

## ISLAMIC AND CULTURE IN JAPAN : DYNAMIC AND PROBLEMATIC

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## ABSTRACT

*Islam is a minority faith communities that developed in Japan. History of Religion in Japan in Japan, religious freedom is widely given by government to the people. It is contained in the quote: "No religious organization shall receive any privileges from the state nor exercise any political authority. No person shall be compelled to take part in any religious act, celebration, rite, or any other religious activity. The Muslim community in Japan may have a low profile but is steadily growing as Muslims strive to overcome any difficulties they face to adapt to life in the giant Asian country. "*

*Most Japanese participate in rituals and customs derived from several religious traditions. Life cycle events are often marked by visits to a Shinto shrine. The birth of a new baby is celebrated with a formal shrine visit at the age of about one month, as are the third, fifth, and seventh birthdays (Shichi-Go-San) and the official beginning of adulthood at age twenty (Seijinshiki). Wedding ceremonies are often performed by Shinto priests, but Christian wedding ceremonies, called*

*howaitouedingu ("white wedding"), are also popular. These use liturgy but are not always presided over by an ordained priest. Japan today is home to a thriving Muslim community of about 120,000, among nearly 127 million in the world's tenth most populated country. Described as the Japanese, believes that human interaction is a key point to offer Japanese people a better understanding of Islam. "Islam is essentially a way of life—it is present in every aspect of the daily life of a devout Muslim," people will become interested in Islam through seeing its influence in aspects of everyday life, and that personal contact with Muslims will help them to understand Islam better who participated in the establishment of the Islamic Center of Japan, Islam puts a strong emphasis on correct behavior and the virtues of charity*

*Keys word : Islam, Japanness and Culture*

## INTRODUCTION

The Muslim community in Japan emerged as the times and the Japanese public curiosity towards Islam . The emergence of the Muslim community in Japan started since the arrival of hundreds of Muslim refugees from Turkey , Uzbekistan , Tadjikistan , Kirghiztan , Kazakhstan and other refugees from Central Asia and Russia at the resurrection of the Bolshevik Revolution during World War I. Those who were given Muslim Asylum ( right asylum ) by the Japanese government to stay in some of the major cities in Japan and then forming a small Muslim community .

A number of Japanese people embraced Islam after interacting with the Muslim community . With the small Muslim community of some mosques were built . Kobe Mosque , built in 1935 and the Tokyo Mosque built in 1938 is the most important mosques in Japan . One thing that should be emphasized here that few Japanese Muslims who were involved

in the construction of mosques and none of the Japanese Muslim who became the Imam in every mosque . During World War II that took place in Japan . This trend brought about by the military government through various organizations and research centers concerned to study about Islam and the Muslim World . In other words, that during World War II , there were more than 100 books and journals published studies about Islam in Japan . Unfortunately, various organizations and research centers that are thriving are not under the control or managed Muslims so that the reviewer can use the name of Islam Islam for any purpose . Though the reviewer's goal of Islam is merely to make the Japanese military to gain knowledge as well as extensive knowledge about Islam and Muslims in the Japanese colonies in China and Southeast Asia . As a result , after World War II ended in 1945 , various organizations and research centers disappeared rapidly . For other events occur due to the oil shock of 1973

In Japan there is no single organization for Japanese Muslims. Also there is no exact figure the actual number of Muslim in Japan. But figures estimate about 70,000 in 2002. The largest number are Muslims from Indonesia, about 20,000 people. Muslim native Japan alone is estimated only 7,000 people most of them converted to Islam through marriage with a Muslim couple from outside Japan. Of that amount, only about 500 people were organized under the Japan Muslim Association, an Islamic organization the largest stand alone in Japan

So the Japanese Muslim minority really absolute . Its presence in the midst of the Japanese people barely unnoticed and ignored . The situation is the same when we talk about Islamic studies in Japan . Expert Islam is still very little . Islamic presence in Japan has breathed fresh air for life . Japanese

people's lifestyles dry spiritual values makes them easy to stress . This can be evidenced by the suicide rate of 30,000 people per year . Though the life of a prosperous society with income per capita GNP of 30,000 U.S. dollars . The biggest problem is the fact that mentally Japanese society succumbs to science and technology into their slaves . They are very work-oriented and materialistic . The concept of a traditional Japanese family is getting weaker in the modern world that refers to the social and economic factors . Modernity interest in Western fashion , lifestyle , and a series of other triggers in addition to economic reasons has been the main locomotive of change in social and cultural values of Japanese society . Unfortunately , this fact is not realized . Thus the Japanese society with welfare can not live happily .

