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**International Entanglement of Drought, War, and Rehabilitation in  
Afghanistan:  
A Sketch from the Viewpoint of Dr. NAKAMURA’s Irrigation Project  
Kansai University  
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**Abstract**

On September 11, 2001, the World Trade Center buildings in New York collapsed due to suicide attacks which were carried out using two hijacked airplanes. In the following month of October, the United States sent soldiers to Afghanistan and toppled the Taliban regime. As the American intervention and chaos continued on the ground, Dr. Tetsu Nakamura constructed the 25.5 km Ab-e Marwarid Canal (2003 to 2010) so that refugees and crop farmers would be able to live on their own and subsequently brought back to life roughly 16,500 hectares of cultivated land through continuous maintenance and branch canal construction.

**1. The Terrorism of September 11 and the American Invasion of Afghanistan**

The simultaneous terrorist attacks on September 11 had a major impact on international politics centering around the United States and marked a turning point in modern history. Until that time, the only attack that the United States had suffered was the Attack on fleets and facilities in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii by the Imperial Japanese Navy. In contrast, the terrorist attacks carried out on the US mainland on September 11 struck and destroyed landmark buildings in Manhattan, New York which were symbols of America’s modern achievements.

Video footage of the two airplanes right before they hit the buildings followed by the buildings burning and collapsing after the impacts as well as people looking from the windows of the high-rise buildings during that time and ultimately jumping to trying to escape from the approaching flames and smoke were repeatedly broadcast on television. The number of victims exceeded over 3,000 people. In director Michael Moore’s documentary “Fahrenheit 911” (produced in 2004 and awarded

the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival) showed then President Bush visiting an elementary school in the state of Florida, which at that time was governed by his younger brother, listening as one of his associates whispered into his ear the first report of the attack, and his dumbfounded expression as he was unable to respond on stage for a brief time can be vividly recalled even now. It seemed that he became disoriented due to a completely unexpected event.

However, the subsequent response by the American government was swift as they determined that the culprit was Osama bin Laden and pressed the Afghan government to hand him over. When the Afghan government did not comply, airstrikes began on October 7, less than one month after the attacks, followed by the insertion of Special Forces in the area around Taliban stronghold of Kandahar on October 19 as the United States launched its ground war. However, according to the British newspaper "Independent," the Delta Force (Special Operation Force) were ambushed by the Taliban side with machine guns and rocket launchers and withdrew after 12 of their members were injured including three with serious injuries. As a result of this operational failure, the US military changed its tactics to avoid the insertion of ground troops, entrusted the ground fighting to the Afghan Northern Alliance of political groups opposed to the Taliban, and exclusively strengthened its attacks through intensive airstrikes. With support from the airstrikes, the Northern Alliance launched an all-out attack and recaptured the key northern city of Mazār-e Sharīf on November 9, took the northwestern city of Herāt on the 12th, and brought the capital of Kabul under control on the 13th (Koyama 2002 pp.7-8).

A new government was created after seizing Kabul, but the United States faced serious problems from the initial strikes with the need to restore public order and rebuild from the war damage. That is because there were no stable political groups which could form the basis for establishing a nation.<sup>1</sup> In Afghanistan, different political and armed groups (warlords) based on regional and tribal differences opposed each other over gains and losses, occasionally cooperating with each other while segregating to maintain order through an uncertain balance. Even the Northern Alliance was in fact a mixed force of bitter enemies composed of three factions which were the Jamiat-e Islami/Islamic Society consisting mostly of Tajiks led by former President Rabbani, the Islamic Movement of Afghanistan consisting of Uzbeks led by General Abdul Rashid Dostum, and the Hizb-e Wahdat of consisting mostly Hazaras. The Jamiat-e Islami/Islamic Society is a Sunni Islamic fundamentalist organization while the Islamic Movement of Afghanistan is a secular non-Islamic fundamentalist

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<sup>1</sup> Within the process of government collapse after 1979 (invasion and occupation by Soviet troops in Afghanistan), [...] the people would at times take up arms and receive a salary from the warlords and mujahedeen factions to lead a self-sufficient life no matter what kind of *Daulat* (state) was involved in international relations or *Hukumat* (government) was running domestic affairs. In agricultural areas of Afghanistan, the last time when farmers paid taxes was around 1979, and since then the farmers have not paid the government anything. The payment of tax in exchange for land titles and land registrations had already stopped in Afghanistan during the early stages of the communist regime. Subsequently, a system for levying taxes based on land titles and land registrations was not yet constructed as of 2014 in the country (Hayashi 2017: 154).

organization, and the Hizb-e Wahdat is a Shiite Islamic fundamentalist organization.

