

## THE CHANGING IMAGE OF ISLAM IN JAPAN

### The Role of Civil Society in Disseminating Better Information about Islam

**Irma Rachmi Yulita; Susy Ong**

School of Strategic and Global Study, University of Indonesia, Jakarta  
email: irmaagartha78@gmail.com

#### Abstract

*This research focuses on the changing of image on Islam in Japan and the efforts of Japan's civil society to eradicate Islam's negative image created by Japan's mass media. In preparation for the coming 2020 Olympic Games, the government, the local NGO, and even individual are taking initiatives to create a Muslim-friendly atmosphere. We try to look into their efforts to disseminate information, as well as to counter demagogues about Islam and Muslim. We have conducted in-depth interviews with 10 Muslims residing in Japan added with 2 respondents taken from book, and compared their stories with Japanese articles, books, and academic journals. Our conclusion is that despite the success in making Japanese society more amicable to foreign Muslims, the human relations problems within the Muslim community must take prioritize to improve the response of Japanese society.*

*[Tulisan ini fokus pada perubahan citra Islam di Jepang dan usaha lembaga swadaya masyarakat (NGO) untuk mengurangi citra negatif Islam yang dibentuk oleh media massa Jepang. Menjelang pekan olahraga Olimpiade 2020, pemerintah, NGO lokal dan sebagian individu mengambil inisiatif menciptakan suasana yang ramah bagi muslim. Kami mengamati usaha mereka dalam merespon informasi yang menyudutkan agama Islam dan pemeluknya. Kami melakukan wawancara mendalam dengan 10 orang muslim di Jepang serta 2 informan dari literatur. Kemudian kami membandingkan cerita mereka dengan berita surat kabar, buku, dan artikel jurnal yang*

*terbit di Jepang yang terkait dengan Islam. Meskipun mereka cukup berhasil meyakinkan masyarakat Jepang, tetapi persoalan hubungan antar sesama kelompok muslim perlu menjadi prioritas dalam rangka meningkatkan respon positif masyarakat Jepang.]*

**Keywords:** Muslim community, Japanese society, disseminate knowledge, image of Islam, religious tolerance

## A. Introduction

This study takes the theme of the Muslim community in Japan, linked to the image of Islam in the Japanese society. Due to geographical and historical reasons, the Islamic religion has been barely known in Japan until the early 20th century. Even until the end of 20th century, only a selective of the Japanese people had the opportunity to interact with the Muslims; therefore the Japanese knowledge and understanding of Islam and Muslims tend to be minimal. They come to know Muslims and Islam from the mass media, especially television. After the incident of 9/11 in 2001, the news about Islam and Muslims presented were mostly negative, being heavily influenced by the Western media's perception. The perception of Muslim and Islam in Japan tends to be 'scary'.<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of this research is to answer how the Japanese society responded to the presence of Muslims in its midst. I believe questions posed by this research were important to answer because as a minority in a non-Muslim and homogen country, the Japanese reaction and view will affect the relationship between them and the Muslim community. The way mass media sometimes depicted radical Islam terrorists indeed gave negative images among the Japanese, thus affected the way they interact with the Muslim community and vice versa.

While some scholars gave some insights concerning the Muslim community in Japan and attempted to change the negative images of Islam, they have not gave an answer whether the Japanese response was purely based on the mass media or there were Muslims within the community who did inflict negative actions, thus solidified the negatives images of Islam. I am of the opinion the answer obtained will contribute

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<sup>1</sup> Akiko Komura, *Nihon to Isurāmu ga Deautoki: Sono Rekishi to Kanōsei* (Tokyo: Gendai Shokan, 2015), pp. 224–7.

to the existing knowledge on the subject because this research will disclose how the Japanese viewed the Muslim community, based upon portrayal of the mass media as well as their experiences during their interaction with the Muslims with religious tolerance as the base of interaction. This research will also describe the efforts of the Japanese and the Muslim community to improve their relationship regardless of what mass media depicted Islam and the Muslim.

I conducted in-depth interviews with 10 Muslims who are presently residing in Japan (Kobe, Kyoto, Osaka, and Kodaira; a suburban in Tokyo). I added the interview of 2 Japanese respondents from the book titled as *Nihon to Isuramu ga Deautoki: Sono Rekishi to Kanōsei* (When Japan and Islam Meet: The History and The Possibility).<sup>2</sup> Their accounts will be analyzed and compared with the news in the print media (electronic version) which were discussed in the first part of analysis. The purpose was to clarify whether the negative tone in the mass media has discouraged the Japanese from further interaction with the Muslims, or on contrary had formed a new perception of Islam. Thus encourage the Japanese people to further associate with the Muslim community around them.

## **B. Muslim Life and Media Imagery**

In the period 1986-1991, Japan experienced an economic bubble, a situation where a very good economic condition entails increase in manpower demand. On the other hand, the labor force of the young generation (born after the 1960s) is accustomed to living comfortably causing them to be reluctant to perform heavy work with relatively low wages called 3K jobs: *kitanai* (dirty), *kitsui* (heavy), *kiken* (dangerous).<sup>3</sup> As a result, many companies are forced to bring-in foreign workers from countries with levels of prosperity lower than Japan, and among those foreign workers, there were also Muslims. After working in Japan for a couple of years, many of them decided to stay and became Japanese citizens, and lived among Japanese locals with minimal knowledge of Islam and worse, a negative image of Islam. Most foreign Muslims in Japan worked in factories. Others work in halal food stores and

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<sup>2</sup> Komura, *Nihon to Isuramu ga Deautoki*.

<sup>3</sup> Erin Acran Chung, *Immigration and Citizenship in Japan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 149–55.

restaurants, or become nurses for the elderly, or as *kenshusei* (unskilled workers who stay in Japan with trainee status).

As the number of foreign Muslims increased, so did the need for places of worship, called mosque. For Muslims who were just arrived in Japan and almost knew nothing about the country, mosque offers them a temporary shelter, as well as network to survive in Japan, through the Muslim brotherhood. Presently, the numbers of mosques in Japan are increasing. The mosques do not only serve as a place of worship, but also as venues for social life and exchange of information, as well as public facilities to hold weddings and funerals, and to establish an identity as Muslim with fellow adherents.

Muslims in Japan are facing a number of constraints: foods, language, and work. They also have to face the negative image of the media. A survey done among high school students in Japan in 2006 showed that 75% among the students believe Islam as an aggressive religion and 92% recognize Islam from the new coverage of television.<sup>4</sup>

Tolerance is more than showing the capability to accept the fact that we should live together in harmony with other persons of different physical as well as cultural orientation. Tolerance is a capability to understand that other human beings have their values and rights, and those values and rights must be recognized, respected, and loved.<sup>5</sup> Being tolerant means one was capable of accepting different others as their own being, instead of viewing them as threats and therefore should be excluded.

According Joseph,<sup>6</sup> religious tolerance is an ability of a religious group to appreciate and accept other religions' beliefs and their practices as well, without necessarily involve or practice it. The religious group will be capable in respecting other religions' beliefs without enforcing the

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<sup>4</sup> Eskil Olaf Vestre, "Japan as an Emerging Multicultural Society: Exploring Contemporary Minority Issues Through the Case of Muslim Immigrants", Master's Thesis (Oslo: University of Oslo, 2011), p. 80.