In 1994 the number of Buddhist population of 90 million , 1.5 million Christians , and Muslims 100,000 , this amount includes the population is not native to Japan . According to Nakata ( 2006 ) for Japanese people religion is out of mind ( being outside the universe of thought ) . According to the Japanese people , religion is only for people who experience mental illness . This is contrary to the opinion Suriasumantri( Sumarlam ., 2004:124 ) say that religion serves to provide a foundation of human relationship with the Creator and with one another , based on the trust that was followed . The history of Islam in Japan Nakata (2006 ) explains that there is no direct contact with Islam Japan until the Meiji Restoration ( 1867 ) . It is a major factor in the Muslim community in Japan at least until now . Muslims Japanese predecessors such as Ahmad ArigaBunpachiro ( w.1946 ) , Hilal Yamada Torajiro ( 1957) , and Nurullah Tanaka Ippei ( 1934 ) , has no children of Muslim descent , and since then they do not have a Muslim family but

three generations earlier , until Hajj Abdulkarim Sekihei Saito ( 1998 ) . Besides Japanese society contiguity with Islam begins with the translation of the prophet Muhammad activity books into Japanese . Further relationship exists when the Japanese government established trade alliance with the Turkish government . Through this association , more tightly intertwined contact between the two civilizations .

The development of Japanese society of science-technology, economics can not deny is very advanced, but the Japanese people can not be able to achieve the concept of living in harmony, is characterized by a large degree of stress and occurs in people of Japanese suicide.

#### **Research Methods Used**

This study used qualitative methods grounded research , which aims to understand the existence of interconnected between the various external and internal symptoms in Japanese public life . In regard to the study of Sociology , using a structural approach . In this approach Environmental seen in terms of formal relations , which reveal the real environmental relationships between individuals and groups . This approach further delineate models pressing environmental reality as a coherent state , emphasizing balance , whereas in reality does not have the characteristics of the overall coherence . Reality has a contradiction environment featuring a variety of variations and modifications to the structure. In the dynamic approach that also considers the dynamic and structure intended to explain the methods and systems that shape , namely to see , contradictions , tensions , and motion inherent in society ( Ballandier , 1996: 19-21 ) . Approach used above all be viewed in the context of approaches ( paradigms ) qualitative . A qualitative approach is

characterized by the useful purpose of research that seeks to understand the symptoms so as to not require quantification or any of these symptoms do not allow precisely measured ( Garna , 1999:32 , Moleong , 1989: 2-3 ).

Stepfield operations carried out systematically to answer the basic research questions that have been raised as a matter of research. Hopefully, through this research will give birth to a hypothetical thought.

Description and expression of empirical phenomena as objective reality of society, will be pressed on descriptive methods. Descriptive research aims to describe and understand the patterns of socio-religious society as a whole in the context of the unity of the round. Descriptive research in socio-religious context with structural and dynamic approach, generating scientific concepts also functions to hold the classification of the symptoms of social, religious and technological culture in question.

This study uses a qualitative overall principles of phenomenology. According Garna (1999:34) the qualitative nature of the empirical terms that refer to a real life person, including all that is behind the pattern of attitude and actions as a human bio-social. The principle of phenomenology, which is meant here "pressing subjective aspects of human behavior. Researchers are trying to enter the concept of a world on subjects he studied, so there searchers to understand what, how and to what extent that understanding will be developed around the event and every day life.