These organizations differed according to ethnic makeup, religious doctrine, and political ideas, and their interests did not always line up. What brought these bitter enemies together in a partnership was being cornered in the northeastern region under imminent danger as the Taliban rose up in the mid-1990s to bring the capital of Kabul and close to 90% of the country under their control. In addition, the former Minister for Defense, General Ahmed Shah Massoud (Tajik), mediated the opposition and struggles between the various factions through his charismatic charm and leadership. However, Massoud, who was expected to be the center holding the Northern Alliance together, was killed by two suicide bomber terrorists (likely members of Al Qaeda) who pretended to be journalists and came for an interview two days before the simultaneous terrorist attacks (*ibid.* 9).

Because no political entity existed or could be formed to take over after the Taliban, the reconstruction and nation building did not proceed smoothly, and the United States was forced to change its initial schedule for ending the operation and withdrawing. On the contrary, close to 100,000 US soldiers had to be stationed in Afghanistan in 2009 to restore public order and maintain political stability. The first peace agreement between the United States and the Taliban was finally signed in February 2020.

Under that agreement, the U.S. Armed Forces are scheduled to completely withdraw from Afghanistan by April 2021. In anticipation of the post-withdrawal period, 70 countries including Japan, the US, and Europe as well as international organizations held an online international meeting based in Geneva from November 23 to 24, 2020, to discuss reconstruction support for Afghanistan and decided to continue providing financial assistance. Roughly \$12 billion (approximately ¥1.25 trillion) will be donated to Afghanistan over the four-year period starting from 2021.<sup>2</sup> After the February peace agreement between the United States and the Taliban, the Afghan government also started peace discussions with the Taliban, but there has been almost no progress. On the contrary, the Taliban carried out approximately 13,000 attacks after the peace agreement, and over 3,000 government soldiers have died. (The *Yomiuri Shimbun* newspaper 2020/11/25)

Looking back on the international situation in 2001, when the simultaneous terrorist attacks occurred on September 11, China officially joined the WTO in December of that year just three months after the terrorist attacks. This was a turning point for the Chinese economy as it entered an upswing which achieved double-digit economic growth from 2003 to 2006. Compared to 2000, the total GDP in 2006 grew by a factor of 2.1, and the per capita GDP also doubled. The economic boom was supported by the expansion of imports and exports due to joining the WTO, and the growth rate of

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<sup>2</sup> During his term (January 2017 to January 2021), President Trump publicly committed to withdrawing from Afghanistan, but 4,000 US soldiers were still stationed in the country as of November 2020 close to the end of his term.

imports and exports during this period, with the exception of 2001, was over 20%. In particular, the growth rate was over 30% for 2003 and 2004, and the export growth rate was close to 30% in 2005 and 2006 (Tong Shiping 2007: 1-2).

Meanwhile, following its invasion of Afghanistan, the United States started its invasion of Iraq on March 20, 2003, together with a coalition of the willing that included the United Kingdom and Australia. The operation to disarm Iraq and remove its weapons of mass destruction was called “Operation Iraqi Freedom” (Second Gulf War). In May, President Bush released a “declaration of the end of major combat operations” and President Saddam Hussein was captured at his hideout on December 13. Combat between regular forces also ended in 2003. However, the United States did not find the weapons of mass destruction which they had denounced and used as the reason for the invasion. After the collapse of the Hussein regime, some of the Sunni military leaders who had supported the regime escaped and joined forces with IS (Islamic State), which effectively controlled the border region between Iraq and Syria. Peace and order deteriorated within Iraq, and U.S. troops continued to fight. On August 31, 2010, President Obama once again declared that the “conflict was over” and the end of “Operation Iraqi Freedom.” On the following day, “Operation New Dawn” started with the goal of Iraq maintaining peace and order on its own after the withdrawal of U.S. troops.

After being provoked by the simultaneous terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the United States invaded and waged war with Afghanistan and Iraq. During the subsequent 20 years leading up to the present, the country has continued to be deeply involved and interfere with the unstable political situation in the Middle East on a political and military level, and has gradually lost its national strength as a result. In contrast, China entered an orbit of high economic growth by joining the WTO in the same year and started on its way to becoming a major political and military power.

Looking back on international politics before the turning point of the simultaneous terrorist attacks, during the ten year period of the 1990s, the United States won the Cold War and despite facing various domestic problems, was drunk on the euphoria of being the sole military, political, and economic victor. In December 1989, General Secretary Gorbachev and President Bush declared the end of the Cold War at a conference on the island of Malta in the Mediterranean Sea. In June, just six months before, the Tiananmen Square protests demanding democracy occurred in China. In addition, after the fall of the Berlin Wall (November 1989), the socialist governments of various Eastern European countries collapsed and led to the dissolution of the Soviet Union (1991).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> A book which expresses the feeling and sense of elation in America at that time is Francis Fukuyama’s “The End of History and the Last Man” (1992). The book asserts the superiority of capitalism as an economic system over socialism and communism while also explaining the ultimate victory of the liberal democratic system based on majority rule over one-party dictatorships and oligarchies. Meanwhile, Samuel Huntington wrote “The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order” (1998) which explains the possibility of the opposition and a clash between the Western world and the Islamic and Chinese worlds.

