

The Muslim Society in Japan: Their Interaction with the Japanese Society

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Introduction

In the contemporary world, for the Japanese, chances to communicate with the Muslims are increasing day by day. Many Muslims stay in Japan as students, workers, and tourists. A part of them become permanent residents in Japan. At the same time, visiting Muslim countries for business and other purposes is not so special experience among the Japanese today.

In Japan the encounter between the Japanese and the Muslims resulted in some issues, which are needed to be resolved. Among those issues, there are socio-economic problems such as labor environment, income, and crimes by Muslims who came to Japan. There are problems concerning international marriage between the Japanese and the Muslims, for example, education for children, domestic violence, and divorce. The language as medium in daily life and working place is still big issue for foreigner Muslims. Majority of them are far from fluent in speaking, reading and writing Japanese.

The interactions between Muslims and the Japanese society can be analyzed from various viewpoints including political and economic viewpoints. Probably most emergent problems are socio-economic problems including crimes, domestic violence, illegal stay of foreign Muslims, and hardcore poverty among some Muslim families. Those problems should be considered immediately. However, when we discuss on the problems of the Muslim community, we have to pay attention on the root of those problems and the background of two societies. Other than material factors, cultural and religious factors influence on

inter-civilizational relationship. Without understanding civilizational context of the Japanese society and the Muslim society, it is difficult to understand fundamental causes of the problems. As for the Muslims, of course Islam is crucial factor in their life. As for the Japanese, religious factors are still very significant in the Japanese society, although the Japanese are generally secular after the modernization and the economic development.

The present achievements of researches on the Muslim society in Japan are still insufficient. The researches on the interactions between the Japanese and the Muslims are also limited. The researches on the Muslims in Japan those focus on civilizational and religious aspects are very rare¹. So this monograph analyzes the interaction between the Japanese and the Muslims in terms of the civilizational interaction. The civilizational and religious factors are supposed to be very crucial in the Japanese-Muslim interaction in the future. The situation of the Muslims in Europe shows that the solving socio-economic issues are not enough for coexistence. The differences of values are more crucial for coexistence than socio-economic issues for the Europeans. In Europe there are differences of values between the native Europeans and the Muslims concerning secularism, human rights, freedom, gender, etc.

The themes of this monograph are as follows. What happens when the Japanese civilization and the Muslims encounter, and how can they establish a framework for coexistence in Japan? Coexistence is not just to live in same space together tentatively. It is necessary to establish an agreement and a framework between two groups for a permanent coexistence. To establish a coexistence framework, there should be process of admitting values each other. The following sections describe what happened in interaction between the Japanese and the Muslims and discuss the difference of values between them in civilizational level. To describe the interaction between the Japanese and the Muslims, outline and history of the Muslim society are explained. After that, religious backgrounds and perception on monotheism in the Japanese society are discussed. Without understanding religious values in Japan, it is impossible to discuss on reactions to monotheistic religions in the Japanese society. At last, the

possibility of establishing a framework for coexistence of the Japanese and the Muslims in Japan is discussed.

The Muslim Society in Japan

It has passed only 100 years since the Muslims presence became visible in Japan. Although there are records on Muslims who visited Japan in 13th century and even before that, the Muslims didn't take root in Japan. There are no records on community, which practice Islam in Japan. There were large Muslim population in China and the Mongolian Empire. However, the diffusion of Islam stopped in China and Philippines in the East Asia.

Muslim residents existed in Japan since late 19th century. It was the Meiji era or the period of the Emperor Meiji in Japan. From 17th century to middle of 19th century, Japanese government limited relations with foreign countries. The main reason of this national seclusion policy was to prevent colonization by Europeans. However, after most of the East Asian countries were colonized, it became difficult to sustain the policy. The Japanese government under the Emperor Meiji implemented modernization policy. They planned to sustain the independence of the nation through industrialization and modern armament.

During the modernization period, foreigners visited Japan for trade. There were Muslims among them. After the Russian revolution in 1918, some Muslims in the Central Asia exiled to Japan. In Kobe, Indian Muslim traders established the first mosque in Japan in 1928. However, until the Second World War, Muslim visitors to Japan were still limited. And most of them didn't become permanent residents.