<sup>5</sup> Franz Magnis-Suseno, "Toleransi dan Budi Luhur", in *Meluburkan Kemanusiaan: Kumpulan Esai untuk A. Sudiarta*, ed. by F. Wawan Setyadi (Jakarta: Penerbit Buku Kompas, 2018), pp. 171–3.

<sup>6</sup> Oluwafemi Joseph Alao, "Moral And Religious Tolerance: A Pluralistic Nigerian Society For Sustainable Development", *Afro Asian Journal of Social Sciences*, vol. 8, no. 2 (2017).

religious group's personal interested belief. Religious tolerance involves understanding where each person has a fundamental right to choose and practice his or her own religion. Religious tolerance also involves on how a person engages with other person, families, and communities who are religiously different. Religious tolerance can be practiced in a tolerant manner where the people within a society are mutually accord one another. This process can be achieved through intercultural contact, where the participants are giving either good or bad responses during the interaction.<sup>7</sup>

### C. The Japanese View of Islam and the Efforts from the Japanese Government and Citizens

This sub chapter discussed 2 articles. The first article focused on the topic about couples of Japanese converts-immigrant Muslims and the issues they faced in Japan. The second article discussed a Japanese monk and his efforts to mediate the Japanese citizens and the Muslims in Nakatsu city through discussion sessions.

The first article titled as *Musurimutachi to Kekkonshite Kaishūshita Nihonjin Joseitachi* (Japanese Women Who Are Married to Muslim Men and Converted),<sup>8</sup> discussed Japanese women converts after marrying immigrant Muslims. Her name is Yuri, married to Ali Gertz, A Turkish Muslim.

Yuri and Ali Gertz are now living in Tokyo. Ali opened a kebab restaurant near Nakano station (one of the residential areas in central Tokyo) since 2016. Yuri works as an architect at a Japanese construction company. Yuri met Ali about 3 years earlier at a restaurant they frequented. In the restaurant, they often had conversations regarding foods and then later, they started dating. At first Yuri did not realize that Ali was a Muslim, because Ali never said openly. Yuri just learned that Ali was a Muslim when asked directly because she saw Ali did not eat some food. The following sentence from the interview within the mentioned article

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<sup>7</sup> Colleen A. Ward, Stephen Bochner, and Adrian Furnham, *The Psychology of Culture Shock* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 5–7.

<sup>8</sup> Kokufuda Hideyuki, “Musurimu to Kekkonshite Kaishūshita Nipponjin Josei-tachi”, *Nippon.com* (6 Sep 2017), <https://www.nippon.com/ja/features/c04005/>, accessed 23 Apr 2018.

containing one of Yuri's experiences on the image of Islam before she embraced Islam:

“Though Yuri only has an image of Islam as a religion whose adherents do not eat pork, Yuri sees news from abroad which gave bad images of Islam.”

For Yuri at that time, Islam was a religion whose adherents do not eat pork. Yuri only knew the negative image of Islam from foreign news. Admittedly these images affected Yuri's perception of Islam. As a result of her discussions with Ali, Yuri gained a different understanding of Islam. Before the event of 9/11, the Japanese perception regarding Islam was neutral at most. Ever since the rise of radical Islamic movement started by the event of 9/11, Islam is often being portrayed as terrorism, a religion with backward culture, illegal immigrants, and many others.<sup>9</sup>

However, Yuri's negative view about Islam changed when one day, Ali saw Yuri about to kill a mosquito. Ali tells Yuri to dismiss the mosquito instead of killing it. Ali even once caught a fly and releases it outside. Yuri did not conceal her surprise that there was a man as gentle as Ali. At that moment Yuri found how different was the reality and the news from the mass media about Muslims. It was plausible that Ali's gentle Yuri's interest in Islam.

When she decided to marry Ali and become a convert, Yuri posed a question that has bothered her for awhile:

“When she started considering marriage, Yuri asked Ali whether Yuri herself should not eat pork. Ali's answer was unexpected.”

His answer was a total surprise to Yuri:

“You must decide it for yourself. You have a lifestyle of your own which you deem important up until now, right?”

Ali argues that he has no say to Yuri's lifestyle. Even when he was the prospective husband, he told Yuri to prioritize her lifestyle first. According to him, Yuri should not let other people's opinions prevent

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<sup>9</sup> The foreigners of non-Japanese descent usually come to work as trainees in Japan. Many of these trainees gradually changed status from trainee to illegal worker once overstaying their visa and generalized as ‘illegals’ to be deported by the Japanese police. At the same time, the Japanese police spread fear about crimes committed by the foreigners and the dangers of terrorism from Muslim community in Japan.

her from building a spiritual relationship with God. Touched by Ali's words, Yuri was determined to convert and study Islam on her own.

While she prepared herself for the conversion, Yuri stopped eating pork and drinking alcohol. All the kitchen wares which were contaminated with pork products were even replaced. Yuri's concerns were understandable considering Yuri was about to marry a Muslim. It is a common thing for Japanese to use ingredients such as pork and alcohol into their daily meal, such as ramen, cake, and crackers. Even though in recent years *halal* meat is more frequently available, at that time the sale of which is still very limited and is still scarce. The *halal* certified meats (consumed by Muslims as the preparations adhere to Muslim *sharia*) are only available at a higher price compared to the meats sold in the market in general. The relatively higher price was due to the fact that Japan has to import *halal* meat from Australia, while *halal* chicken meat is imported from Brazil.<sup>10</sup>

After marrying Ali Gertz and became a convert, Yuri has not yet put on the *hijab*:

“On the other hand, Yuri does not cover her head by wearing *hijab*, except to go to a mosque and she had not forced herself to perform the *salat*.”

Even though she has become a convert and started to learn Islam on her own, Yuri did not wear *hijab* (a head covering worn by the Muslim women), except when she was visiting the mosque; neither did she forced herself to perform the *salat* (the ritual prayer of Muslims which performed 5 times a day). As for the *hijab* issue, Yuri was concerned about the reaction of her fellow co-workers and people closest to her. In fact Yuri has been pondering about wearing *hijab* as her coworkers have a very vague understanding of Islamic belief. Yuri was hesitant lest people around her will feel uncomfortable. Nevertheless in the end Yuri felt that the most important thing was how to worship Allah SWT, a practice of which would be dictated by Yuri herself.

Yuri's concern about wearing a *hijab* in the midst of the Japanese society was also apparent in the experience of a Japanese convert, named Junko Hayashi.<sup>11</sup> Hayashi faces many challenges when seeking

<sup>10</sup> Komura, *Nihon to Isurāmu ga Deautoki*, pp. 99–101.

<sup>11</sup> “Japanese Muslims face challenges at the workplace”, *Mainichi Daily News* (4 Jan 2016), <https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160104/p2a/00m/0na/014000c>,



employment because her insistence on wearing a *hijab*. Hayashi had sent 40 work applications to the companies which focused on the field of energy and shipping and have business relation with Muslim countries. Only a handful companies invited Hayashi for an interview. In the end, no company hired her. Hayashi decided to become a lawyer and passed her exams in 2015. In the end of the text, Yuri expressed her hope that the knowledge that her husband Ali had try to teach to her, in turn will help her husband and others Muslims. In the long run, the knowledge and the ensuing mutual understanding will improve the life of Ali and other Muslims who live in Japan.

