

## DAKWAH AS AN INTERCULTURAL SPACE: Inclusive Islamic Outreach Practices in Japan

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KEYWORD	ABSTRACT
Islamic preaching cultural da'wah minority Muslims Japan interfaith dialogue cross-cultural communication	<p>This article explores the inclusive and contextual Islamic preaching practices (<i>da'wah</i>) among Muslim communities in Japan, particularly those of Indonesian origin. In a predominantly non-Muslim, secular, and culturally homogeneous society, Islamic <i>da'wah</i> in Japan faces unique challenges that require adaptive and creative approaches. Rather than relying on doctrinal messages, Muslim communities engage in social participation, symbolic communication, and cultural dialogue, turning mosques like Tokyo Camii into centers of interfaith and intercultural exchange. Drawing from the frameworks of cultural <i>da'wah</i>, cross-cultural communication, and minority Muslim dynamics, this study finds that <i>da'wah</i> in Japan functions as a space of encounter—bridging Islamic values with Japanese cultural norms through everyday actions, symbolic gestures, and social initiatives. Despite facing stereotypes and limitations, Muslim communities respond with inclusive and humanistic strategies that emphasize coexistence over conversion. The findings suggest that <i>da'wah</i> in minority contexts, such as Japan, is most effective when it emphasizes social harmony, mutual respect, and cultural sensitivity. This study contributes to broader discussions on Islam in non-Muslim societies and highlights <i>da'wah</i> as a meaningful form of cross-cultural engagement in the Asia Pacific.</p>

### INTRODUCTION

In the midst of the complex multicultural landscape of the Asia-Pacific region, Islamic preaching (*dakwah*) faces increasingly dynamic and multidimensional challenges (Masturi, 2019). This region is home to a vast diversity of ethnicities, languages, religions, and value systems—ranging from indigenous local communities to global diasporas, from dominant religious groups to vulnerable minorities (Wei et al., 2022). Globalization, migration, urbanization, and advances in information technology have accelerated intercultural and interfaith interactions while simultaneously triggering identity tensions, social inequalities, and growing tendencies toward exclusivism (Pardianto, 2015). In such circumstances, *dakwah* can no longer rely solely on a normative-doctrinal, one-directional, and homogeneous approach. Rather, it is called upon to function as a form of social praxis that is sensitive to cultural diversity and responsive to the pluralistic realities of contemporary life (Zarkasi, 2011).

In this context, Islamic *dakwah* must be reinterpreted as a dialogical and transformative space—a field of encounter between Islamic values and the social, cultural, and spiritual realities of multicultural societies (Jamal Ghofir & Khoiriyah, 2022). *Dakwah* is not merely a tool for conveying religious doctrines, but a bridge that connects Islam with the universal dynamics of humanity. It

must be capable of listening before proclaiming, understanding before judging, and fostering mutual understanding before affirming truth (Kristianto & Dedy Pradesa, 2020). An inclusive, participatory, and contextual model of *dakwah* is key to ensuring that Islam is not only accepted but also seen as relevant in shared social life based on the recognition of diversity.

Furthermore, in the Asia-Pacific context—shaped by histories of colonialism, struggles over national identity, and aspirations for cultural autonomy—a *dakwah* approach that is sensitive to local histories, traditional wisdom, and socio-political dynamics is crucial (Gube et al., 2022). *Dakwah* must not become a hegemonic instrument that erases local diversity, but rather an emancipatory force that strengthens social cohesion and advocates for justice across identities. Therefore, transformative *dakwah*—that which aligns itself with humanitarian movements, critical education, and social advocacy—emerges as both a strategic and ethical choice in response to contemporary challenges (Nahara & Nurcholis, 2022).

Japan represents a compelling case study within the discourse of Islamic *dakwah* in the Asia-Pacific region, particularly due to its unique socio-cultural and demographic characteristics. As a predominantly non-Muslim country with a very small Muslim population—estimated at only around 0.1% of the total—Japan exemplifies the challenges of *dakwah* within a culturally homogeneous, politically secular society with limited historical contact with Islam as a local tradition (Yilmaz & Morieson, 2022). The Muslim community in Japan largely consists of diaspora populations from Southeast and South Asia, such as Indonesia, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, as well as a small number of Japanese converts (Baffelli & Takahashi, 2023a). They are mostly concentrated in major cities like Tokyo, Osaka, and Nagoya, forming transnational networks that remain closely connected to their cultural roots.

