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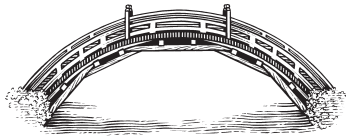
ROUNDTABLE

Islam in Japan: A Cause for Concern?



Emile A. Nakhleh
Keiko Sakurai
Michael Penn

Introduction

Emile A. Nakhleh

In the last two decades "Islamization" has grown by leaps and bounds throughout the world. Islamization is characterized by increased piety, expanding education, growing proselytization (or *da'wa*), deepening awareness by Muslims of their Islamic identity, spreading linkages (both electronic and face-to-face) among Muslims, and more active involvement in the societies where Muslims reside. For the most part this phenomenal growth has occurred equally in Muslim majority and Muslim minority countries and has been lawful and non-violent. A small segment of Islamic activists, however, espouse extremist and radical ideologies and have resorted to violence and terrorism against both Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

Factors that have been driving the Islamization process and the radicalization of segments of Islamic activists include a sense of defeat, a "culture of humiliation," a search for identity, and the psychological need among many Muslims to view their faith as their enduring identity anchor. Other socio-political drivers include the rapid expansion of Islamic media via the Internet and satellite television stations; economic policies and the remarkable growth of global Islamic business (banking, finance, investment, insurance, etc.); regional conflicts in Palestine, Chechnya, Kashmir, Indonesia, and the Philippines; perceived anti-Islamic policies by the Christian West; and recruiting efforts by Islamic radicals. Some of these factors, especially proselytization, have forged a universal sense of Islamization among mainstream Muslims through the use of Arabic, the language of the Quran. Financial support from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Arab states and the active role of international Islamic NGOs and charitable foundations—such as the Muslim World League, the International Islamic Relief Organization, al Haramayn, and the World Assembly of Muslim Youth—have contributed greatly to the growth of Islamization globally.

Vast majorities of newly "Islamized" Muslims have concentrated their activism on increased piety at the personal, familial, and immediate society levels, viewing Islam principally as the moral compass of daily life. To many of these Muslims, faith underpins family values (including family

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cohesion and raising of children), socializing with both Muslims and non-Muslims, attending Islamic "Sunday" schools, supporting the building of new mosques, and generally observing the five key tenets of Islam. These Muslims view Islamic teaching as a guide to what is permissible (*al ma'ruf*) and what is forbidden (*al munkar*), but do not look to this interpretation of Muslim faith as a prescription for political action. A few Islamic activists, on the other hand, have extended their activism to the political sphere, both within their own societies and globally. This expansion has led some activists to become involved in elections and other facets of the political process, involvement that has in some cases spurred violent confrontation with their regimes. Some extremists have used a radical, narrow-minded, and intolerant interpretation of Islam as a justification for terrorism against perceived enemies of their religion.

The Islamization of mainstream Muslims and the confrontation of radical Muslims with the West—especially since the terrorist acts of September 11, 2001—have energized the debate among Muslim thinkers and intellectuals regarding which vision of Islam Muslims should pursue. Raging within Muslim communities across the globe (including in Western countries), this debate has focused on three key questions: How should a Quran that was revealed in 7th century Arabia be translated in order to better serve Muslims living in a globalized and highly connected 21st century? How can Muslims adhere to Islamic laws and practices while living in a non-Muslim country, especially one that is open, free, and democratic? How can Muslims reconcile the basic tenets of the faith—that salvation is only achieved through Islam—with religious pluralism that is the hallmark of most non-Muslim societies? These questions have impacted Muslims wherever they live in Muslim and non-Muslim countries: whether in France where they number several million, in Indonesia where they total almost 200 million, or in Japan, where they number under 100,000.

Given the long-term implications of Islamization and Islamic activism for the domestic stability and regional security of Asia and for the strategic interests of the United States, the National Bureau of Asian Research convened two unique research projects; one focusing on Islamic finance in Southeast Asia and the other on Islam in Japan. This roundtable comprises two research papers that address the role of Islam in Japan and the long-term implications of this phenomenon. Although it is tempting to dismiss the Islamic issue in Japan as insignificant because of the small size of the Muslim community in that country, Muslims in Japan face the same challenges of other minority Muslims and are searching for ways to resolve

these challenges in their daily lives. The two essays, one by Michael Penn and one by Keiko Sakurai, offer a baseline knowledge of the demography, ethnic origins, religious practices, and challenges of Muslims in Japan. The papers also examine the long-term social and national security implications of Islam in that country, both for Japan and the United States.

Both authors offer almost identical portraits of the immigration patterns, ethnic composition, residency status, and social and linguistic difficulties (including the issues of prayers in the workplace, fasting, prohibition against alcohol, conservative clothes such as the head scarf and the *hijab*, and the constant search for *halal* food) of being Muslim in Japan. They also agree that the negative attitudes Japanese hold toward Islam are mostly driven by ignorance, fear, lack of personal contacts with Muslims, media reports about Islamic terrorism (especially the terrorist acts of September 11 in which more than two dozen Japanese perished), and the perception that Islam is an intolerant, harsh, austere, and "single adherence" religion. Penn cites a survey of high school students in which large majorities felt that Islam was "aggressive," "intolerant," "lacked freedom," and "involved rigid doctrines." Both authors agree that Islam is an "alien" religion to most Japanese and that the insular nature of Japanese society makes it very difficult for Islam to make significant headway in Japan. Many old and new religions—Shinto, Buddhism, Tenrikyo, and Christianity—define the social fabric of Japanese society, and Japanese religious beliefs are generally associated with syncretism. The exclusive demands of Islam's doctrine of monotheism (or *tawhid*), especially the interpretation propagated by state-supported Wahhabi Islam in Saudi Arabia and proselytized worldwide, run against the pragmatic or utilitarian attitude toward religion in Japan. One point of contention is the question of alcohol. Japanese businesses and corporations tend to encourage their employees to gather over drinks after work in order to foster camaraderie among the workforce. Practicing Muslim employees who do not drink find themselves disadvantaged and their careers derailed. Similarly, a Muslim restaurant that does not offer liquor on the menu loses customers. Both authors in this roundtable call on Japanese to become more tolerant toward, and knowledgeable about, Islam.

Penn and Sakurai offer rich data and analysis regarding the nature of the Muslim community in Japan. The two essays argue that one cannot speak of a "Muslim community" in Japan because Muslims come from different countries—stretching from Turkey to Indonesia—with very few immigrating from the Arab world. Muslims in Japan belong to different sects—Sunni, Shia, Sufis, and Tablighis—and are spread across the country.