For the Japanese, the Second World War was the first large-scale encounter with other Asian people. Many Japanese saw Muslims and mosques for the first time in China, Malaya, Indonesia and other regions. Some Japanese soldiers embraced Islam in those countries at that time.

During the Fourth Middle Eastern War between Israel and Arab nations in 1973, so called the Oil Shock or the oil price control by some Arab governments seriously shocked the Japanese economy. Japan is totally dependent on oil imported

from foreign countries, and most of them are Muslim countries. The Japanese realized importance of Arab nations as oil exporters, and Arab study became popular in Japan. The Iranian Revolution in 1979 was also daring for a part of the Japanese.

The late 1980s was the peak of the Japanese economic growth. The economic prosperity attracted foreign labors. There were Muslims such as Iranians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, and Indonesians among such foreign labors. A part of them didn't go back to their own country. They married to Japanese women and became permanent residents in Japan. Even after the economic declining period in 1990s and after 2000, there are Muslim visitors as students, technical trainees, and labors to Japan.

There are some claims on Muslim population in Japan today from 40,000 to 1 million. However, most of claims are subjective and not based on empirical research and statistics. For example, Komai Hiroshi estimated the Muslim population as 45,500². Sakurai Keiko estimated the Muslim population as 70,000 based on statistics by the Japanese Immigration Bureau in the end of 2000. In her book published in 2003, Sakurai estimated Indonesian population as 19,346, Pakistani population as 7,498, Bangladeshi population as 7,176, Iranian population as 6,167. In addition to them, there are Muslims from other countries such as Malaysia, Arab countries, Turkey, India, and African countries. According to Sakurai, legal stay Muslims are supposed to be about 42,000, and illegal stay Muslims are supposed to be 21,000. Sakurai estimated native Japanese Muslim population as 7,000³.

According to the latest statistics by the Japanese Immigration Bureau, the registered numbers of Indonesians staying in Japan are 25,620 in the end of the year 2007⁴. Indonesians are the biggest Muslim ethnic group in Japan. The Muslim population in Japan today is supposed to be bigger than 2003 when Sakurai estimated the Muslim population as 70,000. However, the economic recession since the end of 2008 forces foreign workers in Japan to return to the mother countries.

Most of the Muslims come to Japan as workers excepting students. They come to Japan with tourist visas and work as physical labors. As for Indonesians, many of them come to Japan

with visas for technical trainees. However, they are treated as very cheap physical labor force in factories etc. After long years of illegal stay as physical labors, some of them marry to native Japanese women and start their independent business. And there are hundreds of Muslim small business folders in industries such as second-hand car traders, restaurants, and *halal* foods shops. Especially, Pakistanis are successful in such industries compared with other Muslim ethnics.

In 1990 there were only 3 mosques in all over Japan. In the end of 2008, there are 50 mosques and some more are in process of building. Most of the mosques are concentrated in the 3 biggest metropolitan areas of Tokyo, Osaka and Nagoya. Most of the Muslims are employed as physical workers in those areas. And Muslim residents are also concentrated in those areas.

It is possible to say that there was rapid development of the Muslim society in Japan during passed 20 years. However, the presence of the Muslims in Japan is still very limited. It is very rare to find Muslims in rural areas. Even in urban areas, the foreigners form their own community and the native Japanese rarely communicate with them. The Muslims are segregated from the usual Japanese, although the Muslim population is increasing. Islam and Muslims are not yet embedded in Japan until now.

Now it is possible to lead to conclusion on one of the themes of this monograph, the interaction between the Muslims and the Japanese society. There is almost no interaction between them. Although there are Muslims in Japan and the Japanese are recognizing the existence of Muslims, they live in different communities and don't interact with each other. The Japanese consider the Muslims as just temporary residents, not as permanent residents. They generally don't admit Islam and the Muslims as a part of their society.

However, there should be two questions when we face the situation of the Muslim society in Japan. First, why Islam and Muslims are not embedded in Japan? Why Islam is not accepted widely among the native Japanese? Second, will this situation change in the future and Islam and Muslims become a part of the Japanese society? Is there a fundamental factor that obstructs the Japanese embracing Islam? Following sections are discussions on these two questions.

