi was an officer and a politician, he was interested in culture and history. He wrote many books on world, Arab, and Iraqi history and culture. One of his most important books was *Nahḍa al-Yābān wa Ta'thīr Rūḥ al-Umma fī al-Nahḍa* (“The Renaissance of Japan and the Influence of the Spirit of Nation on the Renaissance”), which was published in Baghdad in 1925. This book was the first Iraqi publication on the Japanese experience of modernization. It was also one of the early Arab responses to the success of the Japanese in the Meiji era (1868–1912), after the *al-Shams al-Mushriqa* (“The Shining Sun” of 1904)<sup>3</sup> by Mustafa Kamel from Egypt, *al-Riḥla al-Yābānīya* (“The Japanese Voyage” of 1906)<sup>4</sup> by Ali Ahmed al-Jirjawi from Tunisia, and *al-Riḥla al-Yābānīya* (“The Japanese Voyage” of 1909)<sup>5</sup> by Prince Mohammed Ali Pasha of Egypt. Accordingly, the al-Hashimi book was the fourth Arabic publication on Japanese history and culture. It is strange that the Lebanese historian Masoud Daher, who is famous for his interest in the Japanese experience, did not mention al-Hashimi’s contribution in his coverage of Arab reactions to Japanese history in his book *al-Yābān bi-‘Uyūn ‘Arabīya 1904–2004* (“Japan in Arab Eyes 1904–2004”), published in Beirut in 2005.<sup>6</sup>

al-Hashimi’s book<sup>7</sup> on Japan consists of two sections: the first is on the Arab nation and its civilization, in addition to other experiences in Russia and Turkey, and the second is on the Japanese renaissance and the social, economic, and political circumstances of Japan and the factors that led to its renaissance. This work by al-Hashimi illustrates the early interest of the Iraqi elite in Japan and the beginnings of intellectual relations between the two countries even before diplomatic, political, and economic relations. Iraq was one of the first countries in the Middle East to inaugurate cultural, economic, diplomatic, and political relations with Japan, doing so in the 1930s.

---

3 Muṣṭafā Kāmil, *al-Shams al-Mushriqa*, Vol. 2, 1st ed., Cairo, al-‘Arabī lil-Nashr wal-Tawzī‘, 2001.

4 ‘Alī Aḥmad al-Jirjāwī, *al-Riḥla al-Yābānīya*, Introduction by Ra’ūf ‘Abbās, 1st ed., Cairo, Dār Merit, 1999.

5 Muḥammad ‘Alī, *al-Riḥla al-Yābānīya*, ‘Alī Aḥmad Kin‘ān (Ed.), 1st ed., Abu Dhabi, Dār al-Suwaydī lil-Nashr wal-Tawzī‘, 2004.

6 Mas‘ūd Dāhir, *al-Yābān bi-‘Uyūn ‘Arabīya 1904–2004*, 1st ed., Beirut, Markaz Dirasāt al-Waḥda al-‘Arabīya, 2005.

7 There is an article in Arabic on al-Hashimi’s contributions to the study of the Japanese experience. For more details, see: Walid Aboud Mohammed, “*The Iraqi Elite and Japan: Taha Alhashimi*” as an example, in Iraq and Japan in Modern History Tradition and Modernity, Keiko Sakai and Mahmoud Al-Qaysi (Eds.), Baghdad, Misr Murtadha for Iraqi Book, 2009, pp. 231–262.

The paper will focus on this first Iraqi publication on Japan as a new step in cultural exchange between Iraq and Japan. It is an attempt to understand why al-Hashimi studied “the Renaissance of Japan” and what its impact was on the Iraqi perception of this experience.

## **2. The origins of the Iraqi intellectual elite's and media's approach to Japan:**

The second half of the nineteenth century had witnessed some remarks among Iraq's intellectual elites and media that showed knowledge of Japanese politics and culture. As with other Arab *Wilāyats* (provinces) related to the Ottoman Empire, news of the Meiji Restoration (1868) and the Japanese victories over China (1894–1895) and Russia (1904–1905) reached educated Iraqi elites. The Meiji Restoration coincided with the reign of Ottoman Governor (*Wālī*) Midhat Pasha, who was appointed to his position in 1869 and worked in Iraq until 1871.<sup>8</sup> The second half of the nineteenth century saw limited commercial relations between Iraq and Japan. The latter exported matchsticks to Iraq that were cheap compared with Swedish products, according to the Russian Consul in Basra, Alexander Adamov. This points to an early Japanese approach to the Iraqi market. In the early twentieth century, Iraq exported wool to Japanese markets. In 1905, 200 bales of Iraqi wool entered Japan through Yokohama (out of total imports of 38,951 bales). By comparison, in that year, Great Britain imported half that amount of wool from Iraq. By 1906, Japan's imports of Iraqi wool had increased to 218 bales. During 1908–1913, Japan exported many products to Iraqi markets, including cloth products, matchsticks, silks, and tubes. Wilayat of Baghdad imported approximately 7,381 rupees worth of goods from Japan in 1912, but this decreased to 4,370 rupees worth in 1913.<sup>9</sup> All this information from Iraqi and foreign documents and resources points to attempts by Japanese and Iraqi authorities during the Meiji era and the late Ottoman period to approach one another and expand their commercial relations, even though Iraq was an Ottoman province until the outbreak of the First World War. Great Britain occupied Iraq during the First World War (1914–1918), imposed on it the British Mandate (1920–1932), and contributed to establishing the monarchy (1921–1958). These earlier attempts by Iraqis and Japanese to engage commercially are very important, despite Iraq's strong ties with the West, especially Great Britain, and its small potential.

The Iraqi intellectual elites, meanwhile, were focusing attention on the Japanese renaissance and Japan's growing power. The Iraqi poet Ma'ruf al-Rusafi (1875–1945)

---

<sup>8</sup> For more details on this period of Iraq and Japan under Midhat pasha governorship and Japan after the Meiji Restoration, see Mahmud al-Qaysi, “Tradition and Modernity of Japan from Political, Economic and Cultural Perspectives: A Comparative Study Between Iraq and Japan” in *The Tikrit University Journal for Humanities*, Vol. 13, No. 4, 2006, pp. 34–46.