No heavy concentrations of Muslims exist in any one city or region, making the tracking of Muslims much easier for government authorities. Being dispersed, however, makes practicing faith difficult for Muslims, especially in terms of going to a mosque or finding halal food. Muslims in Japan view Islam as the anchor of their identity. Living out their faith to the best of their ability in Japan, however, becomes difficult when many struggle to maintain a job, succeed in business, raise a family, and assimilate into Japanese society. According to Sakurai, relatively large numbers of expatriate Muslims in Japan are single males between the ages of 20 and 40; come mainly from Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Iran; and have come to Japan to study or work. These single males could potentially pose a problem for the authorities when they get out of school, overstay their visas, or lose their jobs. Although facing specific social and cultural challenges, Muslims who are Japanese, on the other hand, are familiar with Japanese language, customs, and cultural heritage and hence find living as Muslims in Japan much easier than do immigrant or "foreign" Muslims.

Neither author views Muslims in Japan as posing a terrorism threat either to that country or to the United States and both see a low probability of radicalization among Japanese Muslims. They also agree that those Muslims who are long-time residents of Japan and who have established family connections in the country are beginning to integrate into Japanese society through adopting local customs and learning the Japanese language. As memories of September 11 begin to fade, negative attitudes among the Japanese people toward Islam should begin to dissipate. Muslims will thus begin to become more accepted in Japan, especially if their faith is practiced in private.

Due to the small size of the Muslim community, the disconnect between the Muslim *Tawhidi* doctrine and Japanese culture, and the diligence of the Japanese government, the two authors do not anticipate a "Muslim problem" to develop in Japan over the next five to ten years. In gauging the trajectory of Islam in Japan, however, other possible trends may be important. Although Islamization has in recent years mostly reflected traditional, conservative Sunni trends (as Penn points out), Sufism is becoming popular among mainstream Muslims who want to practice their faith void of politics. Many Muslims have rejected the radical Wahhabi interpretations of Islam and have turned to Sufism. Sufi movements—such as the Turkish Millet Gorush under the leadership of Fethullah Gulen—have risen dramatically in the Balkans, the Middle East, Central Asia, and South and Southeast Asia. That many cities across the world celebrated "International Year of Rumi" in 2007—an

event that commemorated the eight-hundredth anniversary of the birth of Jelaluddin Rumi—is an indication of the rapid growth of Sufi Islam. Rumi has been a central figure in the literature, poetry, and spiritual music of Sufi Islam. Some mainstream Muslims view Sufism as an antidote to radical and extremist Sunni Islam.

Sufism takes almost a syncretic approach to religion and allows for veneration of saints and ancestors (a practice considered anathema by strict Sunni Muslims). Sufi Islam could be more acceptable to Japanese culture because it encourages Muslims both to be tolerant of other religions and to shun politics. Sufism does not preach a strict adherence to the five tenets of Islam as interpreted by Sunni Islam but instead views religion as an individual effort to bring people closer to God and to comprehend the beauty of the universe. It is possible to envision a much larger Muslim community in Japan over the next decade as a result of a Sufi resurgence in the Muslim world. The potential spread of Sufi Islam in Japan might also contribute to an expansion in Islamic economics and finance. As the advent of Islam to Southeast Asia many centuries ago has shown, da'wa anchored in business could produce a moderate set of beliefs and practices and a pluralistic world-view. Furthermore, Tablighi Jamaat has been active in preaching Islam worldwide, including in Japan. Again, the Tablighi approach to Islam would be more tolerated in Japan than would be strictly Sunni doctrines and schools of jurisprudence.

On the terrorism front, the two authors rightly argue that Japanese Muslims do not currently pose a threat either to Japan or to the United States. It is possible, however, to envision a low-probability, high-impact scenario where such a threat could increase over the next five to ten years. International linkages through travel and the Internet have made it much easier for radicals to communicate and share a radical ideology. It is equally easy to establish local groups in many countries, including in Japan, that are committed to violence against the perceived enemies of Islam. Disgruntled unemployed youth could easily be recruited by radical "enablers" to commit acts of violence against local or foreign targets. Japanese family members of a radical Muslim could be recruited to aid and abet in planning and carrying out such acts.

Over the next five to ten years, it is possible to imagine Islamic activism in Japan moving along one of two trajectories. The optimistic trajectory will see Muslims endeavoring to assimilate into Japanese culture while remaining faithful to their religion. In the other scenario, the Muslim community, or some segments of it, does not integrate into that country's culture and begins to demand special exemptions and privileges for Muslims to practice their faith. While neither of the two authors has advanced the pessimistic scenario,

both have identified enough challenges for Muslims in Japan as to raise the possibility of inter-communal and inter-religious conflict. Based on the rich analysis in the two studies, the probability of a conflictive scenario is very small; however, such a possibility should not be dismissed outright. The two scholars' baseline analyses of Muslims in Japan informs our understanding of the Muslim community and its potential evolution and growth in a society that is so unfamiliar with the highly prescribed dictates of Islam.

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HTTP://ASIAPOLICY.NBR.ORG

Muslims in Contemporary Japan

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This essay provides a demographic analysis of Muslims living in Japan with special emphasis on Muslim communities and community-building activities.

MAIN FINDINGS

Foreign-born Muslims, representing 80% to 90% of the Muslim population in Japan, immigrated in the mid-1980s and early 1990s mainly for economic reasons. Many came on short-term visas and worked illegally until acquiring legal resident status through marriage. The Muslim minority in Japan is divided by national and ethnic origin, language, sectarian tendency, socio-economic background, and location. As a result of having few commonalities, Muslims in Japan have failed to build large communities and lack representation by a single unifying organization or mosque. Although facing shared problems, Muslims are separated both from the larger Japanese society and from other Muslims and thus often struggle to meet these challenges individually or in small groups.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- Muslims in Japan are small in number and diverse in ethnic, economic, and religious backgrounds, and geographic location. These characteristics render their relationship with the host society unique and make comparisons with Muslim immigrants in the West difficult.
- In Japan the new challenges of post-September 11 suspicion that Muslims face have increased the frustration of some members of this group, but so far there is no indication that this population is radicalizing or could conceivably constitute a threat to Japanese society.
- At present, predictions on the extent to which the next generation of Muslims in Japan will acculturate to Japanese society are difficult to make, since most members of this second-generation are not yet even teenagers. Because the children of the next generation are ethnically and geographically divided, however, this group is also likely to be too diverse to take collective action.
- As a host society Japan will need to become more open toward and accepting of Islamic ways and to accommodate the country's Muslims—both foreign and Japanese—as a religious minority.