In such a context, *dakwah* cannot rely on institutional or state-supported models, as found in many Muslim-majority countries. Instead, it takes place informally through grassroots community initiatives. Mosques in Japan serve not only as places of worship but also as centers for social, educational, cultural, and even economic activities. These mosques often function as intercultural meeting points, being open to the general public—including non-Muslims—for learning about and engaging with Islam. This has fostered a more interactive and educational form of *dakwah*, far removed from confrontational or exclusivist styles (Zuhri, 2010).

Nevertheless, challenges remain. In addition to linguistic and cultural barriers, Muslims in Japan also face persistent stereotypes and biases shaped by global media portrayals of Islam. On the other hand, the Japanese cultural emphasis on etiquette, diligence, and social harmony offers an opportunity for a type of *dakwah* that foregrounds the universal values of Islam—such as justice, compassion, and integrity. In many cases, the success of *dakwah* in Japan is not measured by religious conversion, but by social acceptance of Muslim communities and the cultivation of respectful and harmonious interfaith relationships.

The experience of Islamic *dakwah* in Japan—characterized by cultural adaptation and community-based initiatives—offers a reflective model for *dakwah* in other multicultural societies. It demonstrates that, particularly within minority contexts, an inclusive, contextual, and socially embedded form of *dakwah* is more likely to resonate and be sustained within pluralistic societies.

This paper aims to explore inclusive and contextual *dakwah* practices in Japan. It addresses three key questions: (1) How are *dakwah* strategies developed within a secular and culturally homogeneous society like Japan? (2) How does the minority status of Muslims influence the form and narrative of *dakwah*? (3) To what extent does *dakwah* function as a space of encounter between Muslim communities and the broader Japanese public?

Using a literature-based approach alongside an examination of the practices of Indonesian Muslim communities in Japan—particularly those involved in organizations such as PCI-NU Japan,

KMI (Keluarga Masyarakat Islam), and mosques such as Tokyo Camii and Otsuka Mosque—this study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of *dakwah* as a form of intercultural social practice in the context of religious minority life.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in three principal theoretical frameworks: cultural *dakwah*, cross-cultural communication, and the dynamics of Muslim minority communities in non-Muslim countries. Together, these frameworks provide the foundation for understanding how Islamic *dakwah* can be transformed into an inclusive and adaptive social practice within the Japanese context.

First, the concept of cultural *dakwah* (*dakwah berbasis budaya*) emphasizes that the success of *dakwah* does not rely solely on the strength of theological messages or normative arguments, but rather on the ability of *da'i* (Islamic preachers) to read, understand, and adjust to the local values of the target community (Machasin, 2011). This approach situates cultural context not merely as a background variable but as both the medium and arena of *dakwah*, such that Islamic teachings are not perceived as foreign discourse that disrupts societal order but as living values embedded in the community's social reality.

The operational logic of this theory generally consists of three key stages (Sakareeya Bungo, 2014): 1). Cultural Decoding – Preachers or *dakwah* communities must first engage in deep contextual understanding of local values, social norms, cultural symbols, and communication patterns. In Japan, values such as *wa* (social harmony), *chitsujo* (order), and *kyōdōsei* (collective cooperation) form the ethical and moral foundation of public life; 2). Cultural Translation – After decoding the cultural context, *dakwah* messages are then symbolically and socially translated into forms that are acceptable and appreciated by the local society. In Japan, this includes community clean-up activities, open halal food bazaars, and introductory Islam classes in Japanese—all of which represent forms of *ijtihad sosial* (social reasoning) in articulating Islamic values contextually; and 3). Cultural Embedding – The final stage involves embedding *dakwah* into everyday social relationships. Islam is not conveyed as an external teaching but as part of the lived social practices of Muslims who foster relationships with neighbors, local institutions, and broader society. In this stage, mosques function as symbolic points of encounter between Islam and Japanese culture (Abdullah, 2017).