The Japanese society is very homogeneous. More than 95% of the residents in Japan are ethnic Japanese. The biggest non-ethnic-Japanese community in Japan is the Korean. However, their population is just about 1% in the whole population of Japan. And many of Korean descendants were assimilated in the Japanese community. 100 years history of the Muslim community in Japan is not so long. However, it is not necessarily short, compared with the Muslim community in Europe and America. It is clear that the Muslim communities in the West are developed far more than the Muslim community in Japan.

There are obstacles such as language and citizenship for foreigner Muslims in Japan. However, these problems are only problems of time and efforts. If the Muslims in Japan take time and make effort to overcome these problems, it is possible to solve the problems. However, cultural and civilizational problems are more fundamental. If the Muslims in Japan accept not only language and citizenship, but also culture and civilization, they will be totally assimilated in the Japanese society. Such situation cannot be considered as coexistence of the native Japanese and the Muslims. There cannot be any civilizational interaction, if the Muslims are assimilated totally. In other words, difference of religion is the fundamental difference between the Japanese and Muslims, because religions are foundations of civilizations for both the Japanese and the Muslims. Therefore, the biggest challenge in coexistence of the Japanese and the Muslims is how the Japanese civilization will accept coexistence with an external civilization, Islam.

Religions in the Japanese Civilization

Most of the Japanese practice two religions together, Buddhism and *Shinto*. Although today most of the Japanese are very secular and rarely practice their religions, their religions are still very important factors as part of the basis of their civilization. The Japanese accepted some religions in their history. One of the main religions in Japan, Buddhism was imported from Korean peninsular and China around 6th century. Another main religion in Japan, *Shinto* is peculiar to the Japanese. However, many of essences of *Shinto* were introduced from Chinese. *Shinto* is very

similar with popular Taoism practiced in China. Objects of worship in *Shinto* are animistic natural spirits, mystic gods including the Imperial family, and ancestors. Confucianism imported from China is also very influential on Japanese values. Those religions originated from China (and India) were imported in very early era of the Japanese civilization, and became a backbone of the Japanese civilization.

The Japanese are not always refusing to introduce foreign culture. It is well known that the Japanese are very excellent in introducing foreign technologies and improve them. The Japanese are not reluctant to enjoy foreign cultures such as music, literature, and cuisine. However, they are very conservative to sustain their basic values and social structure. Basically, the Japanese are not positive to introduce basic values from outside. Excepting the ancient period, diffusions of external religions in Japan were very limited.

One of the most interesting cases of the Japanese experience with foreign civilization was the encounter with the Christianity. The first contact between the Japanese and the Christians was in 1549, when Francisco Xavier arrived in the Western Japan from Malacca. Spanish Jesuits propagated Catholic in the Western Japan. Until the early 17th century, millions of Japanese embraced Christianity. The record of rapid diffusion of Christianity in 16th century shows that the Japanese are not necessarily negative to accept foreign religion and monotheism. However, Japanese rulers at that time were very skeptical on Christianity except a part of regional rulers who embraced Christianity. They considered Christian missionaries as agents of Spanish colonialist. After a prohibition and suppression policies on Christians by the authority of *Shogun*, a rebellion by Christians happened. After the rebellion in the Western Japan was subdued and thousands of Christians were executed, Christian survivors went underground. In late 19th century of the Meiji era, Christianity revived in Japan. However, the spread of Christianity was limited compared with 16th century. Today their population is about 1 million that is less than 1% of the Japanese whole population.

It is often believed that the main reasons of the poor diffusion of Islam in contemporary Japan are contracted socio-economic

circumstances of the Muslim community in Japan and the distressed situation of the Muslim civilization. It is true that the most of the Muslims in Japan are manual laborers and their Japanese language skills are very poor. The Japanese have bad impression on the politically and economically troubled situation in Muslim countries. However, the dull diffusion of the Christianity in Japan shows that socio-economic superiority is not enough for the religious prevalence in Japan. The Christians in Japan are relatively wealthy. There are many Christians among Japanese intellectuals and artists. There are many Japanese Christians holding high positions in the Japanese society including the current prime minister, Aso Taro. Moreover, many of the most prosperous countries in the world are Christian-majority countries. However, Christianity is not fascinating for most of the usual Japanese. They don't feel any necessities to accept Christianity or any other monotheism religions. They are satisfied with their life and don't expect that Christianity or other religions can improve their life and prosperity. There are obstacles to spreading of foreign civilization and monotheisms, concerning not only on socio-economic conditions, but also religious and civilizational backgrounds.