According to Maxwell (1996, in Gunawan and Abdullah, 1998), a qualitative study carried out for:

1. Disclose or understand the "Meanings" (meaning that includes Affect cognition, intentions, or other matters as the participant's perspective).
2. Understanding the particular context that participation was the various actions and understand the influence of a particular context to their actions (participants).
3. Identify the symptoms and effects are not anticipated in advance and create new theories that will develop earlier theories.
4. Understand the occurrence of various events and actions.
5. Build a causal explanation. A qualitative approach can be used to describe the pattern of socio-religious relations in society, which is hard to do with a quantitative approach. Moreover Patton (1990) suggested qualitative methods allow researchers to conduct studies on a particular Issue in depth and detail. Grounded research approach that focuses on the following characteristics:

1. Research explores the background without intervention on the background research.
2. Unravel the detailed description of the situation, the person or people, events, interactions and behaviors that can be observed.
3. Qualitative data in the form of a detailed description, the phrase philosophy, the advice, petatah proverb, poem, poetry, saga, situation, person or community, events, interactions and behaviors that can be observed.

4. The detailed description of the safety concerns , attitudes , beliefs of individuals or communities or the entire contents of documents , records and case .
5. The qualitative data obtained from the empirical world in the form of detailed description or the description of a free open every effort to adjust the programs and activities of the human experience in the form of a standard predetermined categories such as choice answers contained in the questionnaire or observation .
6. Using a holistic or comprehensive approach , inductive , moving from one fact to another fact to find a general idea of something being investigated.
7. Collecting data using a conceptual framework with the goal of limiting the focus of research

### **Islam in Japan**

In 2008, Keiko Sakurai estimated that 80–90% of the Muslims in Japan were foreign born migrants primarily from Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Iran. It has been estimated that the Muslim immigrant population amounts to 70,000–100,000 people, while the "estimated number of Japanese Muslims ranges from thousands to tens of thousands".

The Bahá'í Faith in Japan begins after a few mentions of the country by Abdu'l-Bahá first in 1875. Japanese contact with the religion came from the West when Kanichi Yamamoto (山本寛一?) was living in Honolulu, Hawaii in 1902 converted; the second being Saichiro Fujita (藤田左式郎?). The first Bahá'í convert on Japanese soil was Kikutaro Fukuta (福田菊太郎?) in 1915. Almost a century later, the Association of Religion Data Archives estimated some 15,700 Bahá'ís in 2005 while the CIA



World Factbook estimated about 12,000 Japanese **Bahá'ís** in 2006.

There are currently approximately 4,000 Hindus in Japan, about one third of whom are located in the Kansai area and living in Kobe. Though Hinduism is a little-practiced religion in Japan, it has still had a significant, but indirect role in the formation of Japanese culture. This is mostly because many Buddhist beliefs and traditions (which share a common background with Hinduism) spread to Japan from China via Korean peninsula in the 6th Century. One indication of this is the Japanese "Seven Gods of Fortune", of which three originated as Hindu deities, including Benzaiten (Sarasvati), Bishamon (Vaiśravaṇa or Kubera), and Daikoku (Shiva). Various Hindu deities, including the fore-mentioned, are worshiped in Shingon Buddhism. This denomination, and all other forms of Tantric Buddhism, borrow heavily from Tantric

There are presently about 2,000 Jews living in Japan.<sup>[24]</sup> With the Opening of Japan in 1853 and the ending Japan's "closed-door" foreign policy, some Jews immigrated to Japan from abroad, with the first recorded Jewish settlers arriving at Yokohama in 1861. The Jewish population continued to grow into the 1950s, fueled by immigration from Europe and the Middle East, with Tokyo and Kobe forming the largest communities.

During World War II, some European Jews fleeing the Holocaust found refuge in Japan, with one Japanese diplomat, Chiune Sugihara, the Japanese consul to Lithuania, disregarding his orders and issuing more than 6,000 entry visas to Jews fleeing the Nazis. After World War II, a large portion of Japan's Jewish population emigrated, many going to what would become Israel. Some of those who remained married locals and

were assimilated into Japanese society. There are community centers serving Jewish communities in Tokyo and Kobe. The Chabad-Lubavitch organization has two centers in Tokyo.