With such a framework, cultural *dakwah* is not a mere technical adaptation but a two-way process of social transformation: on one side, Islam grounds its values through localized expression; on the other, non-Muslim communities are given space to receive Islam in familiar and non-threatening forms. In practice, this results in *dakwah* that is more fluid, humanistic, and participatory—opening pathways for intercultural dialogue without compromising the spiritual substance of Islam.

Second, Islamic *dakwah* in Japan must also be understood through the lens of cross-cultural communication theory, particularly as developed by Edward T. Hall (1976) and Geert Hofstede (Gladwin & Hofstede, 1981). This theory underscores that culture significantly shapes how individuals and groups communicate—including how religious messages are delivered and received. One of Hall's major contributions is the concept of high-context vs. low-context cultures. Japan is considered a high-context culture, where meaning is not conveyed solely through direct language, but through non-verbal cues, social symbols, interpersonal relationships, and shared emotional atmospheres.

In such cultural settings, explicit messaging or aggressive verbal rhetoric—including frontal religious appeals—can be seen as disruptive and inappropriate. These forms of communication often generate resistance, as they conflict with Japanese communication ethics that emphasize harmony (*wa*), politeness (*teinei*), and implicit understanding. Therefore, *dakwah* approaches relying on confrontational preaching or ideological assertions are often ineffective and may even provoke

cultural resistance (Dolphin, 1988).

Conversely, non-verbal, symbolic, and socially participatory forms of *dakwah* align better with Japanese communicative norms. This is evident in the various activities carried out by the Indonesian Muslim community in Japan and mosque leaderships such as at Tokyo Camii and Otsuka Mosque: halal food bazaars, interfaith festivals, collective iftar with local residents, and volunteer activities. These are not merely “social events,” but actually contextual and cultural forms of *dakwah*—communicating Islamic values of compassion, togetherness, and humanity through action rather than words (Sabella & Hall, 1978).

Hofstede’s concept of collectivist cultural dimensions further strengthens this approach. Japanese society scores high in collectivism and conflict avoidance, thus valuing preserved social relationships and group cohesion over individualistic or overtly persuasive approaches. In this context, *dakwah* is more effective when embedded in collective activities that imply religious meaning without pressuring belief. Islam is presented not as a doctrinal system to be verbally imposed, but as a set of values brought to life in shared experience (Clarke & Halafoff, 2016).

Thus, cross-cultural communication theory offers a crucial foundation for formulating Islamic *dakwah* strategies in Japan. It affirms that the success of religious communication depends not only on what is said, but also on how, when, and through what medium it is communicated. In the Japanese context—where serenity, symbolism, and civility are highly prized—Islamic *dakwah* rooted in social action, symbolic expression, and human relationships proves to be more effective and better received.

Third, to understand the position of Muslim minorities in non-Muslim countries, key studies by Baffelli & Takahashi (2023a, 2023b) and Okai & Takahashi (2023) highlight that Islam in Japan does not develop through formal institutionalization, as it often does in Muslim-majority countries. Rather, it evolves through a more organic and social process, which can be described as the social naturalization of Islam. In this context, Islam is not present as a normatively structured system within state institutions but is instead lived and interpreted through community activities, everyday experiences, and intercultural interactions in public spaces.

As shown in Nakhleh et al. (2008), mosques in Japan—such as Tokyo Camii, Kobe Mosque, and Gifu Mosque—do not merely function as places of worship but also serve as transnational Muslim community hubs that host family religious study groups, cultural events, and interfaith dialogue forums. These mosques are sites of social interaction where Islamic values are introduced not only to Muslims but also to the broader Japanese society through inclusive cultural platforms like halal food bazaars, Arabic calligraphy classes, and communal Ramadan celebrations. This indicates that Islamic *dakwah* in Japan progresses through cultural and social channels, not political or institutional ones.

Tanada Hirofumi (2012) also emphasizes that the growth of mosques and *dakwah* activities in Japan is driven not by state support but by the solidarity of migrant and local Muslim communities, who respond to shared spiritual and social needs. In other words, Islam in Japan grows through grassroots community foundations, where religion becomes part of functional social practices that contribute to broader social relations.