As it has been explained few paragraphs before, Islam were perceived rather in negative light after the event of 9/11. For an example in a 2010 event, suspicion of Muslims increased when the issue of investigation of Muslims on suspicion of terrorism, leaked and spread to the public. The tragedy of the execution of 2 Japanese citizens by ISIS in 2015 became another factor triggering the negative image of Muslims in Japan, further strengthening the antipathy toward Muslim community. The news of the killing of Kenji Goto and Haruna Yukawa by ISIS made the headlines, and caused the Japanese reacted in grief and outrage. A Japanese woman whose name was not mentioned who became a convert in 2009, was one among the Muslims who received this impact. Concerned that she will be harassed by the people she has contact with, she wears *hijab* only on weekend. When she goes to work, she will replace the hijab with a knitted hat. There was one time when the mentioned convert was in a train where she met an old lady. She was feeling scared because the old lady gave her a derogatory remark.

Yet inspite of the negative images maintained in Japanese society in recent years, there are Japanese like Yuri who took interest and even interact with Islam instead. There are few factors which pushed Japan to increase Muslim facilities and encouraged the Japanese to interact with Muslim community. The first factor was because after the earthquake and tsunami occurred in 11<sup>th</sup> March 2011, the Muslim community was among many parties to provide aid for Tohoku region. This act has built a good image of Muslim community among the Japanese society over the negative images which are terrorism, extremists, violent, and many others.

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accessed 10 Apr 2018.



Most of the Japanese's knowledge about Islam and Muslim community gained through mass media. According to Kato<sup>12</sup> as the teaching of Islam's observer, apparently Islam is a foreign religion for the Japanese society. Another factor was the growing population in Islamic countries and the increased of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in those countries. According to the statement of Professor Hirofumi Tanada, Islamic countries such as Egypt, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Iran, Pakistan and Turkey are expected to grow as consumer market. Thus, the increase of Muslim tourists to Japan originated from those countries.

In 2016, there were more than 394,000 Malaysian Muslim tourists came to Japan according to the data provided by Japan National Tourism Organization. From Indonesia itself, the tourists grew from previously 63,000 tourists to 271,000 tourists. These growths occurred in merely several years, between the years of 2009—2016.<sup>13</sup> It has been explained that the sudden growth of Southeast Asian tourists is caused by the act of the Japanese government relaxing visa requirements. This event also supported by the growing middle class with larger disposable income in Muslim countries, notably in South East Asia, and the growth in low-cost airlines serving Japan.<sup>14</sup>

Should Japan open itself to the international world, it is even more urgent to revise this view of Islam into more positive ones. This way, the Japanese will have easier time to accept the Muslims, both those who come from the community and the tourists. Moreover with the ongoing preparation of 2020 Olympic Games, many parties including the Japanese government, taking part in socializing Islam and by extension the Muslims, onto the Japanese society.

For an example, Muslim World League has made an agreement with Japan to become a provider that supply halal meals in 2020 Olympic

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<sup>12</sup> Hisanori Kato, *Islam di Mata Orang Jepang*, trans. by Ucu Fadhillah (Jakarta: Penerbit Buku Kompas, 2014), p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> Richard Whitehead, "Tokyo offers incentives to halal food operators before the Olympics", *foodnavigator-asia.com* (21 Mar 2018), <https://www.foodnavigator-asia.com/Article/2018/03/21/Tokyo-offers-incentives-to-halal-food-operators-before-the-Olympics>, accessed 18 Aug 2018.

<sup>14</sup> Julian Ryall, "Why are Muslims suddenly travelling to Japan?", *South China Morning Post* (7 May 2017), <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/society/article/2092664/why-are-so-many-muslims-suddenly-visiting-japan>, accessed 18 Aug 2018.

Games. This agreement was signed by Mitsuhiro Miyakoshi (special adviser to Japanese Prime Minister), Prince Hiroyoshi (the cousin of the Emperor), and Mohammed bin Abdul Karim Al-Issa (the secretary general of Muslim World League).<sup>15</sup> The Muslim World League, shortened as MWL, will become special provider *halal* certified meals in Japan in general and in the 2020 Olympic Games. The MWL was granted the right to regulate and in cooperation with the Japanese government, *halal* foods, and provide the best services. The MWL will also certify the products and services in accordance with the *halal* and hygienic standards. Furthermore, this organization will issue *halal* certification for products designated to Muslim communities in Japan.

In Toyota city, Aichi Prefecture (in central Japan), a project to make a mobile mosque for 2020 Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games was on the way. The games' organizers have spoken that the Muslim prayer rooms will only be available at the athletes' village. Tetsuro Akimoto, the head from the mentioned project, Yasuhara Inoue voiced his hope to provide a place where both Muslim athletes and spectators can pray. Furthermore, Yasuhara expressed that the possibility of not getting enough mosques for Muslim visitors for 2020 Olympic Games is alarming for Japan, a country which considered itself as a part of international community. Aside from the mobility, another of its advantages is that it can travel to any different Olympic venues and has its own washing area. The mobile prayer room was also equipped with air conditioner and can accommodate up to 50 people.<sup>16</sup>

The numbers of prayer rooms in Japan are also increased. However it is still difficult to spot them without any aid of map or mobile applications. To find the prayer rooms, one must look carefully for the special signs or making inquiries in the information center. The Haneda Airport, for example, now provides prayer room in the third floor for

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<sup>15</sup> Mohammed Al-Sulami, "Muslim World League to supply halal meals for Japan and 2020 Olympic Games", *Arab News* (18 Mar 2018), <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1268396/saudi-arabia>, accessed 18 Aug 2018.

<sup>16</sup> Nicola Shannon, "Company Unveils Moving Mosque to Welcome Muslims in Japan", *US News & World Report* (25 Jul 2018), <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2018-07-25/tokyo-company-debuts-mobile-mosque-ahead-of-2020-olympics>, accessed 18 Aug 2018.

international departure.<sup>17</sup> In Kyoto, the landmark building, the Kyoto Tower, also provides a prayer room in third floor. Some big department stores and public facilities, even outside metropolitans, also provide prayer rooms. Tourist spots are most enthusiastic for attracting foreign tourists, and they indeed are attentive enough to provide the prayer rooms for Muslim tourists.

In July 21<sup>st</sup> 2016, the local government in Yamanashi Prefecture opened the first *sharia* hotel for Muslim in Fujikawaguchi, near Mount Fuji, an internationally renowned tourist destination. This is to anticipate a sudden increase in the number of Muslim tourists ahead of the 2020 Olympic Games. Named as ‘Shariah Hotel Fujisan’, this hotel provides not only *halal* restaurant with Middle East and Indian cuisines and prayer rooms, but also bathroom for *wudhu* (an Islamic practice to purify one self by using water and wash hands, feet, face, and few other body parts).<sup>18</sup>

The last factor for the increased interest in Islam was possibly because the Japanese are more open and accepting another religion compared to those in Europe. The majority of Japanese are Buddhist and Shinto adherents. These religions were known for polytheism. According to Douds,<sup>19</sup> polytheistic religions are more tolerant because they have many gods to worship. This condition enabled many ways to worship these gods and created a condition where a natural plurality of religious practices is possible.