Having won the Cold War, the United States was filled with euphoria for a brief moment. However, in a manner similar to how the Soviet Union was forced to withdraw from their 1979 invasion of Afghanistan after being worn down by 10 years of guerrilla fighting with the Taliban, the United States has also been troubled by terrorism in the capital and guerrilla warfare in the countryside for close to 20 years after taking control of the capital. The country is now in a position similar to the Vietnam War in which it is unable to win victory and must make an honorable withdrawal.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Global Warming and Severe Droughts

Around the time that the United States started its airstrikes on Afghanistan, a severe drought was occurring on the land where the bombs were being dropped due to the impact of a weather phenomenon called El Niño, which is one extreme of climate change that significantly oscillates every few years (El Niño is described further below). According to reports from the local Afghanistan Times newspaper in November and December 2011, Afghanistan experienced eight “droughts and famines” in the 12-year period from 2000 to 2011, and of those events the drought in 2000 was the worst drought in 30 years. That further exacerbated the food supply which was already in a crisis situation due to the war triggered by the invasion of the Soviet troops in 1979. Such droughts and famines impoverished and collapsed agricultural villages to produce refugees, expanded regional conflicts, and encouraged

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<sup>4</sup> The fundamental reason why the United States was not able to achieve victory in Afghanistan is likely because it was unable to obtain the trust and cooperation of the local Islamic inhabitants, a situation which is similar to the Vietnam War. Rather than constraints or failures related to policymaking and execution (c.f. *The Best and the Brightest* by David Halberstam, 1972), it is thought that the United States was unable to understand the local situation and respond in a proper way which respects the state of mind and religion of the inhabitants (c.f. “Hearts and Minds” a documentary film by Peter Davis, 1974).

In a similar way, the United States repeatedly demonstrated in Afghanistan an inability to understand different cultures and a lack of insight and respect for people living in different cultures. Regarding the inability of the American intervention to achieve its initial objectives, Hitoshi Suzuki (2012) examined the “repercussions of an incident in which American soldiers burned the Koran.” In response to the burning of the Koran, a storm of protests immediately spread throughout the country, and American soldiers were also attacked which resulted in two deaths. Meanwhile, the Afghan people were silent about an incident which occurred almost around the same time involving a US soldier who opened fire at random in the early morning hours at a private home in the Panjwayi District of Kandahar Province and massacred 16 citizens. Regarding the contrasting response on the Afghanistan side to both “incidents,” in addition to the voices within the United States pointing out the “difficulty in understanding” their religious outlook and sense of values, there are some who expressed surprise and doubt about the fact that the United States failed to understand the fundamental values of the Afghan people despite numerous deaths and hundreds of millions of dollars of war expenditures paid over 10 years.

“The problem is that such a cultural gap feels like an utterly hopeless distance that can be reflected as an indescribable sense of futility when making command level decisions in a war such as this. That becomes a psychological factor on the American side which leads to the course of the war being characterized as a ‘withdrawal without a victory by U.S. Armed Forces’ that likely determines the future of Afghanistan and the surrounding regions” (Hitoshi Suzuki 2011:576–577).

Therefore, the activities by Dr. Nakamura introduced in the next section carry a more important meaning and implication.

the distrust of the government. Ensuring the development of water resources and irrigation are the very keys to agricultural development in Afghanistan, and it is a sector which can significantly contribute to the growth and stability of agricultural production as well as ensuring peace and order of the local community (Nagata 2017: 224).

Afghanistan ranges from an arid region to a semi-arid region and mountainous areas take up most of the country. The total annual rainfall in the major agricultural regions (altitude of 500 to 2,000 meters) is between 200 and 350 millimeters, and most of that falls during the winter from November to April (JICA, 2011). Rain-fed agriculture is unstable, and cultivation is not possible in many regions even if you have “land.” “Water resources” are more important, and agricultural yields depend on the amount of irrigation water. The ratio of GDP occupied by agriculture was 57% in 2000 and 26% in 2013 as it is gradually decreasing. However, 60% of the total working population in Afghanistan is engaged in agriculture and livestock production, which makes agriculture an extremely important industry particularly in local communities (European Union, 2009). In addition, the disarmament of warlords providing employment opportunities requires the creation of new forms of employment, and only the agricultural sector can fulfill that role for the time being (Naghizadeh, 2004). In other words, the development of the agricultural sector, and the water resource sector in particular, is extremely important for achieving peace as well as reconstruction and rebuilding in Afghanistan (Nagata 2017: 224).