One of the obstacles to the diffusion of Christianity in Japan is the custom of ancestor worship. Many scholars assume ancestor worship as the substance of the Japanese religions. Patrick Lafcadio Hearn, who renamed himself as Koizumi Yakumo pointed out that ancestor worship is the basis of the Japanese society. He was born in Ireland, and immigrated and naturalized in Japan in late 19th century. He researched on Japanese society, customs, and folk tales, and introduced them to the West. He wrote "the idea of incarnation is as universal as the air." He also wrote "the world of the living is directly dominated by the world of the dead⁵."

A Japanese folklorist, Yamaori Tetsuo concluded that ancestor worship is the core of the Japanese religions in his book "The Buddhist Folklore." He wrote as follows:

It is notable fact that even after the Second World War, although the traditional life styles in family and village transformed, the will to worship their ancestor didn't change at all, even though the way of worship changed slightly⁶.

In *Shinto*, objects of worshipping are called "*kami*" or god. *Kamis* are not only animistic nature spirits and mystic figures, but also eminent human beings such as rulers, business tycoons, sports heroes are considered as gods and goddess in the Japanese society. Dead ancestors are also *kamis* for the Japanese. The Japanese religious values are polytheistic in nature.

The concept of *kami* is peculiar to *Shinto*. However, it is common to worship ancestors in Japanese Buddhism. Originally, Buddhism was not necessarily polytheistic religion in India. However, Buddhism became polytheistic religion in the Far East. Buddhism in Japan, especially *Jodoshinshu* or Pure Land Buddhism, which was introduced from China, teaches that dead ancestors went to the Pure Land hereafter, and they protect descendents from there.

When Christian missionaries arrived in Japan in 16th century, they noticed that the value of ancestor worship took root in the Japanese society very deeply. Although the Japanese were very curious to accept Christianity, they didn't abandon their custom of ancestor worship. Mainly because of the oppression by rulers, Christianity could not take root in the Japanese society at that time. Probably, the surface acceptance of Christianity by the Japanese Christians was another reason of the failure. Christianity was very popular in Japan in 16th century. However, most of the Japanese Christians abandoned Christianity and returned to their ancestral religion until the middle of 17th century.

Even today the issue of ancestor worship is crucial in Christian churches in Japan. They cannot avoid this issue and need to show guidelines for believers. The Catholic Church in Japan published a guideline for believers and allowed them surface practice of ancestor worship without worshipping intention to a Buddhist memorial tablet and a tombstone.

A memorial or a respect for the dead is different from worshipping the dead as gods. Worshipping the dead as gods is clearly against the creed of Christianity. In Christianity, a memorial and a respect for the dead is expressed through a prayer to the God⁷.

However, Protestants are stricter than Catholic on this issue. The Protestants churches keep out idolatry customs. Protestants deny the intercession for salvation by human beings. Protestants

also deny intercessory role of the Pope, priests, or any other human beings. Their creed is that only the God can decide on salvation for human beings. Therefore, Protestants don't have steady policy on ancestor worship until now.

In the Japanese society, religion is a family matter. Religion is crucial to sustain kinship of family and relatives. Religious gatherings such as memorial service, New Years Celebration, festivals and especially funeral are chances for relatives to gather together and strengthen unity. Participation in religious rituals is duty as a member of family. Therefore, it is very hard for the Japanese to abandon their ancestral religion, because it is as same as abandoning their family relationship. Even if some of the young accept monotheistic religions such as Christianity or Islam and depart from their tradition, it is only an adventurous experience of their young period for most of them. Most of the young who accept monotheistic religion merely enjoy strange culture just as they enjoy hippie culture. When they get older, many of them return to their ancestral tradition. In other words, monotheistic religions are not "family religion" in Japan until now, excepting a part of Christian family cases.

In the contemporary Japanese society, ancestor worship is not sustainable in its original way, because ancestor worship was closely connected with farming life style that is minority today. Most of the Japanese population left their ancestral home village and concentrate in urban areas in 20th centuries. Majority of the youth are losing connection with ancestral villages and cemeteries. Ancestor worship practices are decreasing in contemporary Japanese society, especially among the youth. Today the Japanese religious value is transforming and becoming secular in general. It is early to conclude that this transformation will increase acceptance of monotheism in the Japanese society or not.