The second article titled *Otera ga Isuramukyōkōza Nakatsushi no Jikaku Kyōseishakai he ‘Manabi, Sonchō wo’ Kagekiba Imejii Fushbokumezasu* (Islam Courses in Buddhist Temple: Jikaku-san of Nakatsu city Aims to Dispel Image of Extremist Group, ‘Learning and Respect’ to Harmonious Society) was released on December 27<sup>th</sup> 2017.<sup>20</sup> This article discussed Jikaku and the discussion-learning sessions hold in his Buddhist Temple.

Jikaku Daidō is a Buddhist monk who holds discussion and lecture

<sup>17</sup> Fifi, *Nihonjin ni Shitte Hoshi Isuramu no Koto* (Tokyo: Shodensha, 2018).

<sup>18</sup> Osamu Miyata, *Isuramu Yuiitsu no Kibō no Kuni Nihon* (Kyoto: PHP Institute, 2017), pp. 239–42.

<sup>19</sup> Stephen Douds, “Tolerance - Afterthoughts”, *Fortnight*, no. 358 (1997), pp. 23–4.

<sup>20</sup> Kukida Teruko, “Otera de Katarō Nihonjin no Henken ni Gimō Kanji Asu, Kanazawa Teramachi no Sōryō / Ishikawa”, *Mainichi Daily News* (9 Jun 2017), <https://mainichi.jp/articles/20170609/dtl/k17/040/360000c>, accessed 1 Dec 2018.

sessions with the theme of Islam in his Sōtō sect temple, Nakatsu city, Oita Prefecture. The purpose of these sessions is to provide a room for interaction between the Muslims with the local residents who lived within the prefecture. Jikaku was aware that conflict and discrimination will occur from the lack of deeper understanding between the two communities. For example in early December 2017, Jikaku attended a dinner in a mosque in Beppu. This dinner was being held regularly. On that occasion, Jikaku inquired at a Bangladesh Muslim regarding difficulties he has encountered in Japan. The Bangladesh who was also a college student, replied that the foods are his main concern. The Bangladesh Muslim said he must check and confirm whether a product was *halal* or not. As Jikaku listened to the college student, Jikaku nodded his head in understanding. Khan Muhammad who sat beside Jikaku, praised the Buddhist monk and highly regarded Jikaku's knowledge about Islam.<sup>21</sup>

Jikaku is a graduate from Tokyo University and has been worked in NGO called Shanti International Volunteer Association which is located in Tokyo. This NGO particularly supports education. This organization also includes some Muslims members. Jikaku admitted there were cases where the Muslims viewed as extremists, including Jikaku himself at that time. Contrary to his belief, the Muslims before him (the NGO workers) actually were peaceful. His Muslim colleagues on Afghanistan sincerely apologized for destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas statues, which were destroyed by extremists. Jikaku was realized the Muslims kept preserved the statues of the other religion for over 1000 years. The Muslims in Afganistan preserved the statues despite those statues were dedicated for the religion other than Islam. Meanwhile, Jikaku who is a Buddhist monk, knew next to nothing about Islam and had not perceived Muslims as peaceful people and capable to tolerant other religion believers. This event left a strong impression on Jikaku and he started learn Islam.

Jikaku was troubled because the image of Islamic terrorism created by the extremists was maintained within the Japanese society. In 2013, Jikaku returned to his region and hold human rights training with the theme of Islam in Kyushu. The Buddhist monks of Sōtō sect

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<sup>21</sup> “Otera ga Isuramukyōkōza Nakatsushi no Jikaku Kyōseishakai he ‘Manabi, Sonchō wo’ Kagekiha Imejii Fusshokumezasu”, *Nishinippon Shinbun* (27 Dec 2017), <https://www.nishinippon.co.jp/item/n/383087/>, accessed 24 Apr 2018.

were involved in the training as participants. At the same time, ISIS made themselves known to the world and appalled the international community. The appearance and the actions of ISIS broadcasted by mass media, has motivated Jikaku even more to eradicate the image of terrorism from Islam:

“I want to wipe out the image of Islam that is connected to terrorism.”

The Japanese word of *tero* within the phrase was an abbreviation from the word of *terorizumu* or terrorism. Should the phrase was translated, the sentence mentioned above written about Jikaku’s wish to erase the image of terrorism attached in Islam. Jikaku wanted to prove that Islam and the Muslims do not fit mass media’s description.<sup>22</sup>

Similar to Jikaku, there exists also Japanese who instead viewed Islam as a good thing and helped the Muslims. They supported and assisted in various ways. In a video of *‘Muslim Travelers-Kisah Islam di Utara Jepang’* released in June 6<sup>th</sup> 2017,<sup>23</sup> a prayer room for male and female Muslims was built near Geibikei Gorge, Ichinoseki city, Iwate Prefecture in Tohoku. Inspired by his experience as one of Geibikei managers, Shu Suzuki is the main actor behind the construction of the prayer room. Suzuki once saw a Muslim tourist who wanted to pray but there was no available prayer room. The tourist then prayed above the boat. That event could not be forgotten by Suzuki. The event left a very strong impression to Suzuki and motivated him to build a tourist friendly tourism spot, especially toward Muslim tourists. Suzuki then built a prayer room provided for the Muslims. *Halal* foods were also available in Ichinose city.

Between the years of 2009–2012 within the city of Gifu, Imizu, and Fukuoka in Toyama Prefecture, questionnaires about the image of Islam were distributed among 725 local citizens who lived around the mosques as the respondents. When the citizens were asked about the impressions and things that came into their mind, around 13,8% of respondents perceived Islam as devout or deeply religious. The percentage

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<sup>22</sup> “Otera de Manabu Isuramu = Hirogaru Ibunka Rikai no Wa - Oita”, *nippon.com* (18 May 2018), <https://www.nippon.com/ja/news/yjj2018051601231/>, accessed 16 Aug 2018.

<sup>23</sup> *Muslim Travelers - Kisah Islam di Utara Jepang* (Jepang: Netmediatama, 2017), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pFG\\_zuNHymU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pFG_zuNHymU).

of the respondents perceived Islam as strict reached 8,8% while 8,4% of the respondents linked Islam with dietary restrictions. The percentage of the response to perceive Islam with exclusivity reached 6,8%. Around 6,1% of respondents connected Islam with religious precepts. The percentage of respondents who perceived Islam with praying reached 5,2%. Around 4,7% of respondents perceived Islam with extremism and the percentage of the respondents associated Islam with terrorism reached 4,1%. Around 4,0% of respondents linked Islam with fear, followed by 3,4% that linked Islam to male domination of women. The percentage of respondents who perceived Islam with fasting reached 3,2%. Around 3,2% of respondents linked Islam with blind loyalty, followed by 3,0% of respondents connected Islam with ethnic costume, 2,8% of respondents perceived Islam as *Allah*, and 2,3% of respondents perceived Islam as serious. Meanwhile, the percentage of respondents linked Islam with women's clothing reached 2,2%, followed by 1,8% of who connected Islam linked with women. The respondents who linked Islam with Arab, conflict, and number of sects reached the same percentage of 1,5%. Around 1,4% of respondents connected Islam with unity and Koran while around 1,2% perceived Islam with serenity. The rest of respondents perceived Islam as being difficult to approach, unfamiliar, create distinct group, courtesy, polygamy, simplicity, beard, and many other traits amounted to a percentage below 0,8%.