According to an analysis performed by weather expert Hitoshi Kawano based on historical documents and 60 years of meteorological observation data from 1950 to 2010, the following three factors are behind the increase and growing severity of droughts in Afghanistan. 1) Water shortages caused by the loss of remaining snow in summer on mountains with an altitude of 450 meters or less due to the impact of global warming on the sudden rise in atmospheric temperature (1.8°C/60 years) and the decrease in the amount of snowfall in spring, 2) drought due to a decrease in rainfall in spring, and 3) an increase in evapotranspiration due to increases in the atmospheric temperature. However, it must be noted that climate change does not mean that the atmospheric temperature of the entire globe rises uniformly but rather that there are significant regional differences. In countries such as Afghanistan, in particular, where there is extremely little rainfall for conducting agriculture and they rely on mountain meltwater for farming, there will be a shortage of irrigation water in summer and become unable to farm due to sudden increases in the atmospheric temperature. It has been pointed out that as a result, that type of situation has extremely significant effects such as producing a large population of starving people (Kawano 2019: 782).

El Niño is a warm phase of the El Niño–Southern Oscillation (ENSO) in which the sea surface temperature from the area near the dateline of the Pacific Ocean equatorial region to the coast of South America rises above the temperature for a normal year, and that condition may continue for a period

of one year or longer. Conversely, a phenomenon in which the sea surface temperature falls below that of a normal year in the same sea area is called La Niña, and the phenomena alternately occur every several years. The El Niño and La Niña phenomena are believed to be significant factors in triggering the oscillation of extreme weather events throughout the world including Japan. The climate and water utilization for agriculture in Afghanistan are also affected by those two phenomena in a location which is far removed from the Pacific Ocean.

Looking back, a major earthquake centered around the Tohoku Sanriku area struck Eastern Japan on March 11, 2011, 10 years after the United States invaded Afghanistan in 2001. The principle number of deaths due to the tsunami reached 22,000 people. The source of the 2011 Tohoku Earthquake and other massive earthquakes and tsunamis which repeatedly occur in Japan, Taiwan, Philippines, and Indonesia lies in the convective motion of the mantle which occurs at a depth of over 100 kilometers below the surface of the earth. The mantle below the earth's crust flows slowly and continues to rise, move, and settle in specific locations. The driving force of the Pacific Plate, which has the largest area, is created at the East Pacific Rise where the mantle convection flows out and advances west at a speed of approximately 10 centimeters per year. For roughly 100 million years, that process has carried the Pacific Plate from east to west where it dives under the Philippine Sea Plate at the Mariana Trench on the eastern edge of the Asian continent. Distortions due to the subduction building up at the point of contact between both plates instantly releases repulsive energy when it reaches a limit and tries to return to its original position, which triggers a massive earthquake.

Similar to the plate, the seawater of the Pacific Ocean moves from east to west in a location slightly above the equator (the following explanation is an excerpt from Shimizu 2012). When the sea water reaches the Japanese islands, it becomes the Kuroshio (Black Current) or Japan Current which flows along the Pacific Ocean coast with a width of between 100 to 200 kilometers and a speed of 2 meters per second (7.2 km/h) at the point where the current is strongest. The flow rate is 50 million tons per second, the magnitude of which is more than 90,000 times greater than the 530 tons per second flow rate of the Shinano River, which is the longest river in Japan. After the Japan Current flows north along the Pacific Ocean coast of Japan and reaches a north latitude of about 40°, it turns right and proceeds east toward the vicinity of California on the North American continent to become the North Pacific Current. Then, when it reaches the western coast of the North American continent, it turns right once again to flow south toward the equator as the California Current. It changes direction toward the west around a north latitude of 10° to become the North Equatorial Current, reaches the Philippine Sea, and passes through the sea around Taiwan to become the Japan Current. The ocean currents which move in a clockwise direction across a broad range of the massive northern Pacific Ocean in this manner are called a subtropical circulation system (Taya 2011: 5-7).

The ocean currents which circulate on the surface layer of the Pacific Ocean are created by the

surface of the ocean being pulled in the same direction by the frictional motion caused by the wind (prevailing wind) which blows on the ocean surface. Separately, at an ocean depth of over 1,000 meters, because the temperature and salt density are nonuniform, a thermohaline circulation is triggered, which forms a deep water circulation which flows and connects the Pacific Ocean and the Atlantic Ocean. This is called the “global conveyor belt,” which is a long-term circulation that takes more than 1,000 years to circulate and is regarded as having a significant impact on the earth’s climate.

The El Niño phenomenon is famous as a short-term form of climate change which is triggered by that belt. El Niño is a Spanish phrase which means “the child of God,” and the phenomenon is triggered when the surface temperature of the Pacific Ocean off the coast of Peru and Ecuador rises by several degrees Celsius at a frequency of once every few years. The cause is believed to be complex and continuous interactions which occur between the ocean and the atmosphere. The factor on the ocean side is called El Niño (EN), and the phenomenon which occurs due to factors on the atmospheric side is called the Southern Oscillation (SO) while the two elements are jointly referred to as the El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO). The relationship between the two and the mechanism through which they combine to create ENSO have not been solved yet. However, it does have a definitive impact on the weather in regions surrounding the Pacific Ocean and causes abnormal weather such as droughts and heavy rain.