The Muslim population in Japan was an inconspicuous presence until the mid-1980s, when the influx of Muslim foreign workers migrating to the country for economic reasons began to attract attention. No official statistics exist, but by most estimates over seventy thousand Muslims of various origins presently live in Japan, with Indonesians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, and Iranians constituting the largest subgroups of this population.

This essay provides baseline demographic information and analysis on Japan's migrant Muslim population—a community largely overlooked in academic literature to date. This essay examines the typical socio-economic background of these Muslims and issues related to living in a non-Islamic society, identity, and community-building. By doing so, the essay portrays the basic characteristics of Muslims in Japan and investigates the challenges facing this population in the host society. This essay is divided into five sections:

- pp. 71–77 provide demographic information on Muslims in Japan
- pp. 77–82 examine the role of mosques in Japan, suggesting that mosques are a multi-purpose space
- pp. 82–85 assess community-building activities and posit that, because of differences in background and current position, Muslims in Japan are isolated from the larger Japanese society and are not united by any single identity
- pp. 85–86 examine special challenges that Muslims living in Japan face
- pp. 86–87 propose that Muslims are unlikely to form large communities and argue that comparison of Japan's Muslim population to similar immigrant groups in the West is difficult

MUSLIMS IN JAPAN: DEMOGRAPHICS

Estimating the Size of the Muslim Population

Estimates of the non-Japanese Muslim population residing in Japan in 2004 range from sixty to seventy thousand people, of which the majority are men.[1] One calculation starts with the total number of registered foreign residents from the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) member countries (67,746), subtracts foreigners with temporary visitor visas (11,525),

[1] For details, see Keiko Sakurai, *Nihon no Muslim shakai* [Muslim Society in Japan] (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo, 2003), 29–39. According to Hiroshi Kojima, the total Muslim population as of the end of each year is estimated to be approximately 5,300 in 1984; 12,300 in 1990; 30,000 in 1995; 47,600 in 2000; and 56,300 in 2003. See Hiroshi Kojima, "Variations in Demographic Characteristics of Foreign 'Muslim' Population in Japan: A Preliminary Estimation," *Japanese Journal of Population* 4, no. 1 (March 2006): 117–19.

and adds the number of overstayers from Indonesia (7,246 in 2004) to arrive at a foreign Muslim population of 63,467.[2] This method of calculation is imperfect in that it both overlooks the fact that several member countries of the OIC (such as Malaysia and Lebanon) have large non-Muslim populations, and fails to include Muslims from non-member countries such as India and Sri Lanka. Despite these defects, however, this method remains the most reliable way available for estimating the number of foreign Muslims in Japan.

Foreign Muslims

Foreign Muslims constitute approximately 80% to 90% of the entire Muslim population in Japan. The largest share of this population consists of Indonesian, followed in number by Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, and Iranians. In 2004 Indonesians living legally in Japan numbered 23,890. The number of legal immigrants from Pakistan (8,610), Bangladesh (10,724), and Iran (5,403) totaled slightly fewer than 25,000. Taken together, Indonesian, Iranian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi immigrants (48,627) represent 70% of this group.[3] Although a considerable number of Malaysians live in Japan, the majority of these residents are of ethnic Chinese decent and are not Muslim.[4]

Muslim immigrants in Japan can be divided into five categories based on the legal category of their residence in Japan, as outlined in **Table 1**.

Enrollments of foreign Muslim students in Japanese colleges and universities increased in the 1990s, with some students finding jobs in Japan and staying in the country after graduation. According to official data, the number of students from OIC member countries enrolled in Japanese universities and institutes of higher education increased from 1,957 in 1986 to 6,758 in 2004.[5]

The majority of expatriate Muslims entered Japan in the mid-1980s and early 1990s in search of employment. Although most came to the country sharing this common objective, these immigrants' social backgrounds and

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2 No 2004 data is available for other Islamic countries, including Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Iran. This is due to the fact that the Ministry of Justice, Office of Immigration, publicized only the data of the ten countries with the highest number of overstayers in Japan. All figures are taken from *Zairyu gaikokujin tokei* [Statistics on the Foreigners Registered in Japan] (Tokyo: Nyukan kyokai, 2005).

3 Temporary visitor visas (6,709) are included in this figure.

4 According to a study by Ishii Yuka, Chinese Malaysians constitute the Malaysian majority in Japan. See Ishii Yuka, *Esunikku kankei no kokusai ido* [Ethnic Relations and International Migration] (Tokyo: Kokusai Shoin, 1999).

5 The figures are taken from *Zairyu gaikokujin tokei* [Statistics on the Foreigners Registered in Japan] (Tokyo: Homusho nyukoku kanri kyoku, 1987); and *Zairyu gaikokujin tokei* (2005).

TABLE 1

Categories of Muslim Immigrants in Japan

Category of residential status in Japan	Percentage by category of visa
Temporary visitor visa	15%
Official, diplomatic, or working visa	33%
Student or trainee visa	16%
Permanent or long-term resident or spouse/ child of Japanese national or permanent resident	26%
Overstayers	10%

Source: Data from 2004. *Zairyu gaikokujin tokei* [Statistics on the Foreigners Registered in Japan] (Tokyo: Nyukan kyokai, 2005). The actual percentage of overstayers would likely be higher than 10% if more complete data sets from Islamic countries were available.

methods of entry varied. Most typically, these immigrants were Sunni men in their twenties and thirties with secondary-level educations.[6]

Indonesians ~ Comprising the largest segment of the expatriate Muslim population in Japan are Indonesians, many of whom came to Japan under the Industrial Training Program (ITP) and Technical Internship Program (TIP) on trainee visas. A survey by Japan International Training Cooperation Organization (JITCO) found most Indonesian trainees to be in their twenties or early thirties, with 69.4% being high school graduates and 9.7% college graduates.[7] Statistics on registered foreigners indicate that Indonesians more often reside in the Chubu region, unlike South Asian and Iranian Muslims, 70% to 80% of whom reside in Kanto area.