The information regarding Islam was foremost about conflicts and incidents with percentage reached 51%. Around 14% of the respondents received information regarding the history and culture of Islam. The citizens who received information about Islamic politic was about 10% and those who acquired information about the teachings of Islam was about 10%.

Unlike the general population of Japan, Jikaku did not view Islam as a terrifying and extreme religion, neither did he viewed its adherents. His wish to erase the image of terrorism from Islam, inspired him to become a lecturer. Jikaku went to the mosque and requested for some Islamic prayers when he participated in a workshop. In June 2017, the discussion and meeting between Muslim community and local residents with the theme of 'Islam in Buddhist Temple' was held. Jikaku invites the Muslims to his Buddhist temple and converse about their culture and

life. Lecturers from Muslim communities were invited as well.

There are times when Jikaku himself makes visits to Beppu Mosque and interacting with the Muslims. Jikaku will go and do a lecture about Islam in a regional festival and Beppu Mosque's exchange. So far, these discussion forums have contributed both to the Japanese residents and the Muslim's community. A Pakistani Muslim who lived in Japan for 18 years admitted the Muslim community was often isolated from the rest of the society. The Japanese might be afraid of men wearing turban and having beard but if they have an opportunity and attend the discussion forums, the Pakistani Muslim said that they would welcome each other. He admitted that attending these discussion forums was a rare opportunity. At a session of the discussion forums, the Pakistani Muslim used the opportunity to chat with the other Muslims. Suga Rumiko, a self-employed elder from Nakatsu city who also attended another session of these discussion forums, voiced out her opinion about the ways and attitude of the Muslims. Rumiko remarked that their way of life and diligence that was similar to those of Japanese.

Jikaku's experience with the NGO's members made him realized that the Muslims in general were not only extremists, instead they appear to be peaceful. Feeling motivated to change the negative image on Islam, Jikaku held many sessions of discussion forum and interacting with as many Muslims as possible. Jikaku is of the opinion that without fundamental knowledge, mutual respects toward one another will not grow. At the same time with the foreigners' population increase in Japan, Jikaku was doing his best to get along with the foreigners, especially the Muslims. Jikaku was not the only one who has taken this road.

In Jōshōji Temple, Teramachi, Kanazawa city, Prefecture Ishikawa, a similar discussion forum by *Teramachi Daitera Katsukyōkikai* (Teramachi Temple Activity Council) was also held in June 10<sup>th</sup> 2017. Teramachi Temple Activity Council was made from the members of 10 Buddhist temples. In response for the Japanese who feared the Muslims because of the terrorism caused by the extremists, the Council held a discussion forum with a theme of learning Islamic culture.<sup>24</sup> According to Ishikawa Muslim Association, around 400–500 Muslims lived in Ishikawa

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<sup>24</sup> Teruko, "Otera de Katarō Nihonjin no Henken ni Gimō Kanji Asu, Kanazawa Teramachi no Sōryō / Ishikawa".



Prefecture. Mizuno Teigen, the monk presided in the Jōshōji Temple, has traveled to South Asia and Middle East when he was a college student. He wished to inform his fellow Japanese that Islam is tolerant toward other religions from his experience during the travel days. Mizuno also wished for an opportunity to deepen his understanding of Buddhism by learning other religions.<sup>25</sup> In June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2017, a discussion session titled 'Introduction to Islamic Culture' was held in Jōshōji Temple. In this discussion session, many Turkish researchers who lived in Japan for 2 years and male Japanese converts spoke and answered questions from the participants. This discussion session also included a roundtable party with the monks.

Meanwhile in Matsumoto city, Nagano Prefecture, a study group titled Shinsū Islamic World Study Group was formed by the Middle East researchers. Professor Emeritus Itagaki Yuzo (86) acted as a representative from Tokyo University. Itagaki was researching Middle East and aiming for a resolve that is discrimination against Muslims. From April in 2017, he opened 8 lectures. These lectures were aimed for the citizens who wish to learn the basic knowledge of Islam.<sup>26</sup> This study group was a response for the Muslims' wish to change the Japanese mass media related to ISIS. This misunderstanding must be cleared, lest the conflict between two communities can be avoided.

This issue becomes more pressed since the population of Muslim children in Japanese schools, was increasing recently.<sup>27</sup> It means that the contact between the Japanese and the Muslims will increase and become more frequent. Due to the difference of the lifestyle (food, praying, clothing), the Japanese schools sooner or later must adapt the educational policies, equipment and the precedent. Religious tolerance thus, is necessary in order to maintain the harmony between the Japanese

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<sup>25</sup> "Kanazawateramachi Honryūzan Jōshōji, Otera de Isurāmu Bunkanyūmon", *Teramachi Terakoya* (10 Jun 2017), [http://kanazawa-teramachi.jimdofree.com/Teramachi\\_Terakoya/](http://kanazawa-teramachi.jimdofree.com/Teramachi_Terakoya/), accessed 1 Dec 2018.

<sup>26</sup> Kawabe Kazumasa, "Henken Norikoe Rikai wo Jibun no Ashimoto, Minaosu Hitsuyō/Nagano", *Mainichi Daily News* (24 Aug 2017), <https://mainichi.jp/articles/20170824/ddl/k20/040/084000c>, accessed 12 Dec 2018.

<sup>27</sup> Kato Seiko, "Musurimu no Kodomozōka Gakkō de Rikai to Oriai wo", *The Sankei News* (26 Sep 2018), <https://www.sankei.com/life/news/180926/lif1809260010-n1.html>, accessed 14 Dec 2018.

and Muslims students.

## D. Muslims Life in the Middle of Japan Society

### 1. *Halal Food*

Access to *halal* food is an important factor for the Muslim community in Japan. The main obstacle to finding *halal* food in Japan is because of the limitations of shops and restaurants which prepare and sell *halal* food. Along with the growing population of foreign Muslim tourists and the population of the community, the Japanese government and businessmen began to open shops and restaurants that sell *halal* food.

Regarding the issue of *halal* food, I have conducted interviews with 5 respondents residing in Japan. Their accounts as follows:

Deajeng Juwita Ayu<sup>28</sup> (Female, housewife and working part time as a volunteer in nursing home. Hereinafter referred to as DJ) was always anxious about finding *halal* food. Surprisingly, *halal* food could easily be found in Kobe. There were also a number of *halal* shops and restaurants. Previously some Indonesian *halal* restaurants can be found. However, these restaurants have been closed and only Indian restaurants remain in place and the number increases within a few years. Although the numbers are still very few in Kobe, some grocery stores even started selling *halal* food. Technological developments encourage the opportunity to sell *halal* food online. People originated from Indonesia for example, are increasingly doing their selling using *halal* online shop.

Nishiguchi Kazuhisa<sup>29</sup> (Male, judo conservator in clinic. Hereinafter referred to as NK), a Japanese convert and husband of DJ, confessed that he did not encounter any food issues. But if he goes out to eat with colleagues, he will be more careful, because many foods in the restaurant are not *halal*.

Ambar<sup>30</sup> (Female, caregiver in nursing home. Hereinafter referred to as A) is an Indonesian caregiver in Japan. In the early days of her arrival in Japan, she had difficulty getting *halal* food. Also, she had difficulty in looking for places of worship. A feels her life in Japan becomes easier

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<sup>28</sup> Juwita Ayu, interview (18 Apr 2018).