When the El Niño phenomenon occurs, vapor builds up due to an increase in the seawater temperature of the eastern part of the Pacific Ocean, which causes air to rise above the surface of the sea to produce changes in the trade wind which blows along the equator from east to west. In the Pacific Ocean, normally the seawater on the equator which is warmed up by solar heat is pushed toward the western part of the Pacific Ocean, the vicinity of Indonesia, by the trade wind (Equatorial Current), and cold seawater rises up in its place in the eastern part of the Pacific Ocean. In this way, the surface temperature of the Pacific Ocean is kept at a temperature gradient with a high barometric pressure to the west and low pressure to the east during ordinary years. However, this temperature gradient becomes more moderate when the surface temperature of the sea off the coast of Peru and Ecuador near the edge of the eastern side rises due to El Niño. When that happens, the trade wind which pushes the warm seawater weakens, and the warm sea area (warm water pool) builds up in the eastern and central parts of the Pacific Ocean, which produces heavy rain and floods along the normally dry Pacific Ocean coast of South America. In contrast, the ocean temperature in the Indian Ocean and the western part of the Pacific Ocean becomes lower than usual, and droughts occur from the northern part of Australia to Indonesia and the Philippines. In addition, the impact of El Niño also causes major changes to climates from the Indian subcontinent to the African continent and the North American continent (Cullen 2011: 2-4).



### 3. From the Site of the “Water for Life” Project<sup>5</sup>

Dr. Tetsu Nakamura continued to run a hospital practice for the sick and refugees first in the provincial capital of Peshawar in the North-West Frontier Province (now the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) of Pakistan from 1984, and then hospitals and an irrigation project in Afghanistan from 1986. He was the recipient of many awards including the Ramon Magsaysay Award (2003) and the Fukuoka Prize (Grand Prize in 2013). He received over 20 major awards. On December 4, 2019, the car that Dr. Nakamura was riding in as he headed to a construction site in Jalalabad in the eastern part of Afghanistan was ambushed, and he lost his life. When his body was being sent back to his hometown of Fukuoka, President Ghani himself helped carry the coffin on his left shoulder at the front to the airplane at the airport. Three months before, Dr. Nakamura was awarded a medal for honorary citizenship of Afghanistan directly by the president. After his death, he was posthumously awarded the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold Rays with Rosette.

As described above, around the time that the Bush administration was engaged in large-scale airstrikes against Afghanistan after being shocked and provoked by the simultaneous terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, people were struggling with water shortages and famine due to a large drought which started from the previous year on the land which was being blown up by bombs dropped from the air. Though he was a medical doctor, Nakamura first started digging wells in agricultural villages and established over 1,600 under the slogan of “one well will do more good than 100 clinics” and repaired *karez* (qanats, irrigation channels built underground) in over 30 locations. From 2003, he started building the Marwarid Canal to irrigate the Gamberi Desert and recover farmland.



Dr. Tetsu Nakamura rejoicing with local children during the trial flowing at Section E of the Marwarid Canal. (2005 c.Peshawar-kai)

To build the canal, he designed the plans himself and at times operated a hydraulic excavator. In 2010, the completed Marwarid Canal (elevation difference of 17.2 meters with an average gradient of approximately 0.0007) had a total length of 25 kilometers, and the estimated irrigation area reached

<sup>5</sup> This section is based on excerpts, corrections, and revisions to two of the author’s manuscripts (2007, 2020).

approximately 3,000 hectares. Through a subsequent joint project with JICA started in 2011 to expand and improve irrigation canals and build new sluice gates and tributary channels, the total area of the irrigated land under cultivation increased to 16,500 hectares across the three districts of Sheywah, Behsud, and Kama. It is estimated that the number of refugees who returned to farming will reach 650,000 people including families (Nakamura 2017:152-160).

It is worth noting that until the joint project with JICA started, the Marwarid Canal was completed using only independent funding from the annual fees of the Peshawar-kai and donations from philanthropists in Japan. Moreover, the majority of those donations (over 90%) were allocated to local operating costs. Normally, roughly half of the budget at major international NGOs is used for office rent and other expenses (staff salary, office running costs, equipment rental, and communication expenses). However, in the case of the Peshawar-kai, the only required expenses were for rent and communications for the one-room apartment in Fukuoka where the office was located as Nakamura and the office staff all worked for free. After the joint project with JICA started in 2011, they hired two specialized staff members to carry out administrative processes and create various documents and began paying for those personal expenses. However, even then the operating financial statements for the Peshawar-kai show that, for example, according to the FY 2017 accounting report, out of the total operating expenses (expenditure basis) of ¥216.5 million (equivalent to \$1.95 million), approximately 90% or ¥194.4 million went to local cooperation expenditures, ¥12.7 million (5.9%) went to office expenses, and ¥9.34 million (4.3%) was spent on public relations expenses (Peshawar-kai Proceedings No. 136: 9).