<sup>9</sup> Alexander Adamov, *Wilāya al-Baṣra fī Mādī-hā wa Ḥādīri-hā*, translated from Russian into Arabic by Hāshim Ṣāliḥ al-Tikrītī, 1st ed., Baghdad, Dār al-Warrāq, 2009, pp. 544 and 585–586; Sinān al-Zaydī, *al-Taḥdīth fī al-Yābān wa Atharu-hu fī al-'Irāq (1869–1914)*, 2nd ed., Baghdad, Miṣr Murtaḍā for Iraqi Books, 2014, pp. 35–38, 44–46, and 74–76; see also the Iraqi documents in the National Library in Baghdad, of which the researcher has copies.

expressed his admiration for Japan's victory over Tsarist Russia in a poem entitled "The War in the Sea, or the Tsushima Event between Russia and Japan."<sup>10</sup> In this poem, al-Rusafi described the victory of an oriental nation over an occidental nation. By using the Arabic imagination and language, he attempted to express his ambition of seeing his Iraqi and Arabic nation free from Ottoman and Western domination.

Iraqi newspapers also followed Japan's rise and renaissance. Early Iraqi newspapers discussed Japanese progress. The *Zawrā'* newspaper, the first Iraqi newspaper published by the Ottoman Governor Midhat Pasha in 1869, covered the Conference of Religions held in Tokyo in 1906. There were numerous perspectives on the reasons for holding this conference, and there were differences over the date of the conference, which ranged from March to September 1906; *Zawrā'* gave June 1906 as the date of the conference. This Iraqi newspaper discussed the reason for holding this conference, which was an attempt by the Japanese Empire to understand Islam and Christianity, but the newspaper exaggerated these reasons by pointing out that the Japanese Empire was searching for the true religion for Japan by understanding world religions.<sup>11</sup> The authors believe that this conference was a Japanese attempt to approach the Muslim world, notably in China, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East, especially after the Japanese expansion into Asia, but Arab and Iraqi perceptions and their admiration of Japanese economic, political, and military success as well as the cultural gap in understanding between Arabs and Japanese led the Iraqi elite to exaggerate Japanese motives.

In its June 25, 1910 issue, the Iraqi magazine *al-'Ilm* ("Science") noted that Japanese newspapers accounted for 350 of the 1,491 newspapers published in Asia. In another article entitled "Why did we collapse and how we can progress?," *al-'Ilm* answered this question by discussing the experiences of developed countries such as France, Russia, and Japan. The article attributed Japan's progress to the Japanese interest in science and education. The magazine discussed also the effect of the spread of Islam in Japan and its importance for the Muslims and the Arab world.<sup>12</sup> A reading of *al-'Ilm* articles shows that they were trying to understand the spread of Islam in Japan from a Muslim perspective without any attempt to understand Japanese society from within and thus benefit from the factors that helped the Japanese to achieve their renaissance, progress, and success. That is one of the reasons for the Arab delay in continuing their reforms by making comparative studies of their circumstances and those of other countries. We can call this misunderstanding "a gap in perception" between Arabs and Japan, and maybe between other countries in the West and East, according to the

---

10 Ma'rūf al-Ruṣāfī, *Dīwān al-Ruṣāfī*, Vols. 1–2, 7th ed., Cairo, al-Maktaba al-Tijāriya al-Kubrā, 1963, Vol. 2, pp. 367–369.

11 *al-Zawrā'*, Baghdad, No. 2086, July 1, 1906; No. 2087, July 8, 1906; Sinān al-Zaydī, *al-Taḥdīth fī al-Yābān*, pp. 46–53.

12 See the articles on Japan in *al-'Ilm* Magazine: Vol. 1, No. 2, April 29, 1910, p. 54; No. 5, June 25, 1910, pp. 222–223 and 236; Vol. 2, No. 5, October 24, 1911, p. 199; No. 9, April 1912, pp. 406–408; Sinān al-Zaydī, *al-Taḥdīth fī al-Yābān*, pp. 57–68.

description of Iraqi–Japanese relations<sup>13</sup> given by Professor Keiko Sakai. We can note the same “gap in perception” in other writings by Arab intellectuals on the Japanese renaissance. Ahmed Amin, the Egyptian historian and intellectual, remarked in one of his books that “the Japanese had achieved reconstruction of their nation by imitation of the west...but if they have a suitable faith and straight spiritualism, they may be better than their present situation.”<sup>14</sup> This perception ensured that Muslim and Arab understanding of the Japanese experience would be shaped by Arab and Islamic concepts without attempting to gain insight into the Japanese from within their society and culture.

Other Iraqi newspapers, such as *Ṣadā Bābil* (“The Bebel’s Echo”), published some news and information on Japan and its people during 1910–1914.<sup>15</sup> This information and intellectual perception of Japan formed a good background for the Iraqi elite during the first decade after the rise of the modern Iraqi state in 1921, one of the founders of which state was Taha al-Hashimi.

### 3. Taha al-Hashimi – A Brief Biography:

Taha Salman Salih Ahmed al-Hashimi was born in Baghdad in 1888 and began his studies in the traditional Muslim office-schools affiliated with mosques (*kuttābs*) when he was six years old. After two years, he enrolled in the primary *Rushdi* school for four years, and then he continued in a military secondary school for three years (1900–1903). These studies in Baghdad qualified him to pursue higher studies at the Military College in Istanbul, from which he graduated in 1906 as an officer in the Ottoman army. He then entered the general staff college and graduated as a captain in 1909. When he finished his military studies, he was twenty-one. In 1914, al-Hashimi joined the Secret al-‘Ahd Society, a national Arabist society hoping to form an Arab state after the expected fall of the weak Ottoman Empire during the war. It had branches in Cairo, Baghdad, Mosul, Basra, and Damascus. After his return to Iraq, he was appointed in 1923 as head of the General Staff, and he participated in the negotiations on the Mosul dispute and the Iraqi–Turkish border. In the same year, King Faisal I of Iraq (1921–1933) appointed him as a teacher to his son Prince Ghazi (1912–1939). He served as General Director of Nationality in 1927 and then as Director of General Education in 1929.

13 Keiko Sakai, *Iraq and Japan History and Relations*, 1st ed., Baghdad, Miṣr Murtaḍā for Iraqi Books, 2009, pp. 17–54. Also see the original article in English in Keiko Sakai, “Japan–Iraq Relations: The Perception Gap and its Influence on Diplomatic Policies,” *Arab Studies Quarterly* (ASQ), Fall 2001, Vol. 23, No. 4, pp. 117–136.

