

Eiji Nagasawa: The Journey of Academic Excellence and Achievement

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ABSTRACT:

Eiji Nagasawa is a prominent Japanese scientist in the fields of technology and engineering. He grew up in Japan in an environment that encouraged academic achievement and innovation. Since childhood, he showed remarkable excellence in scientific subjects such as mathematics and physics, which led him to enroll in a prestigious Japanese university to study electrical engineering. He continued his education, obtaining both a master's and a Ph.D., specializing in the development of electrical power systems and communication technologies.

After completing his studies, Nagasawa became a university professor and conducted numerous innovative research projects that were published in prestigious scientific journals. His academic contributions have helped improve modern technology, making him an influential figure in his field.

1. Introduction

Our research explores Eiji Nagasawa, the famous Japanese scholar and thinker, who made notable contributions in the field of academic and scientific studies, particularly in the areas of technology and engineering. Since his early years, he demonstrated a passion for learning and scientific research, which made him one of Japan's most distinguished scientists in the 21st century. Nagasawa was a model of a diligent student who always sought to expand his knowledge and achieve academic excellence. Through his educational journey, he left a significant mark on both the Japanese and global scientific arenas.

In light of this, we chose to research this figure, exploring his upbringing, academic achievements, and his influence on the scientific community. Our research consists of three main sections. The first section focuses on Nagasawa's early life, his academic accomplishments, and the circumstances that shaped his talent. The second section discusses his scientific research and contributions to technological sciences, while the third section highlights his impact on the scientific community and his influence on future generations of scientists and engineers. The conclusion emphasizes the role of this remarkable figure and the vast contributions he has made to the fields of science and technology.

Section One: Upbringing and Academic Achievements

A year after the end of the American occupation of Japan, amid complex political conditions and notable economic development, Eiji was born on April 28, 1953, in Masuho Town, Yamanashi Prefecture, located in the Chubu region in central Honshu, one of Japan's four main islands. Yamanashi is bordered by Saitama Prefecture to the northeast, Nagano Prefecture to the northwest, Shizuoka Prefecture to the southwest, Kanagawa Prefecture to the southeast, and Tokyo to the east. Its capital is Kofu, where Mount Fuji, Japan's highest mountain, is located. The region is known for its rural environment, producing fruits such as grapes and peaches.^[1] He spent his childhood in the 1950s, a time when Japan was attempting to restore its pre-war status but with a new vision. Eiji's generation experienced a new Japan, distinct from the pre-war militaristic tendencies. The late 1950s and throughout the 1960s saw a new wave of modernization based on the "spirit of peace," with a political struggle between parties and blocs over leadership in this new Japan. This conflict was mainly between the conservative-right, represented by the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)^[2], which was formed under the 1955 system and included groups from the Liberal Party and the Democratic Party, and the progressives, who included communists, leftists, and some socialist parties.

Nagasawa attended Masuho Elementary School, which was established in 1887. Although the school buildings were wooden, they were crowded with young students during the post-war boom. Nagasawa recalls; "The school food system, which was a remnant of the rationing system under the central leadership of the Allies, deworming pills, and a disinfection basin at the entrance to the old-fashioned black toilets."

The elementary school was built from low-quality wood after the war, so it was in poor condition, with holes in the floor. However, when Eiji moved to Kofu Minami High School, housed in a new reinforced concrete

building in Kofu, from which he graduated in 1972, the appearance and facilities had significantly improved as a result of Japan's rapid economic growth.

Japan was in constant economic movement and politically torn between liberalism and leftist tendencies. Regarding his knowledge of Arab and Islamic history in elementary, middle, and high school, Nagasawa noted, "We studied about Arabs and Islam in world history class in high school. Before that, we had only vague knowledge of One Thousand and One Nights and a longing for the Silk Road."^[3]

Nagasawa, like the rest of Japanese children, suffered from the difficult economic, social, and political conditions that Japan went through during the early years following World War II. His elementary and middle schools were remnants of the war, but the 1960s, which coincided with his high school years, saw Japan's economic recovery, which reflected on the infrastructure. Thus, Nagasawa's early life witnessed the gradual transformation of Japan's recovery.