The Ryukyuan religion is the indigenous belief system of the people of Okinawa and the other Ryukyu Islands. It has been influenced by Japanese Shinto and various Chinese religions. Jainism, unlike the closely related Buddhism, is a minority religion in Japan. At present, there are 3 Jain temples in Japan, with the Kobe Jain temple being the most famous one. Taoism is believed to be the inspiration for spiritual concepts in Japanese culture. Taoism is similar to Shinto in that it also started as an indigenous religion in China, although it is more hermetic than shamanistic. Taoism's influence can be seen throughout the culture but to a lesser extent than jukyō. Institutional Taoism is present in the country in the form of some temples; the Seitenkyū was founded in 1995.

Japanese funerals are usually performed by Buddhist priests, and Buddhist rites are also common on death day anniversaries of deceased family members. 91% of Japanese funerals take place according to Buddhist traditions. There are two categories of holidays in Japan. Matsuri (festivals), which are largely of Shinto origin and relate to the cultivation of rice and the spiritual well-being of the local community, and nenjūgyōji (annual events), which are largely of Chinese or Buddhist origin. During the Heian period, the matsuri were organized into a formal calendar, and other festivals were added. Very few matsuri or nenchōgyō are national holidays, but they are included in the national calendar of annual events. Most matsuri are local events and follow local traditions. They may be sponsored by schools, towns, or other groups but are most often associated with Shinto shrines.

Most holidays are secular in nature, but the two most significant for the majority of Japanese New Year's Day and Obon— involve visits to Shinto shrines or Buddhist temples, respectively. The New Year's holiday (January 1–3) is marked by the practice of numerous customs and the consumption of special foods. Visiting Shinto shrines or Buddhist temples to pray for family blessings in the coming year, dressing in a kimono, hanging special decorations, eating noodles on New Year's Eve, and playing a poetry card game are among these practices. During Obon, *bon* (spirit altars) are set up in front of Buddhist family altars, which, along with ancestral graves, are cleaned in anticipation of the return of the spirits. People living away from their family homes return for visits with relatives. Celebrations include folk dancing and prayers at Buddhist temples as well as family rituals in the home.

In 1930, Muslims number reached about 1000 of different origins. Another wave of migrants who boosted the Muslim population reached its peak in 1980s, along with migrant workers from Iran, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Japan today is home for a thriving Muslim community of about 120,000 Muslim, among nearly 127 million in the world's tenth most populated country. Tanada said that factors such as student exchange and self employed workers and those having professional careers are responsible for further mounting in the Muslim population. "There are many Muslims who have married and settled with their families in Japan, and they want to deepen exchanges with their communities," professor Tanada noted.

There is also the increase in the number of Japanese converters, who are currently estimated at 10,000 among the Muslim community, he noted. Many Japanese women have

embraced Islam after marrying Muslim men. And as Muslims numbers grow, so the services catering to them. Halal food outlets are sprawling across the capital Tokyo. There are about 60 mosques, and over 100 "musalla" or limited areas to perform prayers scattered all over Japan. Although Muslims have difficulty attending the five prayers in mosques they are gathered in higher numbers for the Friday noon prayer. Tokyo Camii, also known as Tokyo Mosque, one of the oldest mosques in Japan receives 400 to 500 Muslims this day, most of them from Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia. Ehsan Bhai, a Muslim who has lived in the country for 16 years, was able to adapt to Japanese society, but his wife and children feel some difficulties for being a Muslim living in Japan.

There are also obstacles she encounters such as halal food that is not available all the time, especially when she is in a hurry. She realizes that even in her kids' schools there is not much attention to accommodating Muslims needs. "For example, if you look carefully at a bag of "sembei" (rice crackers), they include extracts of chicken soup, which may not be halal food," she said. But halal food and cultural differences are not the only problems they face. Her husband Bhai is in charge of Asakusa mosque in the Kanto region. The mosque is one of eight other mosques set up by the Islamic Circle of Japan, an organization Bhai helped founding back in 1997 after he arrived to the country. But the atmosphere since that time has changed dramatically. Japan Muslims, just like Muslims in many other non-Muslim countries in the post-9/11 world, have become smeared with terrorism. Western campaigning against Islam spread misconceptions about the religion in Japan what affected Japanese tolerance towards Muslims living among them.