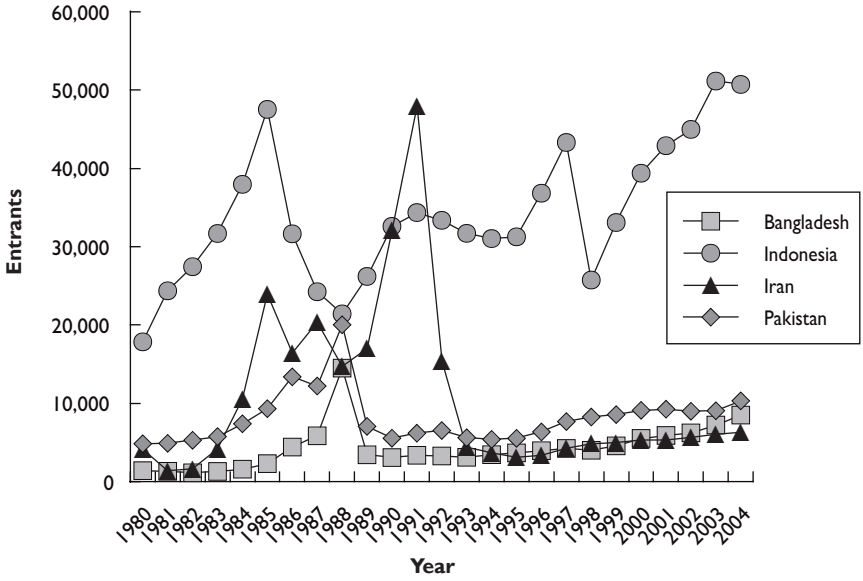
Pakistanis ~ There is a long history of male workers from Pakistan migrating abroad to escape domestic unemployment and to send home remittances. With the sudden decline of oil prices in 1983 the oil-producing Arab countries—formerly the primary destination for Pakistani migrant workers—became a less attractive employment destination, and immigration to Japan increased. As **Figure 1** shows, migration from Pakistan increased during the 1980s and spiked in 1988. Although no survey data on the socio-economic background of Pakistanis living in Japan exists, drawing on anecdotal evidence—and taking into account that these individuals had the means to travel and in many cases speak English moderately well—it is reasonable to

6 Iranian immigrants are mostly Shia.

7 *Gaikokujin kenshusei okuridashi system II: Indonesia hen* [System of Sending Foreign Trainees II: The Case of Indonesia] (Tokyo: Nihon rodo kenkyu kiko, 1997), 3.

FIGURE 1

The Number of Annual Entrants to Japan from Major Islamic Countries



Source: Homusho daijin kanbo shiho hoseibu [Minister's Secretariat, Judicial System Division], *Shutsunyukaoku kanri tokei nenpo* [Annual Report of Statistics on Legal Migrants] (Tokyo: Ministry of Justice, 1981–2005).

surmise that members of this group come from Pakistan's middle or lower-middle classes and have at least a secondary education.

Bangladeshis ≈ According to a survey of 113 Bangladeshis conducted in Japan in 1988–89, the majority entered the country with pre-college student visas.[8] Generally from larger cities and having a higher level of education than the average Bangladeshi, these migrants are from the upper-middle class and are able to afford travel to Japan and enrollment fees for private Japanese language schools. Because of the challenges of managing living costs and educational fees, most Bangladeshi migrants stayed in Japan, working beyond the permitted length of stay. Many, having given up studying, became illegal workers. A 1991 survey of 510 Bangladeshi workers, the average age of

8 Pre-college visa holders are allowed to work up to twenty hours per week. Miyake Hiroyuki, "Asia kara Nihon he no dekasegi rodosha no jittai: Bangladesh shusshinsha no baai" [Investigation into the Actual Conditions of Migrant Workers from Asia to Japan: The Case of Bangladeshi Nationals], *Ajia keizai* 31, no. 9 (September 1990): 27–49.

whom was 29, revealed that 70% were employed in manufacturing, 14% in construction, and 13% in the service sector.[9]

Iranians ~ Immigration from Iran, which peaked in 1991, has constituted another major influx of Muslim foreign workers to Japan (see Figure 1). According to a 1993 survey, the majority of these newcomers were from major cities, 60% were high school graduates, and 70% were single. The average age was 28.[10] Facing serious unemployment conditions at home following the Iran-Iraq War, many Iranians entered Japan under the guise of tourism. At first Iranians filled the positions—mainly in construction and small industries—that were vacated by departing Pakistani and Bangladeshi workers. After the collapse of Japan's bubble economy in 1992, however, the number of Iranians who lost positions or could not find work increased dramatically. When the government began to tighten policies toward illegal overstayers, the majority of the Iranian migrants departed.

Since Japan does not grant work permits to unskilled foreign workers, many of these immigrants originally entered as temporary visitors or students. Though legally barred from employment, foreign workers easily found work in factories and construction sites that were experiencing labor shortages during the 1980s bubble economy. Prompted by a surge in the number of illegal immigrant workers, however, the Japanese government moved first in 1989 to rescind the policy of allowing citizens of Pakistan and Bangladesh temporary entry without a visa and then followed suit in 1992 for Iranian nationals. Japan has not yet withdrawn these entry restrictions, which were intended as a temporary solution to the illegal migrant worker problem. Passage of a new Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Law also hastened the decline of Muslim immigration. In effect since 1990, this law imposed sanctions on those employing or contracting illegal workers, who are typically unskilled or semi-skilled. In the wake of this law's passage, many illegal foreign workers lost their jobs. Compounding these difficulties, the labor market shrank with the collapse of the Japanese economy in the early 1990s, forcing a significant number of foreign workers, including those from Islamic countries who had lost their jobs, to leave Japan.

Many of these South Asian and Iranian migrants, however, chose to stay beyond the time permitted, creating a large pool of overstayers living in

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9 "Nihon he no dekasegi Bangladesh rodosha no jittaichosa" [A Survey: The Experiences of Bangladeshi Workers in Japan], National Institute for Research Advancement, NIRA Research Report, no. 930025, September 27, 1993.

10 Komai Hiroshi, ed., *Gaikokujin teijyu mondai shiryo shusei* [Collection of Research Data Regarding the Issue of Settlement of Foreigners] (Tokyo: Akashi Shoten, 1995).

Japan on expired visas or permits. As shown in **Figure 2**, in 1992 roughly fifty thousand overstayers from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Iran resided in Japan. Although the Japanese government urged deportation of overstayers, some sought and found permanent residence status.

Permanent Resident Status through Marriage

The majority of non-Japanese Muslims who married Japanese women succeeded in obtaining residential status as spouses of Japanese nationals, making their lives in Japan more secure both legally and financially. The proportion of Pakistani and Iranian men with Japanese wives exceeds 80%, while the proportion for Bangladeshis is 51% and for Indonesians is only 41%.[11] The number of Pakistanis who held long-term or permanent resident status or a visa as the spouse/child of a Japanese national or permanent resident, increased from 541 in 1990 to 3,554 in 2004. During this same period the population of Iranians in Japan increased from 311 to 2,958; that of Bangladeshis increased from 338 to 1,947, and that of Indonesians increased from 709 to 5,337.[12] The high proportion of Pakistani intermarriages with Japanese nationals helps to explain greater Pakistani involvement in religious activities in Japan (discussed below). Constituting the core of foreign Muslims residing Japan, many of these immigrants have also been successful in transitioning from the ranks of unskilled factory or construction workers to self-employed businessmen.