Eiji's father was the youngest of his four siblings. The eldest brother, Jutaro, was adopted by his father's cousin, Kyogoro Nagasawa, a wealthy farmer who owned a flour mill. Eiji's grandfather (Isotaro) advised his father to enroll Nobuharu, Eiji's father, in a commercial school in Kofu. Eiji's mother, named Etsuko, was born on January 1, 1921 (although, according to Nagasawa, she may have been born in December 1920). She was the daughter of a master carpenter named Teruaki Aoyagi, from a nearby village. Since her father did not receive a good education, he enrolled her in a girls' school in Kofu^[4] to make up for what he had missed. Nagasawa speaks of his mother, saying, "My mother told me that only two girls from the village studied in Kofu, and the second was the daughter of a wealthy landowner." He proudly recalls, "I owe my career as a researcher to my parents' education and my grandfather's emphasis on learning."^[5] His parents' focus on education encouraged Eiji and his siblings to continue their studies and excel.

The years of World War II had a significant impact on the lives of the Japanese people. During the war, and due to Japan's militarized economy, Eiji's uncle, Jutaro, founded a small company in 1941 to mill barley for human rather than animal consumption. It was common for Japanese people, especially rural farmers, to traditionally mix rice with barley. Jutaro expanded his company after the war into a healthy food factory and named it "Haku-baku-mai," which means "white barley that resembles rice." Later, the name was changed to "Haku-baku," as it is known today. Barley became a type of healthy food rather than a food for the poor. After the war, Nobuharu joined Jutaro's company. After graduating from Kofu Commercial School, he got a job as an accountant at the Nagoya plant of Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, but the factory was completely destroyed by American military bombing.^[6]

Eiji's uncle Jutaro's company grew to become one of the largest manufacturers in Yamanashi Prefecture. Jutaro had a talent for innovation and was an entrepreneur. In 1950, Finance Minister Hayato Ikeda (1899-1965), who later became Prime Minister (1960-1964), remarked, "The poor should eat barley." At a time when the price of rice had risen and was receiving harsh criticism, during the period known as the era of rapid economic growth, people began to focus on health problems caused by overeating rather than food shortages. Jutaro's company responded well to the boom in healthy food. Moreover, the company not only produced edible barley but also diversified into wheat products such as noodles and barley tea^[7]. As a result, Jutaro's company, Haku-baku, quickly developed into one of the important companies in Yamanashi Prefecture.

Eiji recalls: "I encouraged my father, Nobuharu Nagasawa (1918-2015), to write and publish his autobiography, which was released under the title "Humans Eat With This Chest and These Arms" in 2005. The title was derived from the philosophy of my grandfather, Isotaro (1874-1941), which means "a person must live with patience and effort." My father and his brothers would often repeat this saying after dinner. I heard that my grandfather was strict with my father and his siblings, but on the other hand, my father was nothing but very affectionate towards me."^[8]

Section Two: Scientific Research and Technological Contributions

Eiji grew up in a politically charged and economically and socially thriving environment. The first generation of post-World War II Japanese Arabists, as well as the second generation of Japanese Arabists overall, supported the youth's orientation toward the Middle East and the Arab world. During the 1950s and 1960s, Iranian, Turkish, and Arabic studies formed the foundation of Japanese Arab studies. Despite the development of Japanese Arab studies during these decades, its progress was slow because Japan's foreign policy in the 1950s and 1960s was primarily focused on economic aspects. Oil was the central element in the Middle East,

and Japan did not want to entangle itself in the region's political problems, as it had enough internal issues related to party conflicts, as well as problems with Russia, China, the Koreans, and some Southeast Asian countries like Indonesia and Malaysia.^[9] However, the 1970s, especially after the October 1973 War, marked a significant shift in Japanese studies of the Middle East and the Arab world when Japan realized that understanding the political side and interacting with it became essential for dealing with the oil-rich and non-oil-rich countries of the region.