Recent leaked police counter terrorism files have even affirmed that, as it revealed that the police have been identifying Muslim residents as "terrorist suspects". "Myself and many Muslims in Japan love this country and consider it our home. Why would we destroy our own home?" asked Bhai. Through his organization, Bhai hopes to raise public awareness that Muslims are peace-loving people. But despite of all the obstacles, some, like professor Tanada, are optimistic. He believes in Muslims prospect within the Japanese community and their willingness to offer their goodwill to people around them. They [Muslims] want more people to understand their religion."

#### Islam and its impact on Japanese life

Finding Islam thousands of miles away from his home, a Japanese Muslim has devoted his life to spread the correct Islamic teachings and present the true image of Islam to his fellow citizens. "I think Japan inherited a somewhat biased European view of Islam, and this has exacerbated this tendency," Shimoyama Shigeru, a Japanese Muslim who works at Tokyo Camii mosque and Turkish Culture Center.

"For instance, a lot of people in Japan became familiar with the expression "Either the Qur'an or the sword," and this has gotten in the way of a proper understanding of Islam. Particularly after 9/11, the impact of media coverage has made Islam seem an intimidating and "scary" religion to a lot of people." Shigeru first came to know about Islam during his journey down to Nile river to Sudan as a young university student. There, he met different people who flooded him with hospitality though they did not understand a word of what he

said. "The Africans I met were Muslims, and their hospitality made a deep impression on me," he said.

"I was surprised to learn later that their kindness came from Islamic teachings." Returning to Japan, Shigeru met an Iraqi student at the University of Tokyo who gave him the final push he needed to revert to Islam. "His kindness and brotherly love was intricately bound up with his faith as a Muslim," Shigeru recalled.

"That experience was the starting point for the person I am today. To be honest, I never had much belief in God until I became a Muslim," he said. "But once I joined the Muslim community and started to worship alongside other Muslims of all races, side by side as brothers, I realized what a wonderful thing it is." Islam began in Japan in the 1920s through the immigration of a few hundreds of Turkish Muslims from Russia following the Russian revolution. In 1930, the number of Muslims in Japan reached about 1000 of different origins. Another wave of migrants who boosted the Muslim population reached its peak in the 1980s, along with migrant workers from Iran, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Japan today is home to a thriving Muslim community of about 120,000, among nearly 127 million in the world's tenth most populated country. Described as the Japanese teacher of Islam, Shigeru believes that human interaction is a key point to offer Japanese people a better understanding of Islam. "Islam is essentially a way of life—it is present in every aspect of the daily life of a devout Muslim," he said. "I hope that people will become interested in Islam through seeing its influence in aspects of everyday life, and that personal contact with Muslims will help them to understand Islam better." Shigeru, who participated in the establishment of the Islamic Center of Japan,

said that Islam puts a strong emphasis on correct behavior and the virtues of charity.

“The reason we worship in lines alongside each other goes to the heart of the spirit of Islam, which says that all believers are equal before God,” he said. “There is also the belief in justice, or birru; this is the idea that you should always think about the needs of others first. “This belief frees you from an egotistical way of thinking. These Islamic ideas have become deeply engraved in my heart.” Editing and publishing numerous works explaining Islam to Japanese readers, Shigeru hopes to spread the true teachings of Islam, away from biased media. “I was lucky to experience aspects of Africa that most Japanese people don’t have a chance to encounter, so I hope I can make a positive contribution,” he said. “I want to do whatever I can to clear up some of the misunderstandings Japanese people have about Islam and convey a correct understanding of the religion to as many people as possible.”