Japanese Muslims

The number of Japanese converts to Islam has gradually increased, although no statistics on the number of Japanese Muslims exist. These converts can be generally categorized in two groups. The first group consists mainly of men familiar with Islamic culture either through the study of Islam or Arabic or through personal contact with Muslims in the course of traveling, studying, or working abroad in Islamic countries. The second group consists primarily of women who marry foreign Muslims. This group comprises the majority of Muslim women in Japan. Children from these marriages are regarded as "born Muslims," thereby increasing the Muslim population in Japan.

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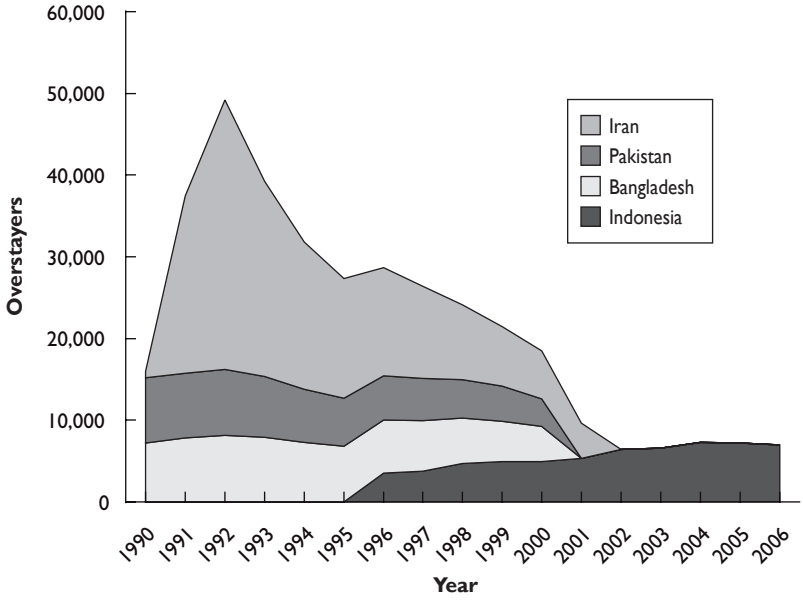
11 Kojima, "Variations in Demographic Characteristics of Foreign 'Muslim' Population in Japan," 127.

12 *Zairyu gaikokujin tokei* [Statistics on the Foreigners Registered in Japan] (Tokyo: Nyukan kyokai, 1991); and *Zairyu gaikokujin tokei* (2005).

FIGURE 2

Change in the Number of Overstayers from Major Islamic Countries in Japan



Source: *Kokusai jinryu* [The Immigration Newsmagazine], Nyukan kyokai, November 1992, April 1996, May 2001, and May 2002. All data summarized by the Ministry of Justice ~ http://www.moj.go.jp/PRESS/070227-2.pdf.

THE ROLE OF MOSQUES IN JAPAN

Mosque as a Multi-purpose Space

Mosques in Japan are not only places of worship but also take on the additional roles of places for gathering and exchanging information. Although the funds needed for the purchase of sites and buildings for the mosques usually come from donations by local Muslims, some mosques also receive donations from individuals and organizations abroad.[13]

[13] For example, in the case of Otsuka Mosque 55.7% of the total land and building costs were paid for by local donations and the remainder through foreign donations. A major part of the foreign donations came from Sultan bin Abdul Aziz al-Saud, crown prince of Saudi Arabia, and the Muslim World League (commonly known as *Rabita*). The Japan Muslim Association received financial assistance in the late 1990s from the then-crown prince of Saudi Arabia Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz al-Saud when the association bought an office with a prayer room in Tokyo. See Khalid M. Higuchi, "Nihon ni okeru Islam 50 nen no ayumi" [Fifty-year History of Islam in Japan] (Paper presented at a symposium entitled "Cultural Exchange between Japan and Saudi Arabia," Arabic Islamic Institute, Tokyo, May 7–9, 2001) ~ http://www.aii-t.org/j/sympo/files/20010508/higuchi.pdf.

Although some mosques have ethnic and sectarian tendencies, mosques in Japan are largely pluralistic spaces. Because Muslims are a small minority in Japan—one that is scattered, with no dominant ethnic group—and the number of mosques is limited, Japanese mosques by necessity are multinational, multilingual, multi-*mazhab* (school of laws), and multi-sect. Although there is a strong Pakistani presence in many of the mosques, other ethnicities are not excluded; Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, Indonesian, and Japanese converts are also active in many of the mosques, communicating in languages such as Japanese, English, Urdu, Hindi, Bengali, Indonesian, and Arabic. The sermons are offered in the native language of the *imams* (leaders in congregational prayer) and translated as necessary by volunteers. Websites often post Japanese or English translations of important sermons. As the number of long-term Muslim residents in Japan has grown, Muslims with different language backgrounds increasingly communicate in Japanese. English is the designated official language of the Nagoya Mosque, which attracts many Muslim students of different nationalities from the surrounding area.

Being the only place in Japan exclusively for Muslims, mosque space is used for many purposes, including accommodating offices, libraries, computer workstations, kitchens, lounges, and even rooms for relaxation. Several mosques provide overnight accommodations for weekend visitors. Accordingly, people in Japan use mosques not only for congregational prayers and religious gatherings but also for weddings, funerals, religious study, and social or business gatherings. On various occasions religious foods are served at mosque kitchens. During the month of Ramadan, for example, many Muslim families visit the mosque to celebrate *iftar*, or the breaking of the fast, by sharing dinner with co-religionists.

Because land and construction expenses are often beyond the reach of immigrant Muslims, buildings, factories, or residences are often renovated and remodeled for use as mosques. For large congregation prayer rooms, walls are often removed and a *mihrab* (an ornamental arched niche in the wall indicating the direction of Mecca) is created, with the pulpit placed beside the mihrab. The addition of wash basins allows for *wudu* (ritual ablutions). Some mosques reserve a floor or separate partitioned space for female worshippers. The budget for maintenance and administration of mosques in Japan relies largely on donations from local Muslims.