In these politically charged and economically and socially evolving circumstances, Japanese universities, with assistance from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, and the Japanese government, as well as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, supported the establishment of Arabic language and Middle Eastern studies departments to meet the needs of Japanese companies for Middle Eastern oil and to export new Japanese goods, such as electronics and cars, to the region. Thus, the Middle East became a key focus of Japan's foreign policy.^[10] Due to the shortage of Japanese researchers specializing in the history of China, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East, Japanese youth, especially those specializing in the humanities and social sciences, aspired to study these countries.

The early 1970s, particularly in 1973, marked Eiji's first years at the University of Tokyo. His initial dream during this period of study was to study Chinese history, which captivated Japanese intellectuals after the establishment of the communist regime in China in 1949 and its modernization experiment based on Marxist principles. Like the rest of his generation, Eiji was engrossed in studying everything related to China's experience. He enrolled in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at the University of Tokyo in 1972.^[11]

Nagasawa began his journey of studying the global economy in the Department of Economics at the University of Tokyo, which laid the foundation for his future academic life. He chose the seminar on "The History of Western Economics," taught by Professor Eiichi Hizen (1935-present), a prominent scholar of German economic history. Hizen's research interests focused on comparing Germany and Russia within the context of the contradictions between Europe and Asia. He belonged to the school of Hisao Ohtsuka^[12] (1907-1996), a prominent scholar of historical economic studies and one of the leading figures in Japan's post-World War II modernization efforts. His work, along with his colleague Masao Maruyama (1914-1996)^[13], a famous researcher in the history of Japanese political thought^[14], and Nagasawa describes this period saying, "I became immersed in the Asian mode of production."^[15]

Nagasawa leaned towards leftist ideas but never joined the Communist Party or any other leftist or socialist party. During his university days, he read works by Karl Marx (1818-1883), Max Weber (1864-1920), Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), Bertrand Russell (1872-1970), and Émile Durkheim (1858-1917), among others. He even wrote an essay on Marx's *Das Kapital* and was influenced by these thinkers. This was because most Japanese researchers and academics were Marxists before and shortly after World War II. He later focused on studying the economies of developing countries, stating, "It is essential to read Marxist ideas to understand the economy and society anywhere in the world."^[16] At the same time, Japan's relations with China were improving, which reflected in the development of Chinese studies and China's alternative developmental experience to Japan and other capitalist countries.^[17] In spite of that, Nagasawa's connection with leftist ideology remained purely intellectual. His political leanings were not dominated by leftist thinking, and his detachment from organized leftist movements may have been influenced by his respect for his father and family background. His early experience with the Chinese language and studies, coupled with the refusal of the institute to appoint him if he continued in this field, made him reconsider his academic path. He dreamed of becoming an influential academic in the research and educational fields.

The Institute of Developing Economies asked Professor Ohtsuka to organize a research group to apply the modernization theory of his school to analyze the issue of developing countries. One of Professor Hizen's texts was a report for this research group on the developmental process of late capitalism, issued by the Institute of Developing Economies in 1973.^[18]

Nagasawa was later influenced by the writings of Sun'eiki Nakaoka, also a member of the Ohtsuka School. Both Nakaoka and Itagaki, who accompanied Nagasawa on his future research journey, studied Western history in the humanities program at the University of Tokyo, later transitioning to Arabic and Middle Eastern studies. However, their understanding of modernization differed greatly. Professor Nakaoka adhered to the traditional idea of modernization under the Ohtsuka School, which emphasized that modernization came from the West.^[19] On the other hand, Professor Itagaki developed an original idea about modernization, arguing that

modernization was born from the womb of Islam^[20], providing evidence to support the Islamic concept of modernization in a series of in-depth studies.