<sup>29</sup> Nishiguchi Kazuhisa, interview (18 Apr 2018).

<sup>30</sup> Ambar, interview (20 Apr 2018).

now, because of increased access to *halal* food and an increase of places of worship are more and more available. With the presence of more and more mosques in malls and stations, A feels that Japan is now friendlier towards Muslims.

Riostantieka M. Shoedarto<sup>31</sup> (Female, doctoral student. Hereinafter referred to as R) confessed that it was not difficult for her to find *halal* food. In Kyoto, there are many shops that sell both *halal* ingredients as well as *halal* food. In addition, the relationship between Indonesian housewives and students from Indonesian Student Association (PPI) is very close. They share the same conditions that they came from Indonesia and they are usually able to cook as well. Likewise with her compatriots, R can cook on her own so as to save expenses.

Deajeng Dinda Jayanti<sup>32</sup> (Female, college student. Hereinafter referred to as DD), an Indonesian student in Japan, had difficulties on getting *halal* food during her first months ago in Kodaira, a suburban area of Tokyo. Currently there are many shops selling *halal* foods, so *halal* foods are more easily found. DD has a very tight schedule, which barely allow her to cook herself. When it comes to eating out, it is hard to find a *halal* restaurant located near her dorm since the number is still very small. DD more often choose seafood instead of *halal* food. There are times when she felt bored with her meals because she could only consumed seafood.

## 2. *Worship*

Living a life as a Muslim in Japan is still challenging. Even though on the one hand, places of worship and shops and *halal* restaurants are increasingly easy to find. On the other hand, fasting in Japan is still creating a bit of a problem. The biggest difficulty when fasting in Japan is the long duration of fasting time. The month of *Ramadan* (the ninth month of Muslim calendar when Muslims are fasting from dawn to sunset) in these latest years usually falls in summer, where day duration is very long. Hereunder is a summary of statements of respondents.

According to DJ, there are no obstacles during fasting in Japan. The only difficulty for her is the length of fasting. When fasting for the

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<sup>31</sup> Riostantieka Mayandari Shoedarto, interview (25 Apr 2018).

<sup>32</sup> Dinda Jayanti, interview (1 May 2018).

first time in Japan, the month of *Ramadan* at that time coincides with the peak of summer. The heat had several times caused DJ to break the fast. Her body weakened due to dehydration. After residing for quite a time in Japan, she began to get used to fasting. The shorter the time of fasting from year to year also facilitate her observance of fasting. It is just that *Iyya* (night prayer, the last from 5 times prayer of *salat*) time in Japan is quite late and dawn is faster. Therefore DJ finds it difficult to prepare food for *sahur* (or otherwise known as suhoor, is a light meal usually eaten at around half an hour to an hour before the sunrise). She cooks around 1.00 am, while dawn in Japan starts from 03.00 am.

The parents of NK and parents-in-law from DJ, adapt as much as possible to the condition of the DJ family. When they want to eat out, they look for food that can be eaten by the family. As is the case with snacks. They are even willing to prepare seafood meal when DJ and her family come to visit. During *Ramadan*, DJ and her family cease to visit their parents (NK parents), not wanting to burden them with the trouble of preparing food. When DJ and NK visit their parents will certainly provide many meals, whereas DJ and her family can not eat because of their fast. To communicate during *Ramadan*, when DJ and NK refrain from visiting, they will instead call their parents.

Similar to Yuri's view before she was becoming a convert, the Islam image memorized by NK is the result of mass media influence. Before becoming a convert and embraced Islam, NK as a Japanese has an image of Islam as the other Japanese generally do. *Allah SWT*, Prophet Muhammad *SAW*, Arabs, and dressed all in white are some of the known Islamic images of NK. The Islam that was embedded in his mind was women dressed in black with only the eyes are visible, the countries which producing large quantities of oil, and act of terrorism. The first contact with the Muslim was when NK made a visit to the Kobe Mosque and experienced a prayer service. At that time, NK still did not know the Muslims. After the experience in the Kobe mosque, NK embraced Islam the next day.

After becoming a convert, NK became a member of a group studying Japanese language in a social media. In the study group, NK met his future wife. During a visit to Indonesia, the image of Islam that was imprinted when he has not yet embraced Islam then collapsed. During

his visit in Indonesia, the relationship between DJ and NK continued until they were married. When NK told his parents and friends that he had become a convert, their faces turn strange, clearly they were very disturbed and concerned. However, as reported by DJ, they basically respond with a normal attitude. They even congratulate NK for his marriage. As a convert, NK was invited to participate in studying Islam by a study group to which his wife (DJ) also belonged. He admitted to having difficulties in learning Arabic and that to learn Arabic letters look like earthworms. Despite the difficulties, NK also admitted it was the first time he has ever been accustomed to reading Arabic letters. He was also noted that in the mosque where NK and his wife often visit, there was also a study group devoted to children.

Meanwhile in Kobe, only in recent years, according to A, Japan has become easier to live in. For example, various *halal* foods stores and prayer rooms can be found with ease. Another noticeable change was the attitude toward *hijab*. When A had just settled in Japan, the use of *hijab* was looked upon as strange in the eyes of the Japanese. In the present, many Japanese have understood the reason for wearing the *hijab* and immediately recognize the wearer as Muslim. Difficulty in fasting was experienced by A when *Ramadan* comes. These last few years, the month of *Ramadan* in Japan coincides with the height of the summer season starting from July to August. As a caregiver in a nursing home, A is required to work professionally and A admitted how tiring it is without food intake and drink.

A was unable to perform *tarawih* prayers (prayer done in the night after one break his/her fast) in a congregation. A was also unable to join celebration with her friends, due to time constraints and distance to reach the mosque. However, even though she was unable to carry out *tarawih*, A with friends were able to join celebration every *Eid Al-Fitr*. When in a gathering with fellow Muslims, A feels like having met her family, especially during the gatherings with her fellow Indonesian Muslims. She also finds happiness because she feels closer to *Allah SWT* and more motivated to learn about Islam.

R's confirmation is similar to that of the other respondents. In line with the increasing number of foreign Muslim tourists visiting Japan, more and more Japanese people have the awareness to provide a place

of worship for them. For entrepreneurs, the preparation of a place of worship brings huge profits. In addition to the prayer rooms provided in the malls, restaurants, information centers, and stations, in Kyoto International Community House (Kokoka) the construction of a prayer room is being carried out. Kyoto International Community House is a place where Kyoto residents mingle, hang out, and discuss with foreigners. In planning the renovation, they have to make big changes because the place of worship to be built would have to fill a requirement of distinctive feature. They have also made sure that the prayer room for Muslims is clean and quiet. Based on R observations, the attitude of Japanese society is more friendly and open to immigrants, including Muslims. In addition to bringing in foreign exchange, the arrival of Muslim tourists gives a positive impact to the business and adds diversity to a vibrant local cultural heritage.

With regard to the obstacles experienced when fasting during *Ramadan*, DD still have not the slightest idea. This year of 2018 is her first time of fasting observance in Japan. However, she felt it would be difficult, because her work starts from 17.00 pm. In Japan, the breaking of fasts starts around 18.30 to 19.00 pm.