Leadership

Each mosque has an imam to lead the congregational prayers and other religious activities. The majority of these leaders, having received no prior formal training as imams, can be described as amateurs in religious guidance; generally, people with relatively superior religious knowledge are asked to volunteer for the position. Imams are not necessarily responsible for overseeing administration since executive councils manage many mosques. Recently, several mosques have invited a qualified imam from abroad to lead prayers during Ramadan. These imams are usually identified and invited through personal networks. Donations cover the living expenses of full-time imams. Having gained official status as religious corporations, the Kobe, Tokyo, and Hiroo Mosques have professional imams on staff on a permanent basis.

A New Generation of Mosques and Community-building

In 1992, when the number of visa overstayers in Japan from Iran, Bangladesh, and Pakistan peaked, only one mosque existed.[14] Lack of a mosque, although unacceptable for devout Muslims, was tolerated by the Muslims whose intent was to stay in Japan for only a short time. The number of mosques increased, however, after the deportation of a large number of overstayers. Workers who married Japanese women or developed significant businesses chose to settle and raise families in the country. As new long-term residents of Japan, these Muslims responded to the acute lack of places for worship by opening new mosques. By 2007 there were at least 38 mosques situated in various parts of Japan.[15]

Muslim immigrants opened the first new mosque in Ichinowari, Saitama Prefecture, in 1992 with money mainly donated by Muslims residing in Japan. In 1995 a prefabricated mosque was built in an industrial area in Isesaki. The following year Muslim immigrants bought and renovated a two-story building in Sakaimachi to serve as a mosque. These three mosques are located on the Tobu-Isesaki railway line, along which were many small factories and businesses where Muslim immigrants had been working at that time.

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[14] In 1992 the total number of overstayers from Iran (32,994), Bangladesh (8,161), and Pakistan (8,056) was 49,311. In 2000 the total number of overstayers from Iran (5,824), Bangladesh (4,263), and Pakistan (3,414) was 13,501. See *Kokusai jinryu* [Immigration Newsmagazine], Nyukan kyokai, November 1992; and *Kokusai jinryu* [Immigration Newsmagazine], Nyukan kyokai, May 2006.

[15] Okai Hirofumi, "Islam network no tanjo" [The Birth of the Islamic Network], in Higuchi Naoto, Inaba Nanako, Tanno Kiyoto, Fukuda Tomoko, and Okai Hirofumi, *Kokkyo wo koeru* [Crossing the National Border] (Tokyo: Seidosya, 2007), 182.

After these mosques opened, others soon followed in several cities and districts. In the Kanto region mosques are located in Hyuga, Gyotoku, and Shirai (Chiba Prefecture); Toda, Yashio, and Tokorozawa (Saitama Prefecture); Ebina and Yokohama (Kanagawa Prefecture); Tatebayashi (Gunma Prefecture); and Koyama and Ashikaga (Tochigi Prefecture); as well as in Asakusa, Otsuka, Ohanajaya, Hachioji, and elsewhere in Tokyo. In the Hokuriku region, mosques have been opened in Niigata and Toyama prefectures. Four mosques have been established in Aichi Prefecture. At least one mosque has been opened in Shizuoka, Ibaragi, Gifu, Nagano, Osaka, Kyoto, Hyogo, Hiroshima, Ehime, Kagawa, and Fukuoka prefectures respectively.[16]

These mosques were created through immigrant grass-roots initiatives; other mosques have been restored or opened with outside assistance. In 2000 the demolished Tokyo Mosque was rebuilt at the initiative of Turkey's Presidency of Religious Affairs, a public-service branch of the Turkish government. Located in the center of Tokyo, Hiroo Mosque was constructed in 2001 as a part of the Arabic Islamic Institute of Tokyo, which was founded in 1982 as a branch of the Imam Muhammad bin Saud University. Although authentic in style and expansive enough to accommodate a large number of worshipers, these mosques are not necessarily regarded by Muslims living in Japan as "*Masjid Jamii*" (official mosques used for Friday prayer and major communal assemblies).

Although they are the third-largest Muslim population in Japan, Shia Iranians seldom attend the mosques, in part because most are run by Sunni Muslims but also because Iranian Shias place less emphasis on participation in Friday prayers. Many Iranian Muslims find it important, however, to mark the day of Ashura, which commemorates the martyrdom of Husayn in 680 AD.[17] A group of devout Iranians have opened their own place of worship (called *Hoseyniye* in Persian) in the center of Tokyo. Taking into consideration the size of the Iranian population in Japan, however, the number of people that gather at Hoseyniye is very limited. Beside Iranians, Shia Muslims from Pakistan, Afghanistan, India, and the Arab countries also gather at Hoseyniye on weekends and religious ceremonial days.

Though Indonesians constitute Japan's biggest group of Muslims, Pakistanis are the most active group with regard to opening and operating mosques in Japan and perpetuating religious activity among the Muslim

16 Eight new mosques were opened in 2006. Okai, "Islam network no tanjo," 182.

17 Husayn, the prophet Muhammad's grandson and the third imam of Shia Islam, was killed by Umayyad troops in Karbala on the tenth day of the month of *Muharram*, called *Ashura*, in 680 AD.

community. Pakistanis have generally carried out their religious observances with the utmost seriousness after immigrating to Japan. As Michael Penn also describes in his essay, in the 1980s Muslim employees in factories and on construction projects found carrying out daily prayers at fixed times and gathering for congregational prayer on Friday at noon difficult. Many Muslims, especially Pakistanis, worked hard to secure from managers allowances for prayers by extending working hours and *musalla*, places for congregational prayers. In addition, the percentage of foreign Muslim men with Japanese wives is the highest among Pakistanis, who therefore are more able to set up their own businesses. Self-employment has afforded many Pakistanis a larger degree of economic freedom and prosperity, which in turn has helped finance the construction and operation of mosques. Finally, Pakistanis have created organizations to build mosques. For example, the Islamic Circle of Japan, formed in 1992, not only operates the Asakusa, Gyotoku, and Tatebayashi mosques but also has purchased land for another mosque in Ibaraki Prefecture.[18] Established in 1994 and led by a Pakistani, the Japan Islamic Trust founded Tokyo's Otsuka Mosque and plans to open additional mosques in the city.[19]

Though they play a vital role in the development of new mosques in Japan, Pakistanis are not the only active group. For example, Bangladeshis play the leading role in the Sakaimachi Mosque in Gunma Prefecture. Shinokubo Mosque in Tokyo is maintained by Myanmarese Muslims. Many Indonesians living in Tokyo prefer to use Barai Indonesian, a school attached to the Indonesian embassy in Tokyo, for prayers. Non-Turkish worshipers at Tokyo Mosque outnumber the small Turkish Muslim minority even though, as mentioned above, the mosque is owned by the Turkish government.