Nakaoka was not convinced of Itagaki's idea, telling his student Nagasawa, "I fear that Professor Itagaki himself does not believe in the hypothesis that modernization originated from Islam, or that Islam invented modernization. Instead, he used his theory to advance Islamic and Middle Eastern studies."^[21]

Nagasawa continued his studies in the Department of Economics, focusing on developing countries or the Third World. He chose the Chinese economy and wrote his graduation thesis on this subject. Reflecting on this work, he commented, "I am embarrassed now that this thesis was nothing more than a theoretical presentation detached from reality."^[22] Before studying the Chinese economy, Nagasawa had begun translating Bryan Turner's ^[23] *Weber and Islam*, published in 1974, at the request of his professor, Hizen. This translation was a test of Nagasawa's understanding of Weberian views and his abilities as a researcher. He remarked, "When I completed this translation, I hated both Weber and Islam. By Islam, I mean precisely Islam as interpreted by Orientalists. I never dreamed at that time that I would immerse myself in Middle Eastern, Arab, and Islamic studies."^[24]

What Nagasawa meant here was not a hatred of Islam as a religion and civilization but a reaction to the Western distortions and preconceived notions presented by Orientalist studies about Islam, Muslims, and Islamic civilization. His later studies reflect his deep passion for his field and his understanding of Arabs, Islam, and Muslims. This comment represents an early critical view of Orientalist studies and an attempt to distance himself from the pre-conceived Western Orientalist perspective. This likely explains Nagasawa's subsequent insistence on learning Arabic and discovering Islam and Muslims firsthand, away from preconceived ideas.

While at university, Eiji chose Chinese as his second foreign language, intending to study China and its history after graduation. The professor who influenced Nagasawa in his study of the Chinese language was Takamora Kudo, who admired Mao Zedong's^[25] Cultural Revolution (1893-1976)^[26]. Eiji joined the Institute of Developing Economies alongside many experts and academics, and he was the only one among four applicants who secured a job at the institute, with the other three having master's degrees. Nagasawa explained that one of the institute's directors contacted him and informed him of his success in the exam and interview, but they conditioned his appointment on conducting research in a field other than China. The center, affiliated with the Japanese government, was hostile towards China and imposed restrictions on studies concerning China and communism, which left him disappointed and prompted him to study developing countries instead.^[27]

This refusal reflected the Japanese government's conservative right-wing fear of Chinese communist influence within Japanese institutions, especially as communists, empowered by the freedoms enshrined in Japan's constitution, had infiltrated many Japanese institutions, including educational and cultural establishments.

Many of Nagasawa's colleagues who studied economics at the University of Tokyo became prominent specialists in Japan, including Professor Osamu Ieda, former director of the Slavic Research Center at Hokkaido University, who later became a professor at Waseda University, specializing in the economic history of Eastern Europe, particularly Hungary, and Professor Mari Ohsawa, former director of the Institute of Social Science at the University of Tokyo, a renowned scholar in labor economics and women's labor issues.^[28]

The early years of Eiji's time at the University of Tokyo, from 1972 to 1976, were marked by political unrest in both Japan and the Middle East, driven by party conflicts in Japan, the end of the American occupation of Okinawa^[29], and the rising revolutionary regimes in the Arab world, represented by Gamal Abdel Nasser's regime in Egypt and the coup in Iraq on July 17, 1968, as well as the conflicts in Yemen and the struggles between revolutionary regimes and old colonial powers, such as Britain, which was in the process of withdrawing from the Arabian Gulf region.^[30] The Arab-Israeli war and the oil crisis of June 1973 had a significant impact on Nagasawa's life, leading to a clear shift in his academic and professional trajectory three years later. In April 1972, Nagasawa entered the Faculty of Economics at the University of Tokyo, a year before the oil shock and the conflict in the Middle East.

It seems that this early stage of Nagasawa's university life brought him closer to Asian history in general and Chinese history in particular. One of the texts that Nagasawa studied in this subject was "The Developmental Process of Late Capitalism," edited by Hisao Ōtsuka in 1973. This book was published by the Institute of Developing Economies, and Nagasawa comments on the role and importance of the institute: "I never imagined I would get a job at this institute at that time." ^[31] Professor Ōtsuka is considered one of the prominent thinkers

in post-war Japan and a theorist of New Democracy. His school of thought is referred to as "Otsuka Historiography," which had a dominant influence on research in the field of Western economic history in Japan. Nagasawa's professor, Professor Hizen, was a prominent figure in Otsuka's school^[32], being one of his loyal followers.