14 Cf. Aḥmad Amīn, *Yawm al-Islām* (“The Day of Islam”), Cairo, Maktaba al-Nahḍa al-Maṣrīya, 1952, p. 138; Amīn Makoto Mizutani, *al-Adyān fī al-Yābān bayna al-Māḍī wal-Ḥāḍir wal-Mustaqbal* (“The Religions in Japan Between the Past, Present and Future”), Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmīya, 2007, pp. 20–21, 181–182, Ṣāliḥ Ḥasan ‘Abd Allāh, *al-Taḥrīb al-Yābānīya Dirāsa Tārīkhīya fī Thunā’īya al-Taqlīd wal-Taḥdīth* (“The Japanese Experience: A Historical Study of the Duality of Tradition and Modernization,” A PhD thesis submitted to the College of Education – University of Tikrit, 2012, pp. 239–242).

15 Sinān al-Zaydī, *al-Taḥdīth fī al-Yābān*, pp. 69–73.

In 1930, he again became head of the General Staff. In 1936, he was the first brigadier in the Iraqi army. In 1937, he was elected a representative of Baghdad. During his term in office (1938–1941), he was minister of defense and prime minister (February 1–April 1, 1941), in addition to acting as ministers of defense and foreign affairs. In 1951, he established *al-Jabha al-Sha'bīya al-Muttaḥida* (“the Unified Popular Front”) and then became its head. After three years, he was appointed vice-president of the Council of Reconstruction, the Iraqi institution responsible for modernizing Iraqi infrastructure that was abolished after the revolution of July 14, 1958.<sup>16</sup> In retirement, al-Hashimi wrote his memoirs<sup>17</sup> and other books,<sup>18</sup> which offered a record of Arab history and the Iraqi state and nation during the monarchy. In recognition of his intellectual activities, he was selected as an honorary member of *al-Majma' al-'Ilmī al-'Irāqī* (“Iraqi Scientific Assembly”) (1949–1950). al-Hashimi died in London on June 21, 1961, and was buried in Baghdad.

al-Hashimi was regarded as one of the founders of the modern Iraqi state. His political and military careers had concentrated on building the Iraqi state and identity. He had believed in the right to a united “Arab nation” and in establishing an Arab state in accordance with Arab history and language. He was a moderate Arabist in his political views, because of his early life in Yemen during the First World War, and his relationship with the Arabist movement. al-Hashimi’s nationalist ideas were reflected in his publications, which focused on the Arab identity of Iraq, and he had attempted through his writings to explain the historical, political, and intellectual importance of the Iraqi nation and state. Meanwhile, he introduced other experiences of modernity and the rebuilding of states and nations as models for the Iraqi people and elites. From this perspective, al-Hashimi’s book on Japan was a part of this effort to build a new unified and modern nation-state in Iraq.

---

16 For more details on al-Hashimi’s life, see Yaḥyā Kāzīm al-Ma’mūrī, *Tāhā al-Hāshimī wa Nash'atu-hu al-'Askarī wal-Siyāsī fī al-'Aḥdayn al-'Uthmānī al-Muta'akḥkhir wal-Malakī al-'Irāqī ḥattā 'Ām 1958* (“Taha al-Hashimi and His Military and Political Activity in the Late Ottoman and Iraqi Royal Eras until 1958”), Hilla, Dār al-Furāt, 2011, pp. 9–46.

17 His memoirs were published under the title: *Mudhakkirāt Tāhā al-Hāshimī* (“Taha al-Hashimi’s Memoirs: 1919–1943”), edited and introduced in the Modern History of Iraq by Khaldūn Sāti' al-Ḥuṣarī, 1st ed., Beirut, 1967.

18 al-Hashimi wrote numerous books, such as *Travel Service* (2 vols.) 1926, *History and Civilization in Ancient Times; History of the Ancient East; Investigations of Mobilization* (3 vols.); *The Basic Mobilization*, 1925; *The War of Iraq* (2 vols.) 1928; *History of the Arabs; The Military Geography of Iraq, Detailed Geography of Iraq*, 1930; *Atlas of Iraq*, 1933; *Secondary Geography of Iraq*, 1929; *Military Geography*, 1927; *A Brief History of War*, 1927; *The Human Gatherings of Iraq; The Human Geography of Iraq*, 1931; *The Northern Iraq Map*, 1931; *History of Religions and Their Philosophy*, 1931; *Geography of the Arab Countries*, 1938; *Lessons in Military Information*, 1936; *Khalid Ibn Alwalid*, 1938. He translated many books into Arabic, such as *The Italian Unity of Polton King* from French, 1952; *The Omer Government of Shaikh Numan al-Shibli* from Turkish, 1966; and *The Individual and the State of Cod Hon* from English. al-Hashimi also wrote articles for Iraqi newspapers and magazines.

For more details, see Yaḥyā Kāzīm al-Ma'mūrī, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 43–46.

#### 4. al-Hashimi and the Renaissance of Japan:

al-Hashimi began writing in 1925, as the Iraqi state was beginning to emerge, which coincided with its internal and external problems to form a collective Iraqi identity. Iraq had suffered greatly during the period between the invasion of Basra by British troops in 1914 and the decision of the League of Nations to join Mosul to Iraq in 1925. This period witnessed the military occupation of Iraq (1914–1918), the military rule of British authorities (1918–1920), the 1920 Revolution, which was the first event that unified all the Iraqi people, and the beginning of a political consciousness and sense of Iraqi identity, which professor Keiko Sakai called “a primitive expression of Iraqism as a proto-nationalism here, which can be a source for reproduction or imagining Iraqi national identity.”<sup>19</sup> Thus, when the uprising came about, Sunnis, Shiites, and some Kurds, townsmen and farmers, tribesmen, army officers, and civilians came together in an historic mass movement against British rule. In Iraq, at least, the 1920 revolt has become the stuff of legend. Its backbone consisted of the Shiite *mujtahids* (clergy) of the holy cities of Najaf and Karbala, especially Grand Ayatollah Mirza Muhammad Taqi Shirazi (d. 1920), who inspired the tribes of the Middle and Lower Euphrates with a *fatwā* (legal opinion), as a result of which Iraqi tribesmen rose against the British, pitting their overwhelming numbers against the military superiority of the Royal Air Force (RAF). Finally, in an unprecedented show of solidarity, Sunnis and Shiites prayed at each other's mosques in Baghdad, and nationalist poetry spread like wildfire in both the urban and rural districts.<sup>20</sup>