In this context, *dakwah* is no longer understood merely as the dissemination of doctrine or conversion efforts, but as an effort to build social bridges and strengthen the recognition of Muslim identity in Japan’s public sphere. Islam becomes part of the social landscape that coexists with local religious and cultural values. This process aligns with the understanding that minorities are not merely passive entities subjected to majority dominance but active agents negotiating their presence through symbolic action, social participation, and collective recognition.

Thus, the social naturalization of Islam in Japan not only illustrates the resilience of Muslim

identity in minority conditions but also offers potential for a new model of *dakwah*—one based on social recognition, intercultural participation, and the formation of inclusive public spaces. This is *dakwah* that does not speak loudly, but works through presence, contribution, and lived example.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design to explore the practices of Islamic *dakwah* within Muslim minority communities in Japan (Sangadji, 2010). The research focuses on inclusive and contextual forms of *dakwah* as practiced by Indonesian Muslim communities and local organizations in major Japanese cities such as Tokyo, Osaka, and Nagoya.

Data collection was conducted through literature review, document analysis, and non-participant observation of religious and social activities carried out by Indonesian Muslim communities in Japan. The primary sources include activity reports from PCI-NU Japan, social media content from Indonesian Muslim organizations, Japanese and Indonesian news articles, as well as previous scholarly studies on the development of Islam in Japan. Additional references were drawn from sermons, video recordings of mosque events, and publications from key Islamic institutions such as Tokyo Camii, Otsuka Mosque, and the Japan Islamic Trust.

The study utilizes thematic analysis to identify patterns in *dakwah* strategies, forms of communication used, and the responses of Japanese society to the presence of Muslim communities. Emphasis is placed on the symbolic, relational, and cultural dimensions of *dakwah* activities that facilitate intercultural engagement and bridge-building (Anggito & Setiawan, 2018). This approach is chosen for its flexibility in capturing the complex socio-cultural dynamics inherent in minority *dakwah* practices, and its capacity to interpret the negotiation of religious identity within a secular and pluralistic society such as Japan (Susilo, 2017).

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study is grounded in three major theoretical frameworks: cultural *dakwah*, cross-cultural communication, and the dynamics of Muslim minority communities in non-Muslim countries. These frameworks provide the analytical lens through which Islamic *dakwah* is understood as an inclusive and adaptive social practice in the Japanese context.

### Mosques as Centers of Dakwah and Cultural Dialogue

In the Japanese context, where values such as *wa* (social harmony), *chitsujo* (order), and *kyōdōsei* (collective cooperation) form the foundations of cultural life, Islamic *dakwah* cannot be presented in ways that are oppositional to or threatening toward these societal norms. Instead, successful *dakwah* is that which is able to reinforce collective values and harmony, while showing that Islamic principles resonate with the universal ethical codes upheld in Japanese society. This is clearly reflected in the *dakwah* practices of Muslim communities in Japan, who prioritize cultural and social approaches over rigid dogmatic ones.

Mosques in Japan, such as Tokyo Camii and Otsuka Mosque, function not only as ritual places of worship but also as vibrant centers for social outreach and intercultural dialogue. In a society that is relatively homogeneous in terms of ethnicity and religion, these mosques serve as strategic spaces of social interaction between Muslim communities and the broader Japanese public. The activities held in these mosques reflect a growing awareness of the importance of *dakwah* that is inclusive, participatory, and culturally attuned.

One such example is the halal food bazaar, which serves as an effective medium to introduce Islam through a culturally familiar and widely appreciated channel—food. These events not only educate the public about halal dietary principles but also foster informal and friendly social encounters. Additionally, introductory Islam classes for Japanese citizens open reciprocal learning spaces that help dismantle stereotypes and promote mutual understanding. These classes are

conducted in a dialogical and open atmosphere, presenting *dakwah* not as indoctrination but as a shared journey of values. The annual interfaith iftar (communal breaking of the fast) during Ramadan also plays a critical role, symbolizing respect for difference and the creation of a common ground among people of various faiths within the broader frame of humanitarian solidarity.

These *dakwah* strategies reflect the core of the cultural *dakwah* approach, which situates culture, social relations, and shared daily practices as the primary medium for conveying Islamic teachings (Maleuvre, 2004). In this approach, Islam is not presented through rigid normative narratives demanding unilateral acceptance, but is instead articulated in socially communicative, open, and contextual forms. *Dakwah* becomes embedded in everyday life experiences, where values such as compassion, social responsibility, modesty, and empathy are expressed through concrete actions that can be directly experienced by the wider society.

