



## ONO, MORIO

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**ONO, Morio** (b. Tokyo, 22 January 1925; d. Tokyo, 4 April 2001), eminent Japanese scholar and Iranologist.

Morio Ono was an influential Japanese scholar in many fields, notably the field of rural studies, particularly Iranian. Born and raised in a family of Samurai ancestry, he finished high school during the turbulent years of World War II, and entered Tokyo University, the most prestigious Japanese institution of higher education, in 1945. He studied geography, and later switched to economics. He was hired by his alma mater in 1953, and was transferred to the Institute of Oriental Cultures (Toyo Bunka Kenkyusho), affiliated with the same university in 1960. He worked at the same Institute, twice as its director, first in 1976-1978, and again in 1982-1984, finally retiring as an emeritus professor in 1985. As is customary with robust Japanese professors retiring from the public sector, he began teaching, developing a school of Oriental studies and doing research as a professor in Daito Bunka, a private university located in Saitama, a prefecture bordering Tokyo. In his later years, he laid the foundation for a research center close to the main campus of this university (later to be named The Morio Ono Eurasia Research Center) for conducting studies on rural areas of Western Asia. A specialized library associated with this center is named Golestān, after the famous book by the great Persian poet Sa'di.

The naming of this library may be a tribute to his father-in-law, the late Rei'ichi Gamo, a prominent scholar and the translator of *Golestān* into Japanese, who in all likelihood initiated Ono's abiding interest in Iran,



including the musicality of the Persian language, which he found “intoxicating.” Yet, although Iran occupied a special (and for a long time dominant) place in his work, his research interests were of global scope. He has done fieldwork in Japanese fishing villages (in addition to studies in regional planning in Japan), Japanese immigrants’ farming communities of Brazil, and closer to Iran, in rural areas of Afghanistan, Turkey and Syria. Ono was a firm believer in fieldwork, and privileged firsthand knowledge over bookish learning in life and in his teaching (Rajabzāda, p. 715). As a result, generations of Japanese social scientists doing fieldwork in far-flung rural areas of the world have been trained under his vast erudition, humanist epistemology and interactionist methodology. Through his practice, teaching and publication, Ono achieved recognition as a major figure in Japanese empirical social research. The late Kenzo Hori, a student of Malaysian society from the Institute of Developing Economies (Ajiken), and Seibo Hirashima, a scholar on Pakistan from Meiji Gakuen University regarded Ono to be a Japanese pioneer of Asian field work research . Ono is, along with Shoko Okazaki of Osaka University of Foreign Studies [Japanese university name? for consistency], the pioneering figure in the area of empirical research in Iranian rural sociology by Japanese scholars. Their work continues by Akira Goto of Kanagawa University, Ryuichi Hara of Toyo Bunka University, Hiroko Nanri of Chuo University and Hitoshi Suzuki of Ajiken, among many others.

As with his research, Ono’s publications were not limited to Iran, though here too is where one would find his most important writings. With the exception of a few publications, the majority of his work, as might be expected, is available only in Japanese. Among those of his publications which are of immediate relevance to Iran and Afghanistan, some mention must be made of the following: “On Socio-Economic Structure of Iranian Villages” (1967), “Social Change in an Iranian Village” (1977), “What’s Your Research Good For?: An Experience in an Afghan Village” (1977), all in English; monographs on the villages of Sā’atlu in Urumiya (1345/1967 and 1971) and Ebrāhimābād in Nayšābur (1346/1967), both in Persian; Iranian Villages (1971), Afghan Villages from a Cross-Cultural Perspective (1971), Asian Villages (1969), Iranian Diaries (1985) and The Twenty Five Year Drama of Iranian Farmers (1990), all in Japanese, except for the latter of which a translation into Persian by Hāšem Rajabzāda, under the title of *Ḳayrābād-nāma* (1997), is also available.

Ono’s actual relationship with Iran may be dated back to 1955 when he visited this country as a member of an Iran-Iraq archeological expedition team

organized by Namio Egami (1906-2002) of Tokyo University. The team's archaeological and anthropological research lasted until 1966 (see [JAPAN V](#)). His own sustained research in Iran, however, began in earnest in 1964, when he returned to the country to conduct a comprehensive study, covering a wide variety of villages, on the effects of the unfolding land reform in Iran, which had begun a couple of years earlier. Although that research did not evolve as planned, it became the instigator of his lifelong love and abiding interest in Iran (Naşiri, p.186; Ferdowsi, 2008, pp. 55-56), particularly its villagers. The result was the training of generations of Japanese students in Iranian rural studies, a vast body of research, some parts of which remain to be published, and a number of published papers, monographs and books, a sample of which was presented above.