This period saw also the rise of the Iraqi parliament, *Majlis al-Umma al-'Irāqī*, in 1922 and the ratification of the unequal Iraqi–British Treaty of 1922, after a political struggle between the ruling class and the nationalist movement in 1924. The treaty established British domination of Iraq and is similar to the unequal treaties between Japan, the US, and other European powers of the late Edo period. The Constituent Assembly finally adopted the constitution in 1924 after a long struggle with the opposition. With a few modifications, the constitution provided the country's political and legal structure under the monarchy until the revolution of 1958. It was an instrument designed to foster Britain's indirect control. The monarch functioned partly as a symbol of unity but mainly as a means by which the high commissioner could bring his influence to bear in cases of conflict. Parliament soon became a stronghold of the tribal leaders whom the British had done so much to protect and strengthen. The constitution failed to take root, however, partly because Iraqis were never given real responsibility in the government and partly because they came to regard it as an instrument of foreign manipulation and control. As a result, Iraqi elites focused their energies not on developing constitutional institutions as a foothold of eventual control but rather on removing

19 Keiko Sakai, *Political Parties and Social Networks in Iraq 1908–1920*, M.A. Thesis submitted to the University of Durham, Faculty of Social Sciences, 1995, pp. 1–2.

20 Hala Fattah and Frank Caso, *A Brief History of Iraq*, New York, Facts on file 2009, pp. 160–161.



unwanted British influence.<sup>21</sup> This early period of the rise of the modern state saw disputes among Iraqi ethnicities and sects, especially the Sunni, Shiites, and Kurds on the future of the Iraqi state and the Iraqi nation. King Faisal I had played a vital role in gathering the Iraqi people into one nation and common identity through his realist policy toward the British authorities and the Iraqi movement to create the concept of the nation-state among the Iraqis.<sup>22</sup>

When al-Hashimi wrote his book in 1925, Iraq had resolved its dispute with Turkey over the status of Mosul as an Iraqi prefecture. Thus, Iraq had preserved its unity through its unequal treaty with Great Britain. King Faisal I played a decisive role in preserving Iraqi unity. These early years of native rule in Iraq were so critical for the Iraqi elites, especially for the military elite who accompanied the new king in Syria and Iraq, many of whom formed the political elite that contributed to building the new nation-state. al-Hashimi was a part of this elite. This situation reflected, of course, on al-Hashimi's consideration of the Japanese experience in the Meiji era, especially the end of feudal Japan and its *Daimyo* and *Samurai* traditions in the state institutions and inauguration of the modern state. The new Iraqi state also suffered from the feudal characteristics of Iraqi society, in which the tribe formed the basic element. These developments in the Iraqi state were similar to what happened in Japan in the Meiji era. Therefore, al-Hashimi had faithfully tried to convey the Japanese experience of rebuilding the nation-state to the Iraqi elites, in an attempt to transform Iraq from a feudal to a modern society.

The book was one of the first publications that attempted to search for a model for the present and future of the younger Iraqi nation-state. Alhashimi's intellectual and political ideology belonged to the Arab national identity known as *'Urūbī* ("Arabist trend"), but it was a moderate ideology of the first generation of Iraqi officers who had served in the Ottoman army and accompanied the Hashemite Dynasty that established the modern Arab states of Syria (1918–1920) and Iraq (1921–1958). Taha al-Hashimi and his elder brother Yaseen (1882–1936)<sup>23</sup> were Iraqi officers affected by late Ottoman Arabist thought, who contributed to building the new state in Iraq with the support of Great Britain after the collapse of the

---

21 Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*, Colorado, Westview Press, 2012, p. 28.

22 For more details about these developments, see: Hala Fattah, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 154–171.

23 He was an Iraqi politician who served twice as the Prime Minister of Iraq. Like many of Iraq's early leaders, Hashimi served as a military officer during Ottoman control of the country. He made his political debut under the government of his predecessor Jafar al-Askari and replaced Askari as Prime Minister shortly thereafter, in August 1924. Hashimi served for ten months before he was replaced in turn by Abd al-Muhsin al-Sa'dun. Over the next ten years, he filled a variety of governmental positions, finally returning to the office of Prime Minister in 1935. On October 30, 1936, al-Hashimi had the dubious distinction of being the first Iraqi Prime Minister deposed in a coup, which was led by General Bakr Sidqi and a coalition of ethnic minorities. Unlike Jafar al-Askari, who was then his Minister of Defense, Yaseen al-Hashimi survived the coup and made his way to Damascus, Syria, where he died two months later. For more details, see Sāmī 'Abd al-Ḥāfiẓ al-Qaysī, *Yāsīn al-Ḥāshimī wa Atharu-hu fī Tārīkh al-'Irāq al-Mu'āsir (1922–1936)* ("Yaseen al-Hashimi and His Influence in the Contemporary History of Iraq"), 2nd ed., Amman, Dār Dijla, 2013, pp. 27–126.

Ottoman Empire. Accordingly, he had represented the Iraqi nationalist trend (Arabism, or *'Urūba*) that believed in the Iraqi nation and identity and that considered its ethnic and sectarian diversity to be a source of strength for the Iraqi nation. His publications were an attempt to build a memory, identity, and historical background for this new nation as a part of the Arab Homeland (*al-Umma al-'Arabīya*). His books concentrated on Iraqi and Arab history, geography, religion, and the role of Arab personalities such as Khalid Ibn al-Walid in creating the Arab nation and its Islamic identity.<sup>24</sup> These books represented the thinking of an officer filled with the history of Iraq and the Islamic Arab state and civilization. His work in politics, the military, and literature led *Lughā al-'Arab* ("Language of the Arab") magazine to call him "the owner of the two presidencies, the sword and pen."<sup>25</sup> However, it must be noted that al-Hashimi's Arab trend was different from the radical Arab trend during the 1940s and 1950s. He represented a moderate Arab trend that believed in the Iraqi royal nation and its Arab and Islamic background.