The pillar of Nakamura's activities was the treatment of patients with leprosy for which he was initially sent to the region, but his activities soon included establishing and operating a sandal workshop to prevent foot sole injuries (plantar ulcers) (Nakamura 1989). Furthermore, his activities changed to include the expansion of medical treatment for people living in the most remote regions and the weak and poor of society (Nakamura 1993), actively dealing with malaria outbreaks (ibid.), construction of a base hospital for PMS (Peace (Japan) Medical Services) (1998), and survival support to enable the general public to survive on their own land, or in other words digging wells and building irrigation channels, etc. (Nakamura 2006). As a result, Nakamura's work also rapidly changed from being a physician to becoming the boss of a sandal workshop, director and manager of a hospital, and a recruiter of day laborers to distribute food as well as a civil engineer, and president and foreman of a general contractor.

In order to answer the highly urgent needs at local sites in Afghanistan, Nakamura would sometimes acquire the necessary knowledge and skills. While struggling with all of these tasks, he did however nimbly change his own vocation from the outset (in the sense that he did not cling to his position and role as a physician). It truly was a period of rapid change. What remained constant

throughout was the principal involvement of the local people with himself in an auxiliary role taking action based on the prioritization of their true needs.

The distinctiveness and greatness of his activities lie in the fact that he himself worked on site breaking a sweat in order to dig wells and build irrigation channels for farmers suffering droughts while at the same time continuing to report (disseminated through newsletters and ethnographies) from the places where people suffering from terrible drought and war damage were living based on his own experiences and observations. The brunt of his criticism was directed not only at the American invasion of Afghanistan and its foreign policies but also the policies of the Japanese government which backed and supported the United States. Nakamura continued to closely observe the reality of the daily lives of the Afghan farmers and refugees living on the ground exposed to the bombing attacks from the air as he placed himself close to the field sites and looked over their shoulders to see things from the same viewpoint. At the same time, he questioned global politics from a perspective overlooking Afghanistan, Japan, the United States, and Europe and hurled criticism at Japanese politics and society (regrettably, due to restrictions on the length of this paper, such details will not be introduced here but instead be covered in a separate paper).

#### **4. Positioning Close to the Local People and Reporting the Truth and Real Situation from the Ground**

His adoption of a humble posture, respect for the local traditions and culture, and efforts to try and respond to the feelings and wishes of the people can be seen in the construction of the irrigation canals as well as the construction of a *madrasa* (Islamic educational facility). He himself explained his basic position and principles regarding humanitarian aid and developmental aid as shown by those actions.



Nearly completed mosque and madrasa buildings in 2009.  
(c.Peshawar-kai.)

Some explanation is required regarding the madrasas. They are normally described in translation as an “Islamic theological seminary,” understood to be a “breeding ground for the Taliban,” and even targeted for airstrikes by foreign troops rather than be supported. However, the actual situation is quite different from the information communicated by Western sources. Madrasas can be said to be the center of the local community, and Islamic society cannot exist without them. They not only train Islamic imams but also establish libraries and dormitories and provide educational opportunities to disadvantaged orphans and children from impoverished homes. Despite such terrible conditions in Afghanistan, the madrasas are one reason why there are few so-called “street children.”

Moreover, madrasas establish mosques as an annex where the heads of each household throughout the community gather for “Jumma prayer (Friday worship).” For the local community, it is a place for important announcements, consultations, and settlements with enemies, etc. They are not a “breeding ground for terrorism” at all as they have no political nature. A student who studies at a madrasa is called a “talibe,” and the plural form of the word is “taliban (student of God).” The students study not only the Koran but also typical subjects such as geography and mathematics. In other words, they are a local cultural center, a welfare institution for disadvantaged children, a place where people can cooperate with each other, and the center which ties the community together. The madrasas are run by the community and are said to sometimes receive aid from the Afghan government.

I realized once again the magnitude of their importance to the local people. Last year, when the primary construction for a 13 kilometer irrigation canal started, there was a large plot of open land 14,000 square meters in size nearby. It was said to be the planned construction site of a madrasa. When asked about the site, a villager responded, “we want to build it, but nobody can do so under such impoverished conditions. International support organizations have specifically removed only the construction of madrasas and mosques from the items which can receive aid.” The provincial Education Minister lamented, “there is no local stability without the madrasas. Even though they are an essential element for the community, just the name of the ‘Taliban’ political group causes a misunderstanding, and nobody wants to cooperate.”