In a country like Japan, which is plural in terms of religious belief, secular in its political system, and highly sensitive to social harmony, this approach has proven to be more effective than purely verbal, ideological, or exclusivist forms of *dakwah* (Fathil & Fathil, 2011). Islam does not appear as a dominant or monolithic narrative in public space, but as a socially negotiated value that aligns itself with local norms and is communicated through practices that foster mutual understanding. This aligns with the principles of cross-cultural communication, where the success of a message depends more on symbols, actions, and context than on explicit or frontal discourse (Olgun, 1997).

Within this framework, the mosque plays a role far beyond that of a ritual religious space. It functions as a symbolic meeting point between Islam and Japanese culture—a transitional space where differences are not suppressed but respectfully engaged. Mosques such as Tokyo Camii and Otsuka Mosque actively host events that nurture interfaith and intercultural relations: from Islam classes in Japanese, open halal food festivals, to annual interfaith iftars. These activities not only promote Islam in persuasive ways but also affirm the role of Muslims as active contributors to social cohesion (Yamagata, 2019).

In other words, *dakwah* in Japan is no longer aimed at verbal expansion of doctrine, but rather at constructing social and cultural bridges. It is a form of religious communication that is dialogical, inclusive, and rooted in respect for difference and shared humanity. In this model, Islam is not portrayed as a foreign entity seeking to change society, but as part of the collective life that enriches the social fabric with values that are both spiritual and contributive. Therefore, the cultural *dakwah* approach in Japan not only succeeds in presenting Islam positively but also paves the way for building inclusive and mutually strengthening interreligious coexistence.

### **Indonesian Muslim Communities and the *Dakwah Bil Hal* Approach**

The Indonesian Muslim community in Japan—particularly those affiliated with Pengurus Cabang Istimewa Nahdlatul Ulama (PCI-NU) Jepang and Keluarga Masyarakat Islam (KMI)—implements a form of *dakwah* that emphasizes the principle of *dakwah bil hal*: preaching through concrete actions, social example, and collective participation in public life. This strategic approach reflects an awareness of the Japanese social context, which highly values work ethic, social harmony (*wa*), and communal contribution, while remaining cautious toward any form of verbal or overt religious proselytization that may be seen as disruptive to the established social order (Yoshihara, 2020).

An interview with M. Rizal Fauzi, former Chair of PCI-NU Jepang (2021–2023), conducted in Tokyo on 12 April 2023, reveals that their *dakwah* activities are more effective when carried out through socio-cultural initiatives rather than theological or doctrinal discourses. Among their regular programs are family religious gatherings (*pengajian keluarga*), halal food bazaars held in collaboration with the Japanese public, and fundraising for disaster relief efforts both in Japan and abroad. “We want Islam to be present not to dominate, but to contribute. Islam should be felt as a mercy, not just preached,”

he stated.

KMI Jepang, composed primarily of students, young professionals, and Indonesian families, follows a similar model. In an interview with Fadilah Rasyid, a KMI coordinator in the Kanto region (Yokohama, 5 May 2024), she explained that activities such as neighborhood clean-ups with Japanese residents, cultural orientation classes for newcomers, and participation in local festivals are effective strategies for promoting *dakwah* through cultural engagement. “Japanese people appreciate those who work with their hands, not those who talk too much. So our *dakwah* is carried out through visible and tangible action,” she affirmed.

Documentation from PCI-NU Jepang further confirms their active role in disaster relief efforts, such as during the Kumamoto earthquake (2016), the Hiroshima floods (2018), and the Ishikawa earthquake (2024). In each instance, Indonesian Muslim volunteers helped clear debris, set up community kitchens, and participated in interfaith donation campaigns. Photographs and records of these efforts are available on PCI-NU Jepang's official social media and annual bulletin (PCI-NU Jepang, 2023).