### 3. *Japanese Society and Muslim Community*

Regarding the image of Islam, DJ feels that the Japanese people in the housing complex are at least very normal on the surface. This phenomenon is likely due to the high Muslim population living in the city of Kobe. The same attitude was also felt when DJ is in the workplace. If news on terrorism appears on media news, they never mention it. The father-in-law did not give much commentary, except to comment on how horrific terrorism is. DJ hopes there is no terrorism in Japan.

Since NK had become a convert, he also felt that nothing weird has happened in his surroundings. He did not experience any inconvenience. Although when it comes to food, since the number of halal restaurants is still small, he must be careful when going out to eat with colleagues.

According to A, the question of whether the Japanese really want to know Islam is, all up to each one of them. Colleagues for example, often ask why A should wear the hijab and other things about Islam. A was also asked about martyrdom related matters. At that time the news about

ISIS was heavily broadcasted. A gives explanations as much as possible so the Japanese natives do not misunderstand. Fortunately after hearing her explanation, they ended up understanding the misconceptions.

Lecturers of R are Japanese people who have often interacted with Muslim students. They have been accustomed to the Muslim creed and customs and accepted if the lab party (party held in the laboratory) are serving *halal* or seafood menu. Even in the laboratory, Friday prayers are also commonplace. Some laboratory activities are adjusted to Friday prayer schedule. According to R, as long as Japanese society sees Muslims as not being rude and disturbing, they will seek to accommodate the needs of the Muslim community.

Based on R's friend, a Japanese convert named Yuji Mizuno, a new paradigm emerged among Japanese Muslims. This was revealed by one of her convert friends called Yuji Mizuno. The paradigm is that if the Mosque Prosperity Council of the mosque has good contact with the police, then the position of the Muslim community will be safe. Especially at times when the police have been readied around the mosque. The placement of the police gave them the perception that the Mosque Prosperity Council has opened itself to the police, which mean the police became a supporter of various Muslim activities in the mosque. Yet it is another case if the mosque was ignored by the police. That means there is a problem between the Muslim community and the surrounding communities, represented by the police. This statement is supported by a statement from R. In the early days of the ISIS news, police guards were often seen. Currently, the placement of the police is only seen during *Eid Al-Fitr*, *Eid Al-Adha*, and Friday prayers that coincide with the long holiday. Sometimes the police, accompanied by journalists, are covering mosque activities.

Fitriana (Female, college lecturer. Hereinafter referred as R6) is a female Muslim who resides in Kyoto. She works as Indonesia's Ambassador for Kyoto and a member of Committee Council Multicultural Facility Kyoto City. Her duty as an Ambassador is to introduce Indonesia culture to schools and a face to face contact, usually intended for education and welfare. Sometimes she is requested by the school to explain about Islam. They are taking interest and having changed their perception, now that they know Islam is unlike the image that the mass media showed. There



are times when they requested her to practice on how to wear *hijab*, how to do *aḥḥan* (the Muslim call to ritual prayer of *ṣalat*) and do *ṣalat*, and many more.

As a member of Committee Council Multicultural Facility, R6 and her fellow council members will hold meetings every 2–3 months. The members who come from overseas in this council always get replace in every 2 years. R6 just becomes a member this year, started in period 2018–2020. Therefore the meeting in July was her first meeting while the next one will be hold in September. There is a chance the Committee Council will discuss an issue about Muslim friendly facilities, though as for now the main focus is still in learning Japanese for foreigners. It's possible that the matter will be discussed by next year.

According to R6, big cities such as Tokyo, Osaka, Kyoto, and Sapporo have been able to provide Muslim friendly facilities. Other than the increase of the Muslim friendly facilities, map in forms of leaflet and mobile applications for smartphone, have been released. Muslim friendly map for example, is a leaflet shaped city map created by the local government tourism agency. It shows various tourist spots which provide *halal* restaurant and praying space. R6 added further that the map is now also available in Tourist Information Centre and in *halal* restaurants.

#### 4. Interviews in Osaka Ibaraki Mosque

During the stay in Kyoto between December 12<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> 2019, we went to Osaka Ibaraki Mosque in December 15<sup>th</sup> 2018 and Islamic Culture Center in December 18<sup>th</sup> 2018. In Osaka Ibaraki Mosque, I have interviewed few sister Muslims.

One Muslim sister, F (an alias, female, housewife. Hereinafter referred as R7), while we can not obtain her name, we learnt that she belongs to Uighur minority in China. R7 is married and has 3 children. She does not speak English and most of the conversation was done through translation by DK. R7 revealed the difficulty to practice Islam in China. R7's husband came to Japan as a worker. She felt that it is easier to practice her belief in Japan than in China.

Dedeh Kulsum<sup>33</sup> (Female, housewife. Referred as DK) is a female Indonesian Muslim. DK has been living for 21 years in Japan, both in

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<sup>33</sup> Dedeh Kulsum, interview (15 Dec 2018).

Kyushu and later in Hyogo Prefecture. She is married to a Japanese convert. During the conversation, she told us that she usually buy halal foods from online shop or through the Ibaraki mosque. DK was in the mosque at the time of the interview to accompany her son who is learning Islam in Osaka Ibaraki Mosque. Even so, she does not strictly enforce her son to learn Islam. Instead she was letting him play with the other children. DK comes every Saturday afternoon to Osaka using monorail which takes 4 hours round - trip.

Ratna Sariyatun<sup>34</sup> (Female, a doctorate candidate in biotechnology field. Hereinafter referred as R9) is a female Indonesian Muslim. R9 currently lives in Osaka. She is married to an Indonesian who works in the Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia in Osaka. She also comes every Saturday afternoon to Ibaraki Mosque, R9 often comes to Osaka Ibaraki Mosque by the motorcycle and participates in the Islamic activities in the mosque. Usually, she and her husband participate in the religious studies on Koran and *hadiths* until 10 pm.

Apparently, because the Muslims in Japan come from different regions and nationalities they also have different perspectives in practicing sharia. There are Muslims who are very selective regarding the foods on one hand. On the other hand, there are Muslims who are more liberal in selecting foods. As a result, the Japanese who invites them sometimes became confused to determine the standard of *halal* foods for the Muslim community. The Muslim community in Japan is in fact, divided into small groups or factions. These factions often gathered in their own mosques.

Subsequently, I went to Kyoto mosque just situated in proximity with the Kyoto Palace, where I have interviewed a fellow Muslim brother. Shahbaz Khan (the vice president of Kyoto Muslim Association, otherwise known as Islam Culture Center. Hereinafter referred as R10) admitted that the visitors of the Islam Culture Center are mostly students and workers. Some of the students are recipient of scholarship. He further told us that Kyoto is the first Muslim friendly city in the world because the local government wishes to increase Muslim tourists. The *halal* foods sell in the Islam Culture Center were previously from Australia and now the *halal* foods are instead produced in Japan. They have the *halal* beef from Japan although the price is a bit expensive.

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<sup>34</sup> Ratna Sariyatun, interview (15 Dec 2018).

There were discussion forums with Japanese converts and non-Muslim Japanese. But the organizers had passed away and since then, there are no discussion forums. The Islam Culture Center does have contact with other Muslim factions in Japan. However, the Muslim factions were coming from different countries, different cultures and thus different perspective regarding Islamic practices as well. Hence it is not surprising that some of them rather gathered with their own fellows and built their own mosque than come to the Islam Culture Center. Outside Kyoto Muslim Association or Islam Culture Center, there are at least 27 mosques scattered across Japan, excluded the prayer rooms. Despise the differences, they still in good terms with each other in overall.