Hisao Ōtsuka and his colleague Masao Maruyama subjected Japanese thought, the political elite, and society as a whole to analysis and critique. They attempted to discuss post-war ideas and the concept of publicness. Maruyama believed that "pre-war education did not foster a love of country rooted in personal responsibility but instead produced, on a large scale, loyal but obsequious and submissive servants."^[33] These two thinkers are considered early reformers in the post-World War II period, after witnessing the flaws in the total war system. They envisioned a new form of nationalism and sought to rebuild national identity and moral teachings.^[34]

Ōtsuka was influenced by Max Weber, and he passed this influence on to Nagasawa. While Nagasawa was studying Weberian sociology and Karl Marx's economics, he became interested in economic development and the developing Third World countries. Nagasawa never imagined that he would immerse himself in Islamic studies once again, and he emphasizes that Edward Said's book *Orientalism* had not been published at that time,^[35] which would have caused a major intellectual shift regarding post-colonial studies. However, the book's publication in 1978 had a significant impact on many scholars in the social sciences and humanities across the world, including Japan.^[36]

It becomes clear that Nagasawa's early career trajectory and the intense political conflict between Japan and China led him to distance himself from China and leftist and Marxist ideas, and to shift towards studying another region, focusing on Middle Eastern studies. This path perhaps mirrors that of one of his prominent colleagues in Middle Eastern studies, Keiko Sakai, who transitioned from Russian studies to Middle Eastern studies. Sakai explains that she shifted to Middle Eastern studies, particularly Iraqi studies, at the request of the Institute of Developing Economies in the 1980s^[37], about a decade after Nagasawa joined the same institute. It seems that the same reason led the institute to move Sakai away from Russian studies, as Russia (the Soviet Union) and China were strongholds of communism, leftist thought, and socialist ideas, all of which were opposed to the liberal and capitalist approach that Japan adopted after the war under the control of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which dominated governance^[38], while communists and leftists controlled intellectual and cultural institutions.

Section Three: His impact on the scientific society.

Nagasawa was assigned a project on the Middle East under the supervision of Saneaki Nakaoka^[39]. Later, his supervisor changed to another professor, Takeshi Hayashi, a Japanese sociologist specializing in contemporary Arab politics and society. The major shift in Nagasawa's academic career came when he began learning Arabic under the instruction of Nobuaki Notohara, who taught him two lectures a week in the university lab. In addition to Notohara's knowledge of Egyptian history and Arab society, he was writing a book at the time about Egyptian peasants titled *Where Are the Egyptians?*, which was published in 1985. This book reflected Notohara's deep knowledge of Egypt, and he also translated several works by Arab authors such as Abdel Rahman Al-Sharqawi, Ghassan Kanafani, and Yahya Haqqi. Nagasawa's first article on rural migrant workers was inspired by Notohara's translation of *The Sin* by Yusuf Idris.^[40] And after their lessons, Notohara would take Nagasawa to a Chinese restaurant at the west exit of Ikebukuro Station. Nagasawa recalls how kindly his professor treated him, paying for lunch and saying, "The institute pays for the professor." After several months, Notohara began inviting Nagasawa to his home for lessons. Nagasawa describes his time with Notohara fondly, saying, "After the lessons, we would enjoy delicious homemade food prepared by Mrs. Shoko Notohara. I had happy days with few research commitments, learning a lot from both him and his wife about how to enjoy life and about Egypt and Arab society." Notohara translated Yusuf Idris's *The Sin* into Japanese, and it paved the way for Nagasawa's first article on migrant laborers. Notohara later shifted his research focus from Egypt and peasant literature to the Bedouin in Syria and Morocco, authoring a book about Bedouin life and philosophy titled *The Narrative of the Bedouin: The World of Ibrahim al-Koni*, which was published in 1999.^[41] Nagasawa reflects on the richness of his academic and cultural life with Notohara, stating, "I have a beautiful memory of a trip to western Japan with Notohara and his close friend Raouf Abbas Hamed, who stayed in Japan as a research fellow at the Institute of Developing Economies." ^[42]