This practice of *dakwah bil hal* strongly aligns with the concept of Islam kultural as articulated by Machasin (2011), which emphasizes *dakwah* not as verbal or normative instruction, but as a dialogical, contextual, and socially engaged expression of Islam. In this approach, religious values are lived out through grounded, everyday practices that are sensitive to local cultural norms—presenting Islam not as a rigid ideology or a marker of difference, but as a shared ethical framework that supports social harmony and collective life.

In a society like Japan, which prioritizes social order, collective responsibility (*kyōdōsei*), cleanliness, and civility in public life, a *dakwah* approach centered on example and contribution is more likely to be accepted by local communities. Islam is no longer seen as an exclusive or ideological “foreign religion,” but as a system of values with strong resonance to core aspects of Japanese ethical life. Activities such as community service, festival participation, humanitarian fundraising, and Islamic introductory classes in Japanese have become symbolic bridges that demonstrate Islam not as a threat, but as a potential social asset.

Moreover, this approach strengthens the narrative of Islam as a mercy for all creation (*rahmatan lil ‘alamin*) in its most tangible and experiential form. Rather than aiming at quantitative goals such as conversion or attendance figures, the *dakwah bil hal* approach in Japan emphasizes social acceptance and the cultivation of intergroup relationships. This is *dakwah* not as expansion, but as active coexistence, where Islamic values are welcomed because they integrate naturally with local cultural ethos—without diluting their spiritual substance.

As supported by field research and ethnographic observations, this strategy also impacts public perceptions of Islam in Japan. Mosques such as Tokyo Camii have become not only places of worship but also centers of dialogue, cultural exchange, and interfaith gathering. Many Japanese students and visitors come not with the intention of conversion, but out of appreciation for the openness, beauty, and social warmth they encounter—qualities that reflect Islam in its most accessible and lived expression.

In conclusion, the combined use of *dakwah bil hal* and the cultural *dakwah* approach practiced by Indonesian Muslims in Japan constitutes a transcultural *dakwah* model relevant for other multicultural societies. It not only bridges the gap between Islam and local culture, but also demonstrates how religion can function as a medium for social development based on universal values, solidarity, and harmony.

## Language and Symbolism in Contextual Dakwah

Language poses one of the most significant challenges for Islamic *dakwah* in Japan. With a limited number of native Arabic or Indonesian speakers among the Japanese population, textual-verbal preaching becomes less effective. However, Muslim communities—particularly those based in Tokyo Camii, Otsuka Mosque, and Kobe Mosque—have responded to this challenge through symbolic communication and visual media strategies. These communities utilize Japanese-language social media platforms, multilingual information boards, and cultural events such as art exhibitions, culinary showcases, and interfaith dialogues to communicate Islamic values. This approach aligns with cross-cultural communication principles, which emphasize that symbols and cultural context are often more effective than direct verbal messages in conveying meaning (Yulita & Ong, 2019).

On social media, official accounts such as @tokyocamii publish *dakwah* and educational content with attractive visual designs and accessible Japanese-language narration. Some mosques even offer Arabic and Qur'an classes in Japanese—not as proselytization tools, but as means to introduce Islam as a peaceful and civilizational legacy. This strategy reinforces the symbolic function of *dakwah* as a bridge between Islam and Japanese society, introducing universal ethical values such as honesty, cleanliness, discipline, and social solidarity without imposing religious doctrines (Yamashita, 2022).

Unlike the expansionist or conversion-oriented *dakwah* often found in Muslim-majority contexts, Islamic preaching in Japan is more invitational (dialogue-oriented) and recognitional (socially integrative) in nature. The primary aim is not to increase the number of converts, but to establish a socially accepted and recognized presence of Islam within Japan's homogeneous and secular cultural landscape. This is reflected in Muslim involvement in public activities such as environmental festivals, community clean-ups, and collaborations with schools and local governments in interfaith and humanitarian programs.

This process reflects what anthropologists have termed the social naturalization of Islam—a process through which the presence of Islam becomes normalized, familiar, and non-threatening to the non-Muslim majority (Roy, 2004). Islam is not presented as a closed system, but as an active participant in public life—contextualized, dialogical, and responsive to local cultural values. Here, *dakwah* functions as a means of symbolic transformation, not merely a transmission of doctrine.