Monotheism and Polytheism in Japan

Generally speaking, monotheistic religions are not regarded as so favorable, especially from viewpoints of nationalists and Japanese traditionalists. For long years, Christianity has been considered as a Westerner's tool of colonizing Asian nations. At

the same, today Christianity is considered as fashionable among the Japanese youth and they prefer Christian style weddings and Christmas parties, although they are not interested in Christianity as religion and the teaching.

To confront with Christian civilization, Japanese conservative thinkers devised a theory on monotheism and polytheism. They insist superiority of polytheism to monotheism, and describe polytheism as Asian value, which is tolerant, inclusive, and moderate. On the contrary, they describe monotheism as Western value, which is intolerant, exclusive, and strict. They assert that monotheism is originated from harsh environment of the Middle Eastern desert and not irreconcilable with moderate climate of the East Asia. They also insist that many of wars in the world were caused by intolerance of monotheistic religions, and it is necessary to propagate polytheistic value to the world for world peace. And they also believe that monotheists destroy earth environment because of arrogance, and polytheists preserve environment because of obeisance to the nature that is considered as gods.

One of the most fervent theoreticians for polytheism-superior theory is Umehara Takeshi. He is a researcher on Japanese thought and founding director of International Research Center for Japanese Studies, which was established by former Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro to promote Japan studies in the world. Umehara wrote as follows;

Monotheistic religions confront each other violently, and create needless wars. As a result, in 21st century, there can be more massive murders than 20th century. In the situation today, for the purpose of permanent prosperity of the human beings, we dare to criticize two main principles of the West, human-centrism and monotheism⁸.

Because polytheism believers admit others to believe their own gods, polytheism is far more effective than monotheism for the purpose of realizing peaceful coexistence of human beings. Monotheism is very warlike religion, because it is a representation of desert tribe's egoism that was born in wasteland after forest was destroyed. Their egoism was declared as "God's will". Without criticizing and suppressing monotheism, I think it is impossible to realize permanent peace of human beings⁹.

It is curious that polytheism-superior theoreticians such as Umehara represent polytheism as Asian value and ignore the fact that not a little portion of Asian nations are also monotheists, or the Muslims! In reality there are no such facts that monotheists are always violent and intolerant, or polytheists are always peaceful and tolerant. Human beings are often tolerant and often intolerant no matter they are monotheists or polytheists. From the viewpoint of monotheist, it is not proper to contrast polytheism with monotheism. An opposite of monotheism is idolatry, not polytheism. The submission to the God is substantially different from worshipping plural idols.

Moreover, polytheism-superior theoreticians' insistence that monotheism is incompatible with the Japanese Civilization is denied by historical facts. Firstly, in the latter half of 16th century, millions of the Japanese embraced Christianity during short term. Secondly, even Japanese religions such as Buddhism and *Shinto* showed some inclinations to be monotheistic in the Japanese history. The largest denomination of Japanese Buddhism is *Jodoshinshu* or Pure Land Buddhism. Their basic teaching is submission to Amida Buddha and existence of hereafter heaven or Pure Land. Their teaching was introduced into Japan from China in 7th century. They teach that if believers submit themselves to Amida Buddha, they may go to Pure Land after death. Their teaching has some similarities with monotheistic religions such as submission to sole supreme existence and existence of hereafter world.

A part of *Shinto* also had a tendency to be monotheistic in history. *Yuitsu Shinto* or True *Shinto* was one of *Shinto* denominations whose patriarch was Yoshida Kanetomo in 15th century. Yoshida was a very influential reformer in *Shinto* and he tried to purify *Shinto*. Yoshida insisted that there is only one supreme *kami* or *Amenominanushinokami* who created the world and exists forever. According to Yoshida, the supreme *kami* or *Amenominanushinokami* created other smaller *kamis* and plant conscience in human beings' hearts. In *Yuitsu Shinto*, supreme existence was assumed and considered as a creator of the world.