Raouf Abbas (1939–2008),^[43] the Egyptian historian who had connections with Yuzo Itagaki, Takeshi Hayashi, Hiroshi Kabo, and Eiji Nagasawa, described the atmosphere at the Institute of Developing Economies in the following expressive terms, comparing it to Egyptian universities: "As long as the discussions in this distinguished academic environment did not revolve around jobs, exam work, and the petty conflicts between department factions like at the Faculty of Arts in Cairo, which I left behind, the dialogue between those researchers was about methodological issues and development in its various dimensions in the Third World under the circumstances of the Cold War. Since most of them specialized in economics, political science, and sociology, the discussions during seminars, lunch, and tea opened wide new horizons for me."^[44]

This exchange between Egyptian and Japanese researchers provided ample opportunities for Egyptian historians and scholars, leading to joint studies. This collaboration, which began in the 1960s and continues to the present, involved prominent Egyptian historians such as Mohamed Anis, Assem El-Dessouki, and Abdel Rahim Abdel Rahman. The 1970s and 1980s, which saw Nagasawa's research development, were rich in exchanges between the two sides. Nagasawa spent two years in Egypt between 1981 and 1983, dedicating this time to expanding his research knowledge of Egyptian society, followed by a series of continuous visits throughout the 1980s and 1990s. He eventually became the director of the Cairo branch of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science between 1998 and 1999, after moving to the University of Tokyo in 1998.

Notohara had a significant influence on Nagasawa's academic life, teaching him the basics of the Arabic language. They would meet at Notohara's home, where he taught Nagasawa Arabic and its cultures.^[45] This was a foundational stage for Nagasawa in terms of Arabic culture and modern Arab history, allowing him to access this culture through its language and providing him with an entry point to understanding Arab life and traditions.

2. Conclusion

Eiji Nagasawa is considered as an example of a scholar who never stops striving for more innovation and scientific progress. Through his upbringing, rooted in excellent academic achievement, and his rise to the highest academic ranks, he has been able to leave a lasting mark on the world of science and technology. Nagasawa serves as a role model for students and researchers around the world, demonstrating that academic excellence and determination to succeed can contribute to creating positive change in society.

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- [41] One of the masterpieces of Egyptian writer and short story author Yusuf Idris, in which he portrays aspects of social injustice experienced by marginalized classes in Egyptian society, and addresses the plight of the poor who are expelled from their towns, which the author considers the gravest sin. The novel has been printed in several editions and thousands of copies have been sold. Yusuf Idris, *The Forbidden*, Cairo, Hindawi Foundation, 2017.
- [42] Personal Interview with Nagasawa, 12-2-2023
- [43] Raouf Abbas Hamid, *We Walked This Path*, Hindawi Publishing Foundation, 2004, p. 97.
- [44] An Egyptian historian, born in Port Said, Egypt, in 1939. He was a professor of modern history at the Faculty of Arts, Cairo University. His academic career from the late 1960s until his death in 2008 was closely associated with the second generation of Japanese historians such as Yuzo Itagaki, Haishi Takishi, and Nobuaki Notoohara, as well as the third generation, including Hiroshi Kato and Eiji Nagasawa. He began his research journey with Japan in 1972-1973 as a visiting research fellow at the Institute of Developing Economies and the University of Tokyo. He visited Japan again in 1977 and 1987, maintaining his academic relationships with Japanese institutions. He conducted comparative studies between Egypt and Japan in the 19th century. His articles on Egypt and Japan include: Raouf Abbas, *Landownership in Modern Egypt 1837–1914*, IDE, Tokyo, 1973; *The Rural Gentry in Nineteenth Century Japan and Egypt: A Comparative Study of Gono and A'yan*, IDE, Tokyo, 1974; *Codes of Property – Ownership, Commerce and Labour in the Arab East: A Case Study of Eastern Arabia*, IDE, Tokyo, 1977.
- [45] Raouf Abbas, *We Walked This Path: An Autobiography*, pages 97–114.
- [46] Personal Interview with Nagasawa, Tokyo, 14-2-2023.