In an interview conducted on 17 April 2023 with Nurul Azizah, a *daiyah* at Otsuka Mosque and doctoral student at Waseda University, she stated:

*“We don’t aim to convert Japanese people. What we want is for them to know that Muslims are part of Japanese society too. Our Japanese may still be limited, but through symbols, smiles, and cooperation, we convey Islam as a blessing.”*

This quote illustrates the essence of *dakwah* in Japan as a cultural practice grounded in empathy and openness, not domination.

Despite the peaceful, cultural, and participatory nature of Islamic *dakwah* in Japan, resistance remains a persistent reality. Such resistance does not usually manifest as direct repression or violence but appears in symbolic-social forms: stereotypes, prejudices, and identity labeling of Muslims as “foreign” or “potentially disruptive.” In a society that prioritizes *chitsujo* (social order) and cultural homogeneity, minority religions like Islam are often constructed as the “other”, expected to conform to dominant values to gain social acceptance (Baffelli & Takahashi, 2023).

Rather than responding with confrontation, Muslim communities in Japan adopt adaptive and symbolic *dakwah* strategies. These avoid discursive dominance and instead build legitimacy through lived social contributions aligned with Japanese cultural values—politeness, cleanliness, discipline, and cooperation. Activities such as community clean-ups, open halal bazaars, disaster relief efforts, and interfaith iftars serve as effective media for conveying Islamic values through social



action rather than theological articulation.

This strategy exemplifies Pierre Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990), which refers to power exercised not through coercion but through social recognition and value internalization (Allan, 2022). Muslim communities do not claim power as a majority but establish symbolic authority by proving their social contribution and capacity for coexistence. Mosques such as Tokyo Camii and Otsuka Mosque have become centers of such symbolic power—recognized for their beautiful architecture, educational initiatives, and openness to non-Muslim visitors.

However, minority politics in Islamic *dakwah* in Japan also occur internally, within the Muslim community itself. As Okai & Takahashi (2023) note in their study of Tablighi Jama'at, there exists a dynamic of "minorities within minorities," wherein ethnic diversity (e.g., Pakistani, Indian, Bangladeshi, Indonesian, and Japanese converts) produces internal tensions. Japanese Muslims and second-generation diaspora often feel marginalized in *dakwah* structures still dominated by South Asian languages and cultural forms.

In response, initiatives such as "Japanese Jama'at" or "Japanese Language Jama'at" have emerged, adjusting their *dakwah* content and delivery to align with Japanese communication norms and cultural sensitivities. This symbolic localization of Islam shows that while the values of Islam remain constant, their expression is adapted to local expectations and norms (Ropi, 2014). This affirms that Islamic *dakwah* in Japan is not simply a one-way transmission of doctrine but a complex process of internalization and meaning negotiation within a layered social environment.

Thus, *dakwah* strategies in Japan illustrate a multi-layered politics of minority engagement: on one hand, building social legitimacy through symbolic power based on trust and contribution; on the other, reconciling internal diversity within the Muslim community to shape an inclusive and pluralistic expression of Islam. In this context, *dakwah* functions less as a missionary project and more as a tool for identity negotiation and relational ethics—a form of Islam that integrates with social structures while preserving its spiritual integrity.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Islamic *dakwah* in Japan, despite taking place within a culturally homogeneous and politically secular non-Muslim society, has shown the capacity to adapt in creative, contextual, and constructive ways. The *dakwah* carried out by Muslim communities—particularly those from Indonesia—does not rely solely on verbal or doctrinal approaches, but instead emphasizes *dakwah bil hal* (preaching through action), symbolic communication, and active social participation.

Mosques such as Tokyo Camii have evolved into symbolic meeting points between Islam and Japanese culture—not merely functioning as spaces for religious rituals, but also as cultural and social venues that facilitate interaction across identities. This approach aligns with the principles of cultural *dakwah* and cross-cultural communication, wherein *dakwah* is understood as a process of negotiating values and identities within a pluralistic society.

By avoiding domination and prioritizing adaptation, contribution, and collaboration, *dakwah* in Japan offers a compelling example of how religion can be present in a peaceful, inclusive, and socially meaningful way within communities that differ in belief and culture. In this context, *dakwah* is not merely an invitation to Islam, but also an invitation to encounter, mutual understanding, and harmonious coexistence.

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