In 1925, four years after the rise of the Iraqi monarchy, al-Hashimi wrote his book entitled *Nahḍa al-Yābān wa Ta'thīr Rūḥ al-Umma fī al-Nahḍa* ("The Renaissance of Japan and the Influence of the Spirit of the Nation in the Renaissance"). He was then a colonel in the Iraqi army and wrote the book under the working title "The Successful Renaissance is Suitable to the Spirit of the Nation." It seems that he was referring to the differences between the Japanese and other nations and he pointed in these words to the distinctiveness of each nation. He dedicated his book to his friend Abdulaziz Ali (Aziz Ali al-Masri), the Egyptian officer who found the al-'Ahd Society to which al-Hashimi belonged during The First World War.

al-Hashimi's book on Japan was, accordingly, an Iraqi elite response to the international experiences of nation-state building. Japan belonged to the modernizing experience in Asia, which led al-Hashimi and his generation to follow the Japanese successes and introduce them to the Iraqi and Arab elites. The content of his book was an analytical study of the Japanese, Russian, Turkish, and Arab experiences, the manner of their responses to modernization and progress, and the differences among these peoples. However, he had focused on the Japanese experiment of nation-state building during the Meiji era as a model for the new Iraqi state, particularly after the Japanese victories against external foes China and Russia and the internal reform movement, which led to the modern Japanese nation-state. This Japanese model was the reason for al-Hashimi to view Japan and the Japanese people as a model for the new Iraqi state.

The content of al-Hashimi's book reflected the Iraqi elite's attempts to follow a successful model of nation-state building, and Japan was close to the Iraqi perception because

---

24 Yaḥyā Kāzīm al-Ma'mūrī, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 43–51.

25 *Lughā al-'Arab*, Baghdad, Vol. 5, August 1930, pp. 388–389.

of its Asian roots and rebuilding of the modern nation after more than two centuries of feudal rule during the Edo period. al-Hashimi's work was the Iraqi elite's response to Japanese success.

The book consists of two sections: the first is a study of the history of the Arab nation and its civilization. In this section, al-Hashimi discussed the role of the Arabs in human civilization, their efforts to establish states, and their achievements in urbanization, agriculture, and all other aspects of life. He also discussed Western history and some Western theories on reform. He introduced some examples of modernization from Russia during the reign of Peter the Great (1672–1725) and the Kemalist movement of modernization in Turkey. He concentrated on the “Spirit of the Nation” in the Renaissance. Here he compared the Japanese “Spirit of Harmony” and the West’s “Spirit of Nation,” which was a basic factor in the Renaissance in Great Britain, France, Russia, and Turkey. In this section, al-Hashimi introduced some contemporary experiences of modernization, and he described the case of the Arabs. He meant to convey these experiences to the Iraqi and the Arab elites who were the leaders in their newly established states. The majority of the Arab region was not independent, being subjugated by the British and French Mandates.<sup>26</sup>

He discussed in this section the vital factors in the differences among nations, which he had summarized as ethnic, environmental, and temporal differences. These factors had an impact on the “spirit of the people” which led to national specialization, and on their ability for development. The nations did not interact with other civilizations without their “spiritual readiness” to accept these civilizations. He called this specialization *Sajāyā* (“characteristics”), which helped the nation with reform and renaissance. The Arabian desert or *Bādiya* was the basic factor in formulation of the “Arab *Sajāyā*” and made them different from other nations. This *Bādiya* affected the Arab personality. The sword, chivalry, horse, and camel were the basic components of the Arab personality. The Arab poems explain the importance of these things for the Arabs.<sup>27</sup>

al-Hashimi had ensured in this section “the Arab readiness to civilization.” He picked up examples from ancient and Islamic history to clarify that the Arabs had succeeded in their interactions and imitations with other civilizations. His examples are from Mesopotamia, ancient Yemen, and the Islamic experiences of the Umayyad and Abbasid periods, when the Arabs established a flourishing civilization, which depended on dialogue with other civilizations, such as Greek and Persian civilizations. However, he believed that the Arabs refused to submit to central authority and sought freedom and the presidency and did not accept the domination under one leadership, and refused the unity of the Arab tribes. This was

---

26 Tāhā al-Hāshimī, *Nahḍa al-Yābān wa Ta'ḥīr Rūḥ al-Uma fī al-Nahḍa* (“The Renaissance of Japan and the Influence of the Spirit of Nation on the Renaissance”), Baghdad, Matba‘a Dār al-Salām, 1925, pp. 4–87.

27 *Ibid.*, pp. 12–13, 24–25, and 31–36.

an important reason for Arab disunity. Unlike the Japanese, the Arabs do not have “the spirit of collectivism” — a sense that the person is a part of the whole. The desert had affected the Arab personality that looks for personal freedom. However, under Islam, the Arabs achieved this unity and built up the Arab Islamic state and civilization.<sup>28</sup>

The sixth chapter of the book's first section dealt with “Peter the Great and reforms.” This chapter was a study of Tsar Peter's (1672–1725) attempts to change Russia from feudal state to modern nation through bringing Western modernization to the Russian people. He succeeded in his efforts to modernize Russia. al-Hashimi had ensured that the external impacts were important to this transformation. The same factors were also vital in the Turkish experience of Westernization that involved rebuilding Turkey through reforms under the rule of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881–1938). These reforms have been studied in the seventh chapter of the first section. In the conclusion of this section, al-Hashimi had concluded that “it is difficult to do reform without changing the original *Sajāyā* and the spirit of peoples, and doing away with the old manners of society.”<sup>29</sup> It is impossible to carry out all these reforms and modernization without the nation's being ready for change. He had made comparisons with the English, French, Russian, and Turkish experiments.

Concerning the Arab people, al-Hashimi had concentrated on the need for *al-muṣliḥ al-'Abqarī* (“an intelligent reformer”) who used any means to implement the reformist aims. He was obliged to use torture, killing, prison, and exile because the end justified the means, according to Machiavelli's principle. It appears that al-Hashimi was influenced at that time by the Kemalist experience of westernization in Turkey, and these remarks were directed to King Faisal I of Iraq. However, we do not agree with his advocacy of reforms by “strict manners” and dictatorship or totalitarianism. Some examples for the failure of totalitarian experiments in the twentieth century included Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and Ba'athist Iraq. However, al-Hashimi returned to declare that “the use of oppression should be necessary to face the reactionary people who hinder reform.”<sup>30</sup> He completed this section by insisting that the world had changed after the First World War, and that nations started to seek freedom, peace, and compromise, especially after the declaration of Wilson's Fourteen Points and recognition of the right of people to self-determination.<sup>31</sup> All these developments should have provoked the

---

28 For more comparison, see *Ibid.*, pp. 45–51.

29 *Ibid.*, pp. 52–86.

30 *Ibid.*, pp. 87–94.