For the Japanese the most drastic experience concerning monotheism was happened from late 19th century until the middle of 20th century. In late 19th century, when Japanese leaders

explored way to modernize Japan under the Meiji government, crucial issues for them were not only industrialization, but also national integration and reform of people's mindset. Japanese leaders at that time investigated experiences of European and American nations. They concluded that single principle of the state is indispensable for national integration and that should be propagated through public education and conscription. They discussed what is the preferable principle of Japan as new modern state. Pro-Western group in the government advocated importation of Christianity as the national principle. Another group advocated enacting Buddhism as the national principle. However, both voices could not be majority in the Meiji government. At last, *Shinto* was established as principle of the state, because many of activists for the Meiji Restoration were *Shinto* revivalists.

All of the many denominations of *Shinto* came under control of the government. Although each denomination had their own doctrines, rituals and *kamis*, they were consolidated into *Kokka Shinto* or National *Shinto*. The government decided doctrines, rituals and *kamis* to be worshipped in all shrines in Japan. Especially the mystical ancestor of the Imperial family, *Amaterasuumikami* was made as supreme *kami* in *Kokka Shinto*. The Imperial family, the core of the modern Japan is main figure in *Shinto* mythology. In *Shinto* mythology, *Amaterasuumikami's* grandson *Hononiniginomikoto* descended to the earth from the sky to conquer Japan and became the first emperor of Japan.

National *Shinto* displayed marvelous power in integration and mobilization of the Japanese nation. School children were instructed to make a bow toward the Imperial Palace every morning. In some wars from the end of 19th century until the middle of 20th century, Japanese nation were mobilized extensively, and they were taught that martyrs for the sake of the Emperor may become *kamis* and be enshrined in the *Yasukuni Shrine* or the War Shrine. In other words, *Kokka Shinto* as the state religion was pseudo-monotheism, which demanded the Japanese nation to submit themselves for the sake of the Emperor and the state.

The experiment to establish pseudo-monotheism collapsed after the Japanese government fully exploited *Kokka Shinto* during

the Second World War. When the Japanese Army occupied other Asian lands, making a bow towards the Imperial Palace in Tokyo was imposed also on non-Japanese Asian people. After the Second World War Two the Emperor Hirohito declared that he is a human being and not a *kami*, as he was instructed to do so by the American Occupation Forces.

As one of the results of reflection on negative role of *Kokka Shinto* during the Second World War, polytheism-superior theory was invented. Polytheism-superior theoreticians insist that *Shinto* should return to its original. And polytheism or tolerance to diversity is substance of *Shinto*, according to polytheism-superior theoreticians.

Today polytheism-superior theory is very popular in Japan. There is a perception among most of the Japanese that the Japanese society is tolerant, because it is based on monotheism. And they believe that the Japanese are very peaceful people in the contrast to monotheists such as the Christians and the Muslims. Although their perception is contradictory to the reality there are many conflicts caused by polytheists, they believe that the Japanese should not be dragged into conflicts between monotheists including "The War against Terror" and keep distance from monotheistic influence.

Conclusion

Although the scale of the Muslim community in Japan is relatively small compared to the Muslim communities in Western countries, the interaction between the Muslim community and the Japanese society is a very interesting case, because the Japanese society has a unique perception on monotheisms including Islam and peculiar history of relationship with monotheism. Most of the Japanese have negative perception on monotheism, or they feel that monotheism is a something troublesome and none of their business. In fact, the Japanese society is one of hardest societies for Islam to take root in.

In the Japanese society Islam is considered as a "foreign religion." Actually, most of Muslims in Japan are foreigners such as Indonesian, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, and Iranians. Islam is also considered as an "intolerant monotheistic religion" by many

of the Japanese. Basically, the Japanese don't even imagine possibility for them to be Muslims. Islam is not a familiar religion for the Japanese partly because of short history of relationship between the Japanese and the Muslims. However, there are some other reasons. Most of the Japanese have prejudice on the Muslims, when they watch TV news on terrorists-linked Muslims in foreign countries, and also when they find poor Muslim physical labors in the Japanese society. In addition to those reasons, there are problems within the Japanese society including care about ancestral values and homogeneousness of the Japanese society.

The Japanese usually cannot leave their ancestral values without enough reason. Although today the Japanese society seems to be changed, and especially the youth seem to be free from old values, the Japanese cannot avoid issues of family, funeral and ancestor worship. Most of the Japanese don't find enough incentive to accept Islam and abandon their ancestral values. History of Christianity in Japan shows that possibility is not so high for the Japanese to embrace monotheism.