Of these publications two merit special attention. In addition to his periodic visits to Iran to conduct research of his own or to supervise research by his students, Ono spent a couple of years in Iran as the director of Japan's Cultural Center in Tehran, right around the time of the 1979 revolution. This rather lengthy stay allowed him to personally observe the unfolding drama of the revolution. Part of his journals of the revolutionary upheaval is published in a volume simply titled *The Iranian Diaries* (1985). In this book, he follows the tumultuous days leading to the return of Ayatollah Khomeini and the establishment of an interim revolutionary government. Ironically, it is not his stay in Tehran and his daily observation of the revolutionary activities unfolding in the capital, but rather the responses of the villagers of a remote village called *Ḳayrābād* that allows him to see the truth of that revolution and indeed the truth beneath Iranian civilization as a whole. [can you ever see the 'truth' of a civilization?]

Ono traveled for the first time to *Ḳayrābād*, a nondescript village located not far from Persepolis, and spent a month there in the fall of 1964 with the purpose of doing a quick study of the village. In reality, this research lasted more than twenty five years, and resulted in the publication of a book titled *Twenty Five Year Drama of Iranian Farmers* (1990, translated into Persian as *Ḳayrābād-nāma*, 1997), undoubtedly his magnum opus. No such book has ever been written about an Iranian village (Ferdowsi, 2001, p. 232; 2008, p. 74). It is the first book to chronicle the history of an Iranian village over a span of more than a quarter century, from the implementation of land reform measures to the establishment of an Islamic state after the 1979 revolution. It meticulously records the villagers' struggles to get ahead in the midst of a harsh climate and



the equally cruel forces of modernization and globalization that hail from a distant and seemingly capricious capital, Tehran.

Of all the accolades Ono received in his illustrious life, he liked none better than the one bestowed on him by the farmers of Kayrābād, who called him the honorary *kadkodā* of their village (Ono, 1990, p. 236; 1997, p. 171). It must be significant that an old Iranian tile bearing the likeness of an itinerant dervish is installed on Ono's tomb stone by his own wish.

Selected Works on Iran.

-*Dehkada-ye Sā'atlu-e Rezāiyya*, Tehran, 1966.

-*Afuganisutan no nōson kara: Hikaku bunka no shiten to Hōhō* (Villages of Afghanistan: from a cross-cultural perspective), Tokyo, 1971.

-et al, *Ajia no nōson* (Asian villages), Tokyo, 1969.

-with Mehdi Ṭāleb, *Ebrāhimābād*, Tehran, 1967, (Published in Japanese as Morio Ono, *Perushia no nōson*, Tōkyō, 1971).

-*Iran nikki: Sogai to kodoku no minshū* (Iranian diaries), Tokyo, 1985.

-“On Socio-Economic Structure of Iranian Villages With Special Reference to Deh,” *The Developing Economies*, no.3, 1967, 446-62.

-“Social Change in an Iranian Village,” in *Hired Labor in Rural Asia*, ed., S. Hirashima, Tokyo Institute of Developing Economies, 1977, 250-62.

-“What's Your Research Good For?: An Experience in an Afghan Village,” in *Dialogue: Middle East and Japan: Symposium on Cultural Exchange*, Reference Series 3, The Japan Foundation, Tokyo, 1977, 132-42.

-*Iran nōmin 25 nen no dorama* (The 25 years drama of Iranian farmers), Tokyo: tr. Hāšem Rajabzāda, *Kayrābādnāma: bist o panj sāl bā rustāiyān-e Irān*, Tehran, 1997).

*Bibliography:*

‘Ali Ferdowsi, “Be yād-e Morio Ono, Irānšenās-e Žāponi,” *Iran Nameh*, XIX:1-2, Winter-Spring 2001, 229-36.

Idem, “Az ra’iyat be kešavarz: Ono va tāriq-e tajaddo-e Kayrābād,” *Iran Nameh*, XXIV:1, Spring 2008, 53-80.

Moḥammad Reżā Naširi, , “Professor Ono Dargodašt, *Nāma-e anjoman*, 1:1, 2001, pp.186-87.

Hāšem Rajabzāda, *Jostārḥā-ye Žāponi dar qalamro-ye Irānšenāsi*, Tehran, 2007.