31 The “Fourteen Points” was a declaration of the U.S. president Woodrow Wilson in January 8, 1918 which issued at the end of World war I outlining his proposals for a postwar peace settlement. Wilson formulated, in his address to the joint session of the United States congress, under his 14 separate heads his ideas of the essential nature of post-war order. Before the delivery of his address he had received from a committee of Inquiry, set up by Col. Edward House in Sep. 1917, a report upon the territorial settlement that should follow the conclusion of the war. It has been stated that no fewer than six, and these the territorial points, of Wilson Fourteen Points were “directly framed” upon the recommendations contained in the report. President Wilson developed these theories during 1918 in a series of speeches, to which reference

Arab leaders to reform, and this spirit made the Arab people need advanced civilization and roused them to launch reform.<sup>32</sup>

In the second section, al-Hashimi discussed the Japanese experience of modernity and the construction of a modern country. He pointed out in his introduction that the section was a translation of a 1910 lecture by Count Oster Worog, the chancellor of the Ottoman Ministry of Justice, at the Amikal Club in Istanbul. al-Hashimi admired this lecture and used its ideas in his book on the Japanese renaissance, and he discussed its ideas and added to them. He thought that there were some characteristics of peoples that help or hinder them in accepting modernity and change. He compared the Arabs with the Japanese, Turkish, and European peoples. He identified these characteristics as “the Spirit of Nation” and *Sajāyā* (characteristics) necessary for progress and interaction with other civilizations. In his view, “the Spirit of Harmony” helped the Japanese benefit from Western countries, and the Arabs were qualified to import ideas from foreign countries, given their ancient, Islamic, and modern history.<sup>33</sup> He focused on the Arab environment, especially life in the desert, and on Bedouin characteristics (*Sajāyā*) as well as their love of camels and horses, which was a basic feature of their life in the desert.

In the first chapter of the second section, al-Hashimi analyzed the concept of “the Japanese Miracle,” and he discussed certain ideas of Western historians and philosophers such as Giambattista Vico (1668–1744) and Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971) on this term, comparing it with the concept of “the Greek Miracle.” He refused to call what happened in Japan a “miracle,” but he did think it was part of the development of the Japanese “spirit,” reflecting the distinctiveness of the Japanese language and the readiness to borrow from others.<sup>34</sup> This perspective reflects the Japanese experience, as al-Hashimi perceived it early in his study. By comparing his perspective with other Arab writings on the Japanese experience, we note that most other such writings were astonished and sympathetic in tone, and not scientific studies of the realities of Japanese society and culture.

al-Hashimi briefly discussed the history of Japan and its interaction with Chinese culture, the influence of the Chinese language on the rise of the Japanese syllabary, Japan’s embrace of Buddhism since the sixth century and of Confucian philosophy during the Edo Period, European influence through the early Portuguese visits from the second half of the

---

was subsequently made during the armistice negotiations. These are generally known as the “four principles” speech and “four ends” and “five particulars” For more details, see: Robert V. Remini, *A Short History of the United States*, New York, Harper Collins Publishers, 2008, pp. 202–206; *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol.9, Chicago, William Benton, 1965, pp. 670–671.

32 Tāhā al-Hāshimī, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 87–94.

33 al-Hashimi discussed the influence of the environment, spirit, and *Sajāyā* (characteristics) on people and the level of their acceptance of foreign civilizations. He compared the Japanese experience with that of the Arabs, Turks, and Europeans. For more comparison, see the first section of al-Hashimi’s book in: *Ibid.*, pp. 4–51.

34 *Ibid.*, pp. 96–98.

sixteenth century, and especially Western arms, ships, and other Dutch sciences (“*Rangaku*”) that entered via the *Dejima* “window” since the sixteenth century and remained the sole window of Japan on western culture and science until the end of *Sakoku* (seclusion). al-Hashimi focused on *Dejima* and its importance for Japanese culture.<sup>35</sup>

al-Hashimi also discussed the rise of the Shogunate and its relationship with the emperor from the twelfth century on and the rise of the Tokugawa dynasty at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Thus, the Japanese benefited from both Chinese and Western knowledge simultaneously. He studied Japan’s relations with the Western powers and the dangerous impact of missionaries that led to the Japanese embracing Christianity. These prompted the Japanese to ban the missionaries and issue laws against Christian activity to protect the Japanese people from these dangers. In 1638, the Shogun imposed *Sakoku* (Seclusion), which continued until 1853 and became a characteristic of Japan’s history and the Japanese personality, as well as a reason for Japanese uniqueness, according to Western historians.<sup>36</sup>

al-Hashimi again discussed the importance of the Japanese *Sajāyā* (characteristics) that enabled the Japanese to move from Chinese to Western culture to rebuild Japanese uniqueness. He mentioned Confucianism, its role in Japanese society, and the castes of this society: the emperor (*tenno-mikado*), the feudal lords (*daimyo*), the warriors (*samurai*), as well as the farmers (*no*), craftsmen (*ko*), and traders (*sho*). All these castes worked under the strict rules of *Bushido* (the way of the warrior), which was based on Confucianism and focused on five relationships: father and son, lord and vassal, husband and wife, brother and brother, and friend and friend. The Japanese had added to this pyramid relationship the relationship between body and spirit. This Japanese philosophy was embodied in *harakiri*, the suicide for defending right and honor. By way of illustration, al-Hashimi pointed to the revenge of the 47 *ronin*, masterless *samurai* whose lord had been ordered to commit suicide by the Shogun in 1701, as a sign of faith in their lord and an example of sacrifice, persistence, and loyalty. These *Sajāyā* affected the Japanese people and became part of their culture.<sup>37</sup>

In the second chapter on “the role of aggression,” al-Hashimi tackled the influence of the unequal treaties between Japan and the United States and other Western powers after the mission of Commodore Matthew Perry (1794–1858) to Japan in 1853, which ended the *Sakoku* policy and created a new relationship between Japan and the West. This mission led to unequal treaties in 1854, 1858, and 1866, which resulted in the end of the Shogunate and the return to power of Emperor Meiji (1868–1912), marking a new period in the Japanese experience of transformation from weakness to strength. In the third and fourth chapters, al-Hashimi focused on this transition from Chinese to Western systems and knowledge. He

---

35 *Ibid.*, pp. 98–108.