Fortunately, we were in the middle of constructing a canal and had abundant equipment, so we proposed that “if everyone is too scared to build it, then let us construct it ourselves.” In the town of Jalalabad, the number of children begging increased, and it is said that there are over 1,000 orphaned children. That is because they focused on welfare institutions which could absorb those children.

However, I was surprised. Both the residents and the local government were even happier than when water began to irrigate the land which had returned to desert. When the nearby village heads attended the groundbreaking ceremony, some of the elders shouted, “now we have become free!” It really made me think about what the word “freedom” means in the phrase “freedom and democracy.” Together with a deep religious spirit, they also hold a strong pride with respect to tradition and culture.

They likely remember a feeling of suppression with respect to campaigns which denied those feelings. Although not by choice, it was the first time that they received support to construct a madrasa from a foreigner other than Saudi Arabia, and it became a popular topic of conversation in the eastern stretch of Afghanistan as a major piece of good news. They heaped great praise on Japan saying, “Of course, Japan understands the situation. They are also not sending any soldiers,” and I felt pleased with it. Some Western international organizations probably frowned at this development, but most Afghan people were overjoyed.

“Man cannot live by bread alone.” This is not simply an ideal or a sermon. As an unimportant Japanese person who once humbly left things up to fate, I was fortunate to learn the truth about people. (Peshawar-kai Proceedings No. 95, 2008)

Nakamura thought about the sentiments and religious spirit of the local people and tried to see the real world from that perspective, and that approach is the fundamental position of academic activities within cultural anthropology, which is the field of expertise of the author. To borrow the words of Bronislaw Malinowski, who is said to be the founder of modern anthropology, the goal is to see things “from the native’s point of view” or to borrow the words of Clifford Geertz, who had a major impact on various disciplines in the humanities from the 1970s to the 1980s, it is the standpoint (positioning) of “reading over the shoulders of natives.” Nakamura became close to the local people and his efforts to try and view the surrounding world from that perspective (or from over their shoulders) are clearly shown by his statements encouraging people to rethink the “barbaric” demolition of the Bamiyan Buddhas by the Taliban from a perspective which differs from the condemnation of world opinion.

Roughly six months before the simultaneous terrorist attacks on September 11, the Supreme Leader of the Taliban Mullah Mohammed Omar delivered the proclamation ordering the destruction of the Buddhist statues and other statuary ruins in the country as they would lead to idolatry which was prohibited under Islam on February 26, 2001. The response from international society was swift as the United Nations Security Council issued a statement criticizing the order for destruction on March 6, and a general resolution demanding that the order be revised on March 9 was unanimously adopted. However, the two Bamiyan Buddhist statues were destroyed immediately after.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Regarding the background to the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas, analysis by So Yamane (2002) indicates that the direct cause was a struggle for power within the Taliban regime with the hardliners holding the actual authority and carrying out that decision to show their power. In other words, the Taliban took control of the capital at the end of September 1996 and established a temporary government, but while expanding their territory through a subsequent civil war, they were unable to obtain the approval for their government from international society. Therefore, around the end of 1999 a group emerged within the Taliban who expressed their dissatisfaction with the leadership and wanted to overturn the status quo.

Immediately after on the morning of March 19, Nakamura was on site around the time that topics of the Buddhist statues' destruction by the Taliban were spreading throughout the world. Sporadic combat continued at the point when the destruction of the massive stone Buddhas was half complete. With only the Taliban soldiers and Hazara military and civilians present, most of the village was completely deserted as the majority of the residents had relied on relatives in Kabul to flee. The reason that Nakamura had come to Bamiyan was not his interest in places which are sacred to Buddhism. The PMS (Peshawar-kai and Peace Japan Medical Services) which he served as Director had decided at the end of February to provide emergency medical support to Kabul. In order to establish clinics in the five zones in the city where refugees were thought to reside, he had come to the country of the Hazara people (Bamiyan), which had the most refugees, to explore the possibility of practicing medicine as a part of that support.

Because Afghanistan had already suffered not only war but also the worst drought during these 30 years, Nakamura reported from the field that the nation was at a critical point where it might collapse. Since the previous summer, United Nations organizations had already been issuing warnings to the world that "10 million people are facing disaster, and one million people are expected to die of starvation." Nakamura sent a letter to the editor of the Asahi Shimbun newspaper titled "Who Will Really Destroy Me?: From the Site of the Great Buddha Statues in Bamiyan" about his thoughts as he stood among the rubble after the demolition of the stone Buddha statues of Bamiyan.

Surrounded by a deep blue sky and peaks of dazzling snow, the Bamiyan Valley was so quiet that it was almost eerie. Amidst countless stone caves, a particularly large and massive Buddha stood straight up, with right half of its body remaining. What must it be thinking as it looks down upon the ground?