### **The Current Muslim Presence in Japan:**

Muslims in Japan, Japanese and residents, cover more or less the entire of Japan, from the northernmost island in the country (Hokkaido) to the smallest island in the south of the country (Okinawa Island) neighboring Taiwan; and from the easternmost part of the country (Tokyo) to the westernmost part of it (Kanazawa, Shimane and Tottori). We can classify Muslims in Japan into the following categories:

Japan Muslim Association is the first major Islamic association founded in 1953 by Pre-Second World War, Muslims who returned after their conversion in Indonesia, Malaysia and China, in addition to those early Muslims who were alive at that time. Graduates from Al Azhar University,

Islamic University, Al Madeenah Al Munawwarah and UmmulQura University, Makkah Al Mukarramah play an active role in the association, and its current president is Mr. AmeenTukumatsu, a graduate from Al Azhar University. Mr. YahyaEndo, a graduate of the Islamic University in Al Madeenah Al Munawwarah, is also one of its active members, and so is Mr. Nooruddeen Mori, a graduate of UmmulQura University in Makkah Al Mukarramah. 1.The Islamic Association in Hokkaido 2. Japan Islamic Friendship Association in Kyoto 3. Association of Islamic *Da'wah* in Osaka ).4.The Islamic Association in Nara ( 5).Muslim Women Association in Osaka and Kyot (6) Arabic Culture Association in Tokyo

This type is somewhat widespread in all parts of Japan and in huge numbers. To give a few examples, Mr. Khalid Kiba who runs his own association in Tokushima southwestern Japan, he is also a member of Islamic Center-Japan, Professor Abdul Jabbar Maeda with the Islamic Association in Miyazaki in southeastern Kyushu Island, Brother Muhammad Sato is active with Muslim Student Association and Islamic Association in Sendai and member of Islamic Center-Japan, and Professor MurtadaKurasawa who is one of the directors of Islamic Center-Japan and at the same time a professor in Nagoya University.

In fact, the situation of Muslims in Japan is relatively similar to that of Muslims during Makkah Al Mukarramah period, when new Muslim individuals were scattered in the various cities, villages and oases of the Arabian Peninsula. Some of them were hiding their beliefs, while others publicly declared them, inviting torture and harm upon themselves until they migrated to Al Madinah Al Munawwarah. A question arises here: What is the number of Muslims in Japan? The answer is



that there is no reliable census of Muslims in the country. In fact, there are more than one hundred Islamic societies and scores or even hundreds of Mosques and prayer halls through which many Japanese people embrace Islam almost every day.

In addition, seventeen millions Japanese leave the country as tourists every year. Some of them embrace Islam in Muslim countries while others do so in Europe and America. They contact us online to provide them with Islamic books and their requests are promptly granted. A Japanese Muslim woman once sent us an e-mail from Kuala Lumpur saying that about fifty Japanese men and women were interested in Islam and requested us to send her Islamic books in Japanese.

Japanese Muslims are estimated at about 100,000 or even more, while non-Japanese Muslims are estimated at 300,000 or more. However, this remains a rough estimate which observers look at from different perspectives and accordingly give various estimates. It is worth noting, however, that the number of Muslims in Japan is on the increase and that the Japanese people are much closer to Islam than are any other nations in the world. In fact, Japanese people revere this religion and believe that it confirms their long standing ideals and traditions.

The early Muslims who came to Japan were from Indian Sub Continent before independence. They came to Japan towards the end of the nineteenth century, settled in Tokyo, Yokohama, and Kobe where they engaged in trade. They founded the first permanent Mosque in Kobe in 1935. This Mosque has stood the test of time in that it survived the Second World War which demolished a nearby church and the 1995 earthquake which also demolished the same church for the second time.

The second generation of Muslim emigrants consisted of Tatars, or Kazan Turks, who came to Japan to escape Communist rule during the early twenties of the twentieth century. They lived along with Indian Muslims in Kobe and built a Mosque in Nagoya, which was demolished during the Second World War. They also founded Tokyo Mosque in 1938, and were led in their Islamic activities by the late Abdul Hay Qurban Ali. We can say that these emigrants represent the first Muslim community to settle in Japan. Some of their youth had migrated to Turkey, Europe, and America and very few of them are still in Japan.