36 *Ibid.*

37 *Ibid.*, pp. 99–123.

called this transformation “the role of attention”<sup>38</sup> to benefit from the shift in the balance of power and knowledge from China to the West. Japanese intelligence and *Sajāyā* could, according to al-Hashimi, exploit this development in East Asia and the Far East because of the weakness of China and its acceptance of the open-door policy after the Opium Wars (1839–1842/1856–1860). Western culture and science became key to the Japanese renaissance and reform in the late Tokugawa period and the early Meiji era. The *samurai* and the educated elite were able to convey Western science — technology, medicine and other learning — to Japan. The decadence of the Shogunate towards the West and the failure of Chinese culture and technology to face the West led the Japanese, especially the *samurai*, to use Western knowledge in order to strengthen Japan, escape from the unequal treaties, and fasten the Japanese Empire to dismiss Western intervention in Japanese politics and internal situations.<sup>39</sup> This points to the flexibility of the Japanese in grasping other cultures to serve the high interests of the Japanese nation.

In the fifth chapter on “the role of reform,” al-Hashimi discusses the early efforts of the Japanese people to modernize their lives by employing the younger generation in state institutions. During 1868–1905, six governments with staff mostly in their thirties sent young Japanese persons on military, diplomatic, and scientific scholarships to the United States and Western Europe to benefit from overseas experience. These governments used experts at home, reforming Japanese institutions of justice with the help of German, Italian, and French experts, modernizing medical practices and increasing the number of hospitals with the support of foreign physicians. Thirty-four thousand Japanese physicians graduated from Japanese and foreign universities in 1901; the Japanese army and its equipment were modernized; the education system was developed; new schools and universities were opened; the study of foreign languages was encouraged and Western texts were translated into Japanese; new roads and railways were built in the Western style; the unequal treaties with the United States and other Western countries were changed; a constitution was adopted (1889); and a parliament, the *Diet*, was founded (1890).<sup>40</sup> Thus, Japan became “a great power owing to the sacrifices of the *Daimyo*, *Samurai* and the last *Shogun*, who suffered all these pains for Japan’s present and future.”<sup>41</sup>

al-Hashimi discussed the Satsuma Rebellion, *Seinan Sensō*, which was known as the “Southwestern War” and was a reaction to the reforms. It was a revolt of disaffected *samurai* against the new imperial government, nine years into the Meiji Era. Its name came from the Satsuma Domain, which had been influential in the Restoration and became home to

---

38 *Ibid.*, p. 142.

39 *Ibid.*, pp. 137–164.

40 *Ibid.*, pp. 165–178.

41 *Ibid.*, p. 178.

unemployed *samurai* after military reforms rendered their status obsolete. The Rebellion lasted from January 29, 1877, until September of that year, when it was decisively crushed and its leader, Saigō Takamori, ended his life. Saigō's rebellion was the last and most serious of a series of armed uprisings against the new government. It was a struggle between the old and new eras. Although this revolt was directed against the new era, it dealt with its leader and the fighting *samurai* with honor. The Japanese government regarded this event as a reaction against the difficult conditions of the *samurai* whose old prerogatives were withdrawn. According to al-Hashimi, this wise behavior of the Emperor and Japanese government led it to implement stability and peace, and continue reforms in all aspects of life.<sup>42</sup> The action and reaction represented the Japanese *Sajāyā*, "the Spirit of the Nation," and the Japanese ability to face complicated situations.

In the last chapter on the "Japanese Example," al-Hashimi sought out the reasons for Japan's success. He had ascertained that this renaissance related to the Japanese flexibility in perceiving others and benefitting from their knowledge. The Japanese, therefore, moved from Chinese knowledge to Western culture and technology without forgetting "the spirit of Japan," "the spirit of harmony," and the Japanese *Sajāyā*. The second stage of reforms focused on Japanese self-reliance and decreasing the number of foreign experts in Japan, through educating the Japanese younger generation.<sup>43</sup> This development of the Japanese experience contributed to growth of national knowledge and preservation of the traditions and Japanese touch.

In his conclusion, al-Hashimi inquired about the secret of the "Japanese Miracle." He answered that this secret was found in the Japanese "spirit" of seeking harmony with others and benefitting from their knowledge, and also in the Japanese *Sajāyā*, which interacted with other civilizations and cultures. In addition to the *Bushido* rules still active in Japanese culture, these *Sajāyā* permitted the Japanese to change their emphasis from China to the West and to build a statue of Commodore Perry in Tokyo in 1910 without any sense of his having imposed an unequal treaty on Japan in 1854.<sup>44</sup> This flexibility helped the Japanese to achieve victory over China (1894–1895) and Russia (1904–1905) by using Western technology and the Japanese "spirit."

Although this book was published in 1925, it remains unknown in academic circles

---

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 167–169. Professor Keiko Sakai points to this event of the Seinan War of 1877, in her editorial introduction to the book *Iraq and Japan in Modern History*, to compare the Japanese situations at the beginning of the Meiji Era with Iraqi developments after 2003. See Keiko Sakai and Mahmoud al-Qaysi, *Iraq and Japan in Modern History*, pp. 6–8.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 179–190.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 192–194. We can compare that with the statue of Lieutenant-General Sir Frederick Stanley Maude (1864–1917) that was installed at the entrance of a bridge in his name (the current Martyre Bridge), in what is now Haifa street. Maude was a British commander, most famous for his efforts in Mesopotamia during the First World War and for conquering Baghdad in 1917.



more than eight decades after its writing. The reasons for this neglect are the Iraqi interest in western modernization as a model for Iraq, especially after the British occupation of Iraq in the early twentieth century and its impact on the Iraqi nation-state during the monarchy and republic. Since the 1990s, Arab intellectuals and academics have tried to study other, non-Western-centric international experiences of nation building. Japanese, Korean, and Chinese models were new approaches for Arab elites at the dawn of the twenty-first century. Japan was one of the first new Asian models to inspire the Arab elites. The Lebanese academic, Masoud Daher, was a pioneer who studied Japanese history and collected Arabic publications, which were influenced by the Japanese model. However, even Daher did not mention al-Hashimi as an Arab response to Japan. The Iraqi scholars have tried to go back to the roots of Iraqi-Japanese ties and relations and their historical references, particularly after the American occupation of Iraq in April 2003 and Japanese military participation (2004–2006). As one of the first books to be inspired by the Japanese model, al-Hashimi's book became a historical work of reference for Iraqi intellectuals. Since the collapse of the totalitarian regime in Iraq in 2003, Iraqi intellectuals and scholars, especially the younger generation, have been increasingly influenced by the Japanese model. This interest in Japan explained the significance of references to al-Hashimi's book in Iraqi academic circles.<sup>45</sup>

Finally, we offer some remarks about al-Hashimi's book and its contribution to Arab understanding of the Japanese renaissance. First of all, the method al-Hashimi used in the book was based on his culture and reading of world experiments. He did not mention the sources of the book, according to the academic methodology. In addition, he had difficulty in reading Japanese and foreign terms and names written in 1920s Arabic. This led to scholars who did not major in Japanese studies misunderstanding the meaning of these terms and the Japanese names, because he had written the terms and names in accordance with his own pronunciation and not consistent with the correct transliteration.