If there is only a limited possibility of embracing Islam among the native Japanese, another possibility of spreading Islam is to increase number of foreign Muslims in Japan. Actually, in European countries and Northern American countries, increase of Muslim population is mainly a result of foreign Muslims immigration. In 20th century Muslim immigrants came to Western countries from the South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Their settlements in Western countries and increase of their descendents resulted in enlargement of Muslim presence in Western countries.

Until today most of the Muslims in Japan are foreigners. Without influx of foreign Muslims to Japan in late 20th century, the development of Muslim community in Japan could not happen. The increase of Muslim population in Japan mainly owes to foreign Muslims and their marriage to native Japanese women. However, foreign Muslims' descendents are not necessarily contributing for development of Muslim community in Japan, because most of them are assimilated in the Japanese society. Assimilation of Muslim children is the main obstacle for sustainable Muslim community development in the Japanese society.

In Europe there is also pressure of assimilation on Muslim immigrants from governments and society. Muslim immigrants are required to accept secular life style as like other Europeans. There are often negative public opinions on some Muslim customs such as headscarf and slaughtering on Eid-al-Adha among the native Europeans. However, in European countries, there is a principle of religious freedom. Islamic belief itself is not negated basically. Religious practices are considered as one of basic human rights in Europe.

In Japan religious freedom is assured as basic right in the constitution. However, the society is not necessarily generous toward extraneousness including unfamiliar foreign religious practices. Residents of the Japanese society are required to accept homogeneousness such as same language and customs. Heterogeneous person or groups are usually alienated or ignored in the Japanese society. In the Japanese society Muslims are allowed to stay only as foreigners and temporary residents. It is very hard for the Muslims to be accepted as a part of the Japanese society. In Japan inter-civilizational interaction itself is difficult to happen, because of indifference toward outsiders among the native Japanese.

In Europe there is a tendency to return to Islam among second or third generation Muslims. Muslim youth often concern with Islam more than their parents. Such Muslim youth study Islam eagerly and become core of new generation of European Muslims¹⁰. In Japan, history of Muslim community is shorter than Europe, and there are not so many second or third generations. The expectation on second and third generations' returning to Islamic identity in Japan is probably negative. Most of second or third generation Muslims are already assimilated in the Japanese society and losing Muslim identity. Most of them know nothing about their father's land, language and even religion. They behave like the native Japanese youth.

One of main reasons of sweeping assimilation is public education in Japan. Muslim children are required to behave like other children in elementary school and junior high school. They are demanded to wear same uniforms, speak same language and eat same foods. If they behave differently from other children, they would be alienated or neglected by other children. It is very

cruel treatment for children and most of them cannot endure. In Japan Muslim permanent residents' children have no selection like Islamic school. It is unavoidable for most of them to attend Japanese public school. If Muslim children accept same life style with other native Japanese children, there is no difficulty to be member of Japanese society and become friends with native Japanese. However, they usually forget their Muslim identity, while they are assimilated in the Japanese society.

For sustainable development of the Muslim community in Japan, one of possible measures is establishing Muslims' own institution such as Islamic educational institute. However, without recognition as a part of the Japanese society, it is impossible to survive permanently in Japan, even if they live in seclusion in their own community. Perhaps the Japanese society can avoid serious interaction with the Muslim community. However, the Muslims cannot avoid interaction and dialogue, if they seek permanent settlement in the Japanese society. Muslims cannot shut themselves in their own community in Japan permanently. Therefore, on the one hand, Muslims in Japan have to obtain their Islamic identity and knowledge through their effort, and on the other hand, they have to find way to be acceptable in the Japanese society.

Without certain syncretism with Japanese culture, Islam and the Muslims cannot be familiar for the native Japanese. In some aspects, especially idolatry, Islam cannot be mixed with Buddhism and *Shinto*. However, some Japanese values and traditions including ancestor worship should be considered, when Islam is explained for the native Japanese and newly converted Japanese Muslims.