**E. Sources from the Book *Nihon to Isuramu ga Deautoki: Sono Rekishi to Kanōsei*<sup>35</sup>**

From the 2 previous sub-chapters, the interviews often described the issues which the Muslim respondents faced, the positive efforts, and changes between the Japanese and the Muslim community. On one hand, some aspects were improved due to those interactions based on religious tolerance. On the other hand, not all people were able to put their mind to do positive efforts, including the Muslims as well. Inside the Muslim community, the Muslims come from various tribes and countries. Their characteristics and behaviors differed according each culture they originated from. Some Muslims were more open and amiable while others behaved more insensitive and uncaring. The interview results from 2 Japanese ex-converts explained how some Muslims and their actions were actually become the reason why these Japanese deserted Islam. Thus the negative images of Islam were formed in the mind of these Japanese.

L (Female, a Japanese employee. Hereinafter referred as R11) had married to a foreign Muslim. They met in a club in the city where foreigners often gathered and had a talk about Islam. After some time they decided to marry and R11 converted to Islam. At the beginning, R11 was eager to learn Islam. In order to learn the teachings of Islam, R11 had attended a study group hold in every weekend in a mosque. They were questioned and talked about their marital lives. One day, R11 told her husband that in the teachings of Islam, the women supposedly

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<sup>35</sup> Komura, *Nihon to Isuramu ga Deautoki*.

should not work and men should not be lazy. Her husband responded that if R11 she was learning together with the other female Muslims and have received knowledge about Islam in the mosque, she should have not going to the mosque and the study group again. It seemed that the husband of R11 did not support her and instead, taken it as a heavy burden. As R11 was keep thinking about her husband, her weekend visit to mosque was reduced.

Another example was when R11 bought some seafood, it turned out that her ex-husband rejected certain type of shellfish. The revelation surprised R11 because she heard from her fellow Japanese Muslim friend, only pork and liquor are forbidden to eat by the Muslims and on the contrary, all seafood are allowed to eat. Depends on the interpretation of the Islamist school and the customs, there were schools that taught there are things they can not eat, included seafood as well. While R11 still asked and answering questions about Islam with her husband, this small interaction caused R11 to further felt anxious for their marital life. Later, they were divorced for some reason R11 prefers to keep to herself. After the divorcement, R11 continued practicing Islam. However, it was proven harder than she has anticipated. She could not practised Islam without gaining some attention to her and distinguished her from her friends and superiors. Finally, R11 chose a Japanese life than continued practice Islam.

M (Female, Japanese employee. Hereinafter referred as R12) is a Japanese who once a convert. At that time, she was troubled with her relationship in the company and her future. R12 consulted with her acquaintance of a Japanese converter about her problem. Impressed by the sincerity of her converter acquaintance, the interest to Islam started to grow. She learnt about Islam from the books in the library and bookshop before made decision and converted in a mosque. R12 and her acquaintance went to various mosques to be introduced and befriended with other female Muslims. At the beginning, she eagerly spent her time within the gathering. The longer R12 spent her time however, she began encountering few issues. In spite of the new identity as a Muslim, R12 felt that she received a different treatment from her fellow Japanese converts. Every time she attended in the gatherings and entered the room for female Muslims, there were Muslims who would put unpleasant faces. During

discussion, a number of female Muslims told the others participants that it is *haram* to do what R12 has said. It makes R12 feels uncomfortable whenever she was surrounded by the other Muslims.

In other time, R12 and a fellow Muslim was in the middle of conversation when a Muslim suddenly involved herself within the conversation. When R12 admonished her, the intruding female Muslim did not take the advice very well. On the contrary, the female Muslim admonished back in an angry yell and even accused her. From the perspective of R12, she found that the presence of R12 irritated her. When she got yelled, there were other female Muslims as well. After the abuse, no one included the Muslims who R12 considers as a friend gave a word or defend her. To R12, it is as if her identity as a Muslim was being denied and branded as a *kafir* (non-believer) instead. She feels betrayed by her fellow female Muslims and chose to leave the gathering earlier.

Since then, R12 slowly never attend to gathering in that mosque. Because the Japanese Muslim population especially the female Japanese converts was not many, R12 was afraid at the possibility of meeting the Muslims she knows in another mosque. R12 was in dilemma, she questioned herself if by leaving Islam, she will truly rejected by the Muslims. She slowly drifted away from Islam before finally stopped learning Islam. Whenever she heard a topic about Islam, R12 was always feeling pain caused by those past experiences.

## F. Concluding Remarks

Based on the elaboration from the results of deep interviews, it can be concluded that there are the Japanese who act friendlier and accepting with the Muslim community. By finding more information through direct interaction, their understanding of the Muslim will grow deeper. From this understanding, the conscious of religious tolerance will grow within their mind. It will move them to socialize with the Muslims and improved the image of Islam. This change supported by the Japanese government's efforts to disseminate informations about Islam to the Japanese society, especially in conjunction with oncoming 2020 Olympic Games. Government and private parties seek to increase the facilities of halal shops, halal restaurants, mosques, and prayer rooms. All of these developments are for the sake of familiarizing Islam within the society,

as well as the convenience of the Muslim community. These efforts also helped spread a more positive Islam image and erase the negative ones.

Even so, in spite the participation of the Muslim community is taking the community suffers human relations problems. Within the community, the Muslims divided in many factions. Every Muslim has each own of their perspective regarding Islam and the sharia. Their different perspective regarding the *halal* foods is one example which signified the friction between Muslim factions in Japan. For example in the case of R11, the problem was not laid in the Islam learning activity who R11 has attended but in the difference teachings between Islamic schools. Islam is divided to various types of schools. The knowledge about Islam which R11 acquired from the mosque was differed with the teachings of Islam which the husband has been taught. As a result, 2 different the lifestyles clashed with one another and created disturbance. As a result, the husband of R11 attempted to defend his lifestyle and not willing to adjust it with his wife's lifestyle. This conflict of lifestyles is eventually leading to divorce. Even when R11 tried her best in learning and practice teachings of Islam, she has no one she can rely or ask help with, she gave up learning Islam.

From the case of R12, the lack of concern from the other members is discouraging her from learning teachings of Islam and thus becomes another human relation problem as well. Many of the Muslims are foreigner workers and students resided for temporary stay, usually in 2-3 years. Other factors such as culture diversity, faction diversity, and the absence of continuous communication and the lack of strong attachment also affected the Muslim community as an organized group. As a result, the Japanese Muslim community is lacking the element of 'friendship' and 'cohesion as a group'. This situation is contradicted with the concept of Muslim society which requires brotherhood and unity. Without the implementation of brotherhood, unity within the community can not realize.

While the effort to make Japanese society more open to foreigner Muslims is important, it is equally necessary to solve those human relation problems too. The improvisation can be done through pay zakat for those who in need included the poor, those who need a debt relief, and converts, hold a rotating gatherings in any participating Muslim'

dwelling or any designated place aside the mosque and collaborate with Japanese government or NGO to hold discussion forums which the Japanese society may take participation. Thus, it becomes easier for the Japanese public to accept Muslims into their society.



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