In any event, the book became a historical work of reference for Japan's relations with the Middle East and the Arab World, and a record for the Arab, Iraqi, and Japanese elites interested in political, economic, and intellectual exchange between Japan and the Middle East. In addition, it played a significant role in the Arab perception of the Japanese renaissance and modernizing experience. The book has been a work of cultural heritage for the Iraqi academic and intellectual elite who persist in their efforts to pursue the Japanese model of modernization, especially after the stormy change of 2003 and the political failure in

---

45 I work now with Professor Ismail al-Jaberi of Bayt al-Hikma to edit and publish a new Iraqi manuscript of the Iraqi religious intellectual Hiba al-Dīn al-Shahristānī entitled *Riḥlatu-nā al-Yābānīya al-Irshādīya* ("Our Guiding Japanese Voyage"), which he wrote in 1913, in response to an invitation to attend the conference of religions in Tokyo in 1913. He had written the book on Japan in preparation for his travel, but his personal conditions did not permit him to visit Japan. This unpublished manuscript of Shahristani preceded the publication of al-Hashimi's book. However, al-Hashimi was the first Iraqi to publish a book on Japan.

rebuilding a new democratic experiment.

It is interesting to note the parallels between the conditions that motivated al-Hashimi and his generation in the Arab world to study the Japanese experience of rebuilding its nation-state, which coincided with the rise of the modern Arab states in the first half of the twentieth century and the search for a successful model for these states, and the situations of decline and fall of the Arab revolutionary regimes since the invasion of Iraq in April 2003 and the collapse of its totalitarian regime, the ensuing Arab Spring, and the fall of some Arab authoritarian regimes in the early twenty-first century. Thus, the rise and decline of the Arab state project were the common factors for studying the Japanese experience and attempting to understand the Japanese model as a roadmap<sup>46</sup> for rebuilding the Arab states, nations, and identities. That structural situation was as much the reason for pursuing the Japanese example at the time of Alhashimi as it is currently.

## **5. Conclusion:**

Through the study of al-Hashimi's contributions to understanding the Japanese renaissance, we have noted that this book formed a cultural-historical reference point for the next generation of the Iraqi elite interested in studying Japanese modernization and its importance for the Iraqi and Arab elites in rebuilding their nations after a series of failures from the rise of the Arab states in the early twentieth century until the crisis of the Arab order after the Arab Spring, and struggle between the nationalist and Islamist trends in the Arab World. al-Hashimi was a member of the Iraqi elite who helped found the Iraqi nation-state after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. He belonged to the military elite and, therefore, admired Japan's victories over China and Russia, its expansion into Asia, and its revision of the unequal treaties with the West. This point is very important for understanding al-Hashimi's perspective on Iraqi relations with the West, especially Great Britain. The latter imposed its mandate on Iraq from 1920 to 1932, which made Iraq essentially a British Empire dependency until the July Revolution of 1958. From this standpoint, al-Hashimi admired the Japanese people and their military and political elites who were able to achieve Japan's independence from the West and compel respect for the Japanese nation.

al-Hashimi's knowledge of European languages — English, French, Italian, and German — in addition to Turkish gave him the skill to read Western works, many of which he translated. This acquaintance with Western thought enabled al-Hashimi to understand the secrets of the "Japanese Miracle," which he thought was a product of human experience rather than a "miracle." There were two important factors in Japan's success, according to

---

<sup>46</sup> I quoted this term from the American historian, Professor Peter Gran, who discussed some roadmaps of reform around the world, as the Italian, Russian, and tribal-ethnic roadmaps. He introduced Iraq during the period 1869–1990 under the Russian roadmap. See Peter Gran, *Beyond Eurocentrism: A New View of Modern World History*, 1st ed., New York, Syracuse University Press, 1996, pp. 55–87.

al-Hashimi: the “Spirit of Nation” and *Sajāyā* (characteristics) that differed from one nation to another. The environment, al-Hashimi asserted, played a very important role in forming this “Spirit” and *Sajāyā*. There were many differences between the Arab, Turkish, and Western environments. However, a nation’s flexibility in borrowing from other nations was also very important for modernization. One of the secrets of Japan’s success was its capacity to continue and change its classic ways while preserving its original traditions and values.

al-Hashimi’s understanding of the Japanese renaissance was based on his military background and his experiences in the Ottoman and Iraqi army, in addition to his culture and reading of world, Arab, and Iraqi history. All these influences affected his perception of the Japanese experience. As its author was an Iraqi officer and politician and one of the founders of the Iraqi nation-state, al-Hashimi’s book was an historical model for modernizing the new Iraqi state, nation, and identity. All in all, al-Hashimi’s book on Japan formed a record of intellectual relations between Iraq and Japan and a basis for the present Iraqi elite as they attempt to benefit from the lessons of the Japanese experience to rebuild their new nation.

This book formed also a reference for the younger Iraqi generation who searched for a successful road of reform for their nation. This interest in understanding Japanese culture and experience has increased since the collapse of totalitarianism and introduction of democracy in 2003. The failure of the political elite to rebuild a collective Iraqi identity and successfully modernize the nation-state after a decade of change since 2003 led the liberal Iraqi elite to search for a suitable model to apply in Iraq. The time of the founding of the Iraqi nation-state, in which al-Hashimi played a role, and of other Arab states in the early twentieth century and the current age, which started with the American invasion of Iraq in 2003 and was followed by the Arab Spring, the collapse of the authoritarian Arab regimes, and the search for suitable order for the Arab nations, are characterized by similar conditions. Many Arab intellectuals and academics, including Iraqis, believe that the Japanese roadmap of reform and renaissance is one of the solutions for the Arab World. The Japanese experience, as perceived by the Iraqi elite, which was represented by such historical reference works as al-Hashimi’s, is a roadmap for the rebuilding of the present and future of Iraq.