One of the main themes of this monograph is how to establish a framework for coexistence which enable the Japanese and the Muslims to live together permanently in Japan. Most of the Japanese seem to be negative on coexistence with foreign immigrants including the Muslims. Japanese converts who embraced Islam are very rare in the Japanese society, and many of them return to their ancestral values in some years. Most of second or third generations of immigrants including Muslims are assimilated in the Japanese society. The biggest non-Japanese community in Japan Koreans is also assimilated, although they

have their own schools and a university in Japan. For the Muslim community in Japan even sustaining their community itself is very hard. Therefore, setting up framework for coexistence in the Japanese society is very difficult task.

Most of the Japanese seem not to be interested in coexistence with foreign immigrants or unfamiliar religious group. However, like other developed countries, Japan is also expected to accept foreign immigrants in the future, because now Japanese birthrate is very low and the Japanese society lacks of labor force. Foreign labor force might be introduced to supplement the lack of labor force. For example, according to the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare Japan, 208 nurses and care workers were accepted to Japan from Indonesia in 2008 in accordance with Japan-Indonesia Economic Partnership Agreement. In 2009 more nurses and care workers (the maximum number is 792) are expected from Indonesia¹¹. If the number of immigrants increases in the future, certain portion of them might be Muslim. Coexistence with foreign immigrants is probably unavoidable for the Japanese in the future. To prepare for the coexistence with foreign immigrants in the future, framework for coexistence with the Muslims also should be considered in Japan.

The Muslims in Japan also have to consider on coexistence in the Japanese society, if they really hope to live in Japan permanently and hope their posterity to live in Japan. Many of first generation immigrants Muslims in Japan don't consider Japan as their motherland. They often dream of going back to their original countries after they save money in Japan. Such first generations don't accept Japanese culture and customs, and don't make effort to be accepted in the Japanese society. If the Muslims intend to live in Japan permanently and sustain their identity as Muslims, they have to prepare for the future. They need to establish means for their children's education, and have relationship with the Japanese including the administrative organs, medias, and non-Islamic religious groups including Buddhists and *Shinto* believers. It is basically very difficult for the Muslims to change pillars of their teaching. However, certain syncretism of Islam and Japanese traditional values should be considered. There can be some ideas on outward appearance such as mosque designed like a Japanese Buddhist temple. The

Muslims should consider what is disliked and what is demanded concerning Islam in the Japanese society. The Muslims should have dialogues with various groups in Japan to know the situation that they are in. Inter-religious dialogues are also helpful to know about reactions and perception to the Muslim community in the Japanese society. The Muslims in Japan need to know common points to share with and differences from the Japanese society and what should be done to win trust from the Japanese society. Establishment of a framework for coexistence might be long-range task, and it needs efforts and contribution by many people.

Endnotes

- ¹ Abu Bakr Morimoto (1980) *Islam in Japan*. translated by Iskandar Chowdhury. Tokyo: Islamic Center Japan. This small booklet is a comprehensive study on the Muslim society in Japan. However, it was published about 30 years ago, and doesn't cover contemporary situation.
- ² Komai, Hiroshi (2004) "Walking around the Muslim Society in Japan (Japanese)" in Katakura, Motoko. Umemura, Hiroshi. & Shimizu, Yoshimi. eds. *Islamic World*. Tokyo; Iwanamishoten.
- ³ Sakurai, Keiko (2004) *Muslim Society in Japan* (Japanese). Tokyo; Chikumshobo
- ⁴ Immigration Bureau Japan (2009) <http://www.moj.go.jp/PRESS/080601-1.pdf> (04/05/2009)
- ⁵ Hern, Lafcadio (1983) *Japan-An Attempt at Interpretation*. (translated into Japanese by Kashikura Shunzo). Tokyo; Heibonsha.
- ⁶ Yamaori, Tetsuo (2002) *The Buddhist Folklore* (in Japanese). Tokyo; Kodansha.
- ⁷ Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan (1985) *A Guideline on Ancestors and the Dead for Catholic Believers* (in Japanese). Tokyo. Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan.
- ⁸ Umehara Takeshi (2004) "Message of the East Asian Civilization (in Japanese)". in *Asahi Shimbun* (a Japanese newspaper). 20th July 2004.
- ⁹ *ibid.*
- ¹⁰ Tariq Ramadan (1999) *To be a European Muslim*. Leicester. The Islamic Foundation.
- ¹¹ Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare Japan (2009) <http://www.mhlw.go.jp/bunya/koyou/other21/index.html>