To date the Japanese government has officially recognized as religious corporations only a few mosques (such as Kobe, Tokyo, and Nagoya Mosques) and Islamic associations (such as the Japan Muslim Association, the Islamic Center–Japan, and the Japan Islamic Trust). Without this status, grass-roots mosques must register as personal property and pay higher taxes. Though other mosques also hope to obtain religious corporation status, they have found the model of these more established mosques difficult to follow. The embassies of some Islamic countries have contributed facilities for prayers,

[18] For further information on this organization, see the Islamic Circle of Japan website ~ http://en.icoj.org/.

[19] For further information on this organization, see the Alles Net website ~ http://www.alles.or.jp.

but only the Turkish and Saudi Arabian embassies have established their own mosques.

Female Muslims in Mosques

Female Muslims have a limited presence in Japanese mosques. Relatively few mosques have a female floor or a partitioned space. The majority of Muslim women in Japan converted at the time of marriage and, having never lived in an Islamic country, are unfamiliar with both the Muslim way of life and the predominant languages of the imams (Arabic, Urdu, Bengali, and Indonesian). Some Muslim husbands, concerned that their spousal authority might be threatened, prefer that their converted wives not take the initiative in religious activities at the mosque. Many husbands who come from patriarchal societies ask their Japanese wives to follow the model of the "ideal Muslim wife" as proof of obedience. By the same token, patriarchal culture, which is still dominant among conservative Japanese women, may support or reinforce the male-dominant mosque culture. As a consequence, many Muslim Japanese wives with husbands from the subcontinent wear a typical South Asian loose trouser and long shirt, called a *sharwar kamiz*, and cover their hair completely. The Muslim lifestyle and dress can sometimes detach these women from the Japanese society in which they grew up.

MUSLIM COMMUNITIES OUTSIDE OF MOSQUES

Alternative Spaces: Business Communities

Although placing a priority on opening mosques, Muslims in Japan have also struggled to maintain customary religious observances, such as dietary prohibitions, month-long periods of fasting, and fixed times of daily prayer. Obtaining religiously sanctioned foods is a particular challenge. Muslims are prohibited from eating pork and should eat only meat that has been prepared in conformity with Islamic law (halal). Careful observant Muslims cannot therefore eat meat sold in ordinary Japanese stores. In collaboration with Japanese companies Muslim entrepreneurs in the late 1990s started selling fresh halal meats, newspapers, magazines, and imported videos and DVDs. A 1998–99 survey of 80 halal food stores, found that South Asian immigrants ran nearly 80% of the stores, with Pakistanis running 47 stores

and Bangladeshis operating 15.[20] Since halal food stores outnumber mosques and are not specific to any sect—Iranians, for example, purchase food and spices at these stores even though they seldom attend Sunni, South Asian-led mosques—these stores serve as an important place for a variety of Muslims to meet and exchange information. With the decrease in the number of Muslims overstaying their visas, however, many owners of halal food businesses have been forced into other lines of work.

The largest proportion of Muslim immigrant-run or self-employed businesses, particularly among Pakistanis, is related to used car sales and exports. Of the 550 listings in the Directory of Pakistani Businessmen in Japan, 58% are for used car dealers; only 12% of the listings are for owners of halal food sales businesses and 8% for restaurant owners.[21] A sizable number of Pakistani used car dealers can be found in port cities such as Niigata and Toyama (facing the Sea of Japan), attracting many Russian customers. In Toyama, for example, at least 150 Pakistani dealers have their offices near the port and export 80% of their used cars to Russia.[22] Among the 800 companies exporting used cars, 350 firms were established by Pakistani immigrants, 100 by Bangladeshis, and 100 by Sri Lankans.[23] These groups have largely overtaken Japanese used car dealers and now dominate the major overseas markets.

Staying Connected

Constituting a small population that is divided by ethnic origin, language, sectarian tendency, and socio-economic background, foreign Muslims living in Japan have no common publication such as a newspaper or journal. There are, however, various publications designed to introduce Islam to both Muslims and non-Muslims in Japanese, such as the Islamic Center–Japan's quarterly journal *Assalam*. Although the number of Turkish Muslims living in Japan is small, the followers of *Nurculuk*[24] have since 2002 published the

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20 For further details, see Naoto Higuchi and Tanno Kiyohito, "Shoku bunka no ekkyo to Halal shokuhin sangyo no keisei, zainichi Muslim imin wo jirei to shite" [Internationalization of Food Culture and the Development of the Halal Food Business: The Case of Muslims Living in Japan], *Tokushima daigaku shakai kagaku kenkyu* 13 (2000): 99–131.

21 For more details, see the Directory of Pakistani Businessmen in Japan website ~ http://www.global-biz-link.com/directory/.

22 Andrey Belov, "Regional Dimension of Economic Cooperation between Japan and Russia," *Journal of East-West Business* 11, no. 1/2 (2005): 134.

23 Ibid.

24 A Turkish religious movement founded by Bediuzzaman Said al-Nursi, who died in 1960.

monthly Japanese journal *Yasuragi*,[25] aimed at guiding Japanese people in the Islamic way of life.

Other publications provide local information in the first languages of Muslims living in Japan, as well as updates on home and world affairs. The Urdu journal *Nawa-e Tokyo* (currently available as an online publication) first appeared in 1991 as a printed magazine for Pakistanis living in Japan. Also circulated among Pakistanis living in Japan is the biweekly *Pak Shinbun* tabloid, which is available at halal food stores and Pakistani restaurants. *Mesia Nuansa Indonesia* is a monthly tabloid that has been published since 1996 in Indonesian with a few Japanese pages. Since the late 1990s several other magazines and tabloids in Persian, Urdu, Bengali, and Indonesian have appeared locally; because of the high cost of publishing, however, most of these publications have either disappeared or switched to online formats.

Missionary Activity

Most Muslims do not engage in missionary activities targeting the broader Japanese population. Some South Asian Muslims, however, have brought the teaching and missionary practices of Tablighi Jamaat to Japan and engage in missionary activities mainly toward co-religionists, especially those who neglect their religious duties or seem on the verge of losing their religious identity.[26] Traveling around Japan in small missionary groups and inviting fellow Muslims to gatherings, the proponents of Tablighi Jamaat have found bases in at least five mosques (the Ichinowari, Sakaimachi, Ebina, Anjo, and Ohanajaya mosques) to accommodate missionary groups from inside and outside Japan. Tablighi Jamaat gatherings attract many Muslims who often perceive their situation as a struggle to survive in Japan's "alien" environment.