With the sudden increase of refugee patients at the base hospital in Peshawar, in February of this year I planned medical care activities in the capital of Kabul with the goal of "engaging in activities to avoid sending refugees outside of the country." This plan had already clearly exceeded the scale of one NGO. Moreover, the majority of foreign NGOs had withdrawn or

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At this time, there were a moderate faction which advocated accepting the demand to hand over Bin Laden to obtain the approval of international society and a hardline faction which advocated refusing this demand and for the further promotion of an Islamic system, and the opposition between these two factions became clear. On February 2, the hardline faction and moderate faction provoked an armed conflict, and the hardline faction was victorious. In truth, this hardline faction included many who had been influenced by Arab military volunteers.

When the Taliban first formed, the group had a strong similarity to vigilantes or neighborhood watch groups. Because the citizens and traders, etc. supported the group for restoring peace and public order, many residents joined the Taliban without being asked, and the group was able to quickly expand its military power. However, with the stalled civil war and a lack of clear progress on internal affairs, the group's only achievements which were claimed to fall under maintaining order and a thorough implementation of Islamic law, were an order for men to grow beards and the prohibition of music, and it became difficult to recruit soldiers. In their place, Arab military volunteers became involved and expanded the group's power. (Yamane 2002)

suspended their activities. It was roughly around this time that the United Nations sanctions started, and the problem with the destruction of the Buddha statues occurred. I wonder how this looked to those who were suffering from drought. Around the time that the Buddha statue problem was at its highest peak, a letter arrived from an Afghan staff member.

“I am very sorry. All of the staff members would like to apologize on behalf of all Muslim believers. Our intention is not to blaspheme the beliefs of others. We sincerely hope that Japan will not misunderstand the Afghan people.” I responded to their action during the morning meeting.

“We will not add to the chorus of criticism. We do not have the time to argue while one million people are dying of starvation. Peace is the national policy of Japan. We will observe that spirit and continue to provide support. The misunderstanding of the Japanese people will also likely be resolved over a long period of time. What are the cultures and civilizations of mankind? I am grateful to God for the opportunity to think about such things. The true ‘cultural heritage which is common to all people’ is the spirit of peace and mutual aid. That is what should be built in our hearts.”

When I looked at the giant Buddha, with half of its body remaining, at Bamiyan several days later, for some reason its pitiful form seemed to be trying to reveal something. “Who will really destroy me?” The silence of that stone expressed an intention to perish with the folly of all people on its back even if it broke into countless pieces of rock. It stood apart from the world of the divine and boisterous people and even seemed to be pointing at something genuine. (April 3, 2001, Asahi Shimbun newspaper)

A report titled “The Real Afghanistan: Thoughts About the Destruction of the Bamiyan Stone Buddhas” with almost the same content was also posted in the Gakushikai Bulletin No. 832 (July 2001). However, a subtitle reading, “Deprivation of Japanese Spirituality” was added to the second half of the essay describing his introspection with respect to the morals and ethics of Japanese society. Those who were treated in a “feudal, undemocratic, and belligerent manner” by the occupation army after unconditional surrender were branded as being part of a bad tradition and intentionally erased and forced in one fell swoop to discontinue their good traditions at that time. He says that was a systematic and large-scale destruction of cultural heritage which clearly exceeded what happened at Bamiyan.

In grasping the thoughts of the Bamiyan stone Buddha and asking on its behalf “Who will really destroy me?” Nakamura’s words carry a deep meaning. It is doubtful as to whether those of us living in Japan far away from Afghanistan will really hear that question. However, the Empress Michiko seriously considered that question and wrote the following *waka* poem. “All unconsciously, Have I

too not fired a shot? With spring well along. On the plains of Bamiyan. The stone Buddhas are no more.” On the official web site of the Imperial Household Agency, the poem was introduced as follows (deleted afterward). “At the height of spring in the fields of Bamiyan, the stone Buddhas are no more. If the stone Buddhas were destroyed as an expression of the hatred and intolerance which lurks inside human beings, did I too unknowingly fire a bullet? This waka poem was composed as an expression of those feelings of sadness and fear.” The poem by the Empress Michiko connects with the emotions and ethics of Dr. Nakamura.

## Conclusion

This paper examined the severe drought damage due to global warming and its subsequent prolongation on the ground in Afghanistan from the late 1990s when the Taliban expanded their power to the simultaneous terrorist attacks in 2001, and the airstrikes and invasion by a provoked United States. In contrast, it clarified the significance of the construction of the Marwarid Canal by Dr. Tetsu Nakamura and the Peshawar-kai to secure irrigation water. The objective was to use Afghanistan as an example to analyze the close entanglement of domestic and international politics over climate change and water resources in their entirety. However, this is still limited to a simple sketch. The next task will be to fill in the details based on this rough sketch to illustrate the entire picture.

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