Indonesian and Malaysian Muslims represent the third group of Muslim emigrants to set foot in Japan. In fact, a doctrinal controversy arose between these and Tatar Muslims (Indonesians and Malaysians follow Shaf'i School of Jurisprudence, while Tatars follow Hanafi School of Jurisprudence). This controversy prompted the late Abdul Hay Qurban Ali, Tatar Muslim leader to write to Al Masumi, the *Imam* of Holy Mosque in Makkah Al Mukarramah, regarding this controversy, and the latter wrote a treatise in response. The treatise was titled *Hadiyah Al-Sultan Ila Bilad Al-Yaban* (The Gift of The Sultan to the land of Japan). This book published during the thirties of the twentieth century. This treatise has been reprinted many times and is still in circulation. Indonesian community remains the largest Muslim community in Japan. Its members have a school and a Mosque in Tokyo that played a major role when Muslims missed Tokyo Mosque.

The largest immigration is the one that has been going on since the eighties of the past century. This migration consists of a number of nationalities and many of these emigrants settled in Japan after they got married to Japanese Muslim women. The

new trend in this regard is Japanese men's marriage after their conversion to Muslim women who come mainly from Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, and Arab world. One of the latest marriages includes a Japanese man after his conversion to a Russian Muslim lady.

Muslim Students Coming from Muslim Countries:

The first Muslim students to come to Japan were Chinese. These students about forty studied at Waseda University in 1909, published *Islamic Awakening*, an Islamic magazine in Chinese which bears the title in Arabic. Three Ottoman students, including Ahmad Muneer son of AbdurRasheed Ibrahim, a seasoned first class traveler and noted caller to Islam, joined Waseda University in 1911. During the Second World War large numbers of Indonesian and Malaysian students came to Japan, some of whom were martyred as a result of the atomic bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima, while some others survived. In fact, I met these victims a few years ago. Tatar migrant's children attended Japanese schools and studied at Japanese universities. These include Dr. AlTinbai, Al hajj TamimdarMuhit and his wife, Mr. Ramadan Safa, and AsadQurban Ali. They established an Islamic association in the forties of the past century.

The largest numbers of Muslim students started coming to the country following World War II, precisely towards the end of the fifties, and are still on the increase. Most of these students come from Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Arab world, Turkey, Iran and Africa. They established, along with Japanese Muslims and other Muslims who are permanently settled in the country, Islamic gatherings in every city where they hired halls which included a library and a meat shop for

selling *halal* meat in addition to areas reserved for prayers and meetings.

As a matter of fact, I had always lamented the fact that practically all Muslim ethnic groups had built their Mosques with the exception of the Arabs, in whose midst the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) was raised. Finally, Arab Muslims, mostly from Egypt, set up a Mosque in their quarters on the outskirts of Tokyo (Shin Misato). Twenty five of them as well as other students performed the pilgrimage in 2000. Many students from other nationalities also performed pilgrimage this year.

Large number of professionals from Islamic countries visited Japan and stayed here from several weeks to a year. These professionals need to know about where to get *halal* food from as well as the prayer times. Many of them are also asked questions about Islam, and they request us online as well as by post and fax to provide them with books and to answer some of their queries, which we immediately granted. These professionals played a big role in introducing Islam to Japanese people and their very existence in the country paves the way for Japanese people to know something about Islam, especially if they are practicing and seek to live by the dictates of Islam.

The commercial relationship between Japan and Muslim world is very old indeed and still ongoing, and a large number of businessmen and tourists who play a major role in introducing Islam to Japanese people visit the country every year. Our Islamic Center-Japan is specialized in Islamic books and booklets in Japanese and provides the required Islamic material for all Islamic societies in Japan as well as for students, professionals, businessmen, tourists, and others. It also provides newly arrived professionals with the necessary information

about Mosques, prayer times, *halal* foods, and Islamic gatherings.

## **Conclusion**

Though there are few Muslims in Japan, today's Japanese public has generally accepted them as members of Japanese society. For the most part, Japanese people have accepted their cultural differences as colorful aspects of the world and have understood that these cultures are actually not very different from their own. Mothers such as Khan, a Japanese woman who married a Muslim, lived in Pakistan for several years, and has three children, are not very different from the other Japanese mothers. Khan is very fashionable, with her flowery pink and white hijab and long, dangly earrings; people who have met Khan enjoy her energetic company and embrace the life that she has chosen. It is this understanding, this openness, and this innate compassion that is essential in fighting for the rights of all people and the preservation of human dignity.

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