

Research Training Seminar – Report

Research Topic: Studying Islamic Economics in the Lands of al-WakWak, Japan

By Dr. Ammar KHASHAN

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The lecture given during the most recent research training seminar class at the Graduate School of International Relations at Ritsumeikan was presented by Dr. Ammar Khashan. Dr. Khashan is a Special Researcher at the Ritsumeikan Asia-Japan Research Institute. His research more generally focuses on Islam, its practices and perceptions within and beyond borders.

Dr. Khashan's lecture was a critical engagement of Islam, its laws and rites. In particular, he focused on Halal food and the consumption of alcohol. Dr. Khashan undertook a genealogical analysis – perhaps even in a Foucauldian manner – of the gradual prohibition of intoxicants under Quran. In so doing, he distinguished between the initial stage at which there was no mentioning of alcohol; the second stage during which alcohol was referred to, however not prohibited; the third stage which Dr. Khashan refers to as “conditional prohibition”; and the final stage termed “unconditional prohibition”. This process enables one to identify the various actors involved and thereby stresses the socially constructed nature of Quran and its prohibitions. It appears to be a rather objective and perhaps even secular analysis of something highly religious – arguably a rare and politically difficult undertaking.

Through Dr. Khashan's research, he provides one with an alternative view to understanding the changing nature of Islam's treatment of the consumption of alcohol. By highlighting the non-natural (or rather non-divine) aspects of such prohibitions, one would assume that Dr. Khashan himself does not adhere to such man-made conventions. Nonetheless, as he admitted, Dr. Khashan continues to reject the consumption of alcohol. This curious phenomenon highlights that one cannot merely analyze religion in legal or social terms. Rather, other dimensions and variables such as those stemming from psychology also appear to play a large part. This is to be considered good news for young scholars and graduate students, more generally – namely, that no field of research is complete. Knowledge gaps and curious phenomena can be found everywhere.