Following the style and manner of their homeland, Tablighi Jamaat male practitioners always appear in sharwar kamiz with a short beard. This connection to the South Asian way of life helps create a familiar environment in Japan for those originating from the subcontinent and helps increase the numbers of the Tablighi Jamaat proponents. Many followers learn the message

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25 *Yasuragi* means peace of mind in Japanese. For more information on the journal, see the Yasuragi website ~ http://www.yasuragiweb.com/.

26 Tablighi Jamaat is a non-political grass roots movement started by Maulana Muhammad Ilyas (1855–1944) and his disciples in Mewat, India near Delhi in 1926. The movement's followers began by preaching a simple but compelling message that rapidly gained millions of supporters throughout the subcontinent. The movement also spread among the Muslim migrants living in Western Europe and North America.

of Tablighi Jamaat and participate in missionary activities only after coming to Japan.

SPECIAL CHALLENGES

Education

Schools are another concern for Muslims who settle in Japan. Many of the non-Japanese Muslims who married Japanese spouses became parents in the 1990s. Muslim parents see Japanese government schools as an unsuitable environment for the observance of Islamic norms. To devout parents, co-education is unacceptable; even more lenient parents want segregated athletic classes and female teachers for girls. Foods provided in school lunches pose a problem, and many parents ask for the teachers' help in ensuring the school does not provide the children with religiously prohibited foods. Believing the teachers in private Christian or international schools to be more sympathetic to religion, affluent Muslim parents often prefer these schools over secular Japanese government schools.

Muslim parents also worry about teaching their children the basic beliefs and ritual obligations of Islam. Non-Japanese Muslim fathers, wanting to provide the same form of education they were given, enroll their children in religious classes at mosques that are held on weekends or weekday afternoons so that children who are enrolled in local schools can attend. Since logistical factors bar the invitation of qualified teachers from Islamic countries for weekend classes, children are taught by volunteers with moderate religious knowledge. Japanese translations of Islamic textbooks for children, such as *Studies in Islam* by Maulavi Abdul Aziz, are used in religious classes in Japan.[27] Despite these efforts, many Muslim parents still find the religious education options in Japan insufficient and some, especially Pakistanis, prefer to send children to their grandparents living in Pakistan.

The Islamic Center-Japan has launched a project to establish a full-time, regular Islamic school on land purchased next to Tokyo Mosque but owing to budget shortcomings has been unable to complete the project.[28] In 2004 Japan Islamic Trust started the International Islamia School, which is located next to Otsuka mosque and now provides preschool-level education for Muslim children. Only the Indonesian and Iranian embassies

[27] *Islam Gakushu* [Studies in Islam] was published in New Delhi in 1992 by Islamic Book Service. The book was translated by Habiba Kaori Nakata and published by Muslim Shinbunsha in 1999.

[28] For more information, see the Islam Center–Japan website ~ http://islamcenter.or.jp/eng/.

have established schools for the children of nationals to provide the same educational program given in their home countries. In 1962 the Indonesian embassy opened an attached formal school in Tokyo for Indonesian children, offering courses from preschool through high school. The Iranian embassy provides a school for Iranian children that offers the official educational program given in that country, with the teachers, textbooks, and final examinations all sent from Iran.

Burial

Among Muslims settling in Japan with their families burials are becoming another problematic aspect of life. According to Islam a deceased person must be buried with the head facing Mecca. In land-scarce Japan, however, cremation is a general rule and internment is not permitted. Presently only one Islamic cemetery—owned by the Japan Muslim Association with a membership of mostly Japanese converts—exists in Japan. Despite strong local opposition the temple priest of the Bunju-in Buddhist temple in Yamanashi Prefecture allowed the association to establish the cemetery on adjacent land.

At present the price of burial in the association-owned cemetery is higher than the cost of sending the remains back to the native country of the deceased. Although a prevalent alternative for foreign Muslims, sending remains to an Islamic country is not an option for Japanese converts. With the increase and aging of Japan's Muslim population the cemetery will soon reach capacity. Securing more land for interment is an urgent need for Japan's Muslim community; local opposition, however, renders doing so difficult.

CONCLUSION

As described above, the majority of Muslims living in Japan are foreign men—mainly from South Asia, Indonesia, and Iran—who came to Japan in search of employment between the mid-1980s and early 1990s. Few in number, these Muslims are too diverse in their ethnic, economic, and religious backgrounds, as well as geographic location, to form a single, cohesive community represented by any one mosque or organization. These characteristics render their relationship with the host society unique, making comparisons with Muslim immigrants in the West difficult.

As they grow more acculturated and settled in Japan, many foreign Muslims, especially those who married local women or are economically successful, try increasingly to accommodate Japanese culture and ways of

doing business. Many still feel, however, that they are isolated and not truly members of Japanese society. This situation causes frustration—for them, for their children, and also for Japanese spouses who have converted to Islam.

After the events of September 11, Muslims living in non-Islamic societies—including those living in Japan—have often been viewed with suspicion. As a result, Muslims come to feel vulnerable because of their religious activities, and this new challenge has increased the frustration of some members of this group; but so far there is no indication that this population is radicalizing or could conceivably constitute a threat to Japanese society. At present, predictions on the extent to which the next generation of Muslims in Japan will acculturate to Japanese society are difficult to make, since most members of this second generation are not yet even teenagers. Because the children of the next generation, like their parents, are ethnically and geographically divided, however, this group is also likely to be too diverse to take collective action. As a host society Japan will need to become more open toward and accepting of Islamic ways and to accommodate the country's Muslims, both foreign and Japanese, as a religious minority. ◈

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Public Faces and Private Spaces: Islam in the Japanese Context

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This essay examines Japanese views and attitudes toward Muslims living in Japan and the implications of Japanese perspectives for U.S. policy and other matters.

MAIN FINDINGS

- Muslims in Japan face many challenges in Japanese society due to the negative image of Islam that has arisen primarily from the media.
- These challenges—mostly involving a lack of sensitivity toward Muslim religious needs—stem more from ignorance on the part of the Japanese than from any specific hostility toward Islam.
- The attacks of September 11 and policies related to the war on terrorism have exacerbated these negative attitudes directed toward Muslims in Japan.
- Despite the challenges they face, members of the Muslim community in Japan are not particularly bitter toward their Japanese hosts.
- The Japanese government or society itself will not likely undertake any dramatically restrictive initiatives toward this religious minority.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- From the perspective of the U.S., there is little need to formulate specific policies toward these Muslim communities in Japan given that the Muslim population in Japan is very small and has little political influence.
- Rather than framing this minority's presence as a security issue, the U.S. could assume a general approach that encourages Japan to adopt anti-discrimination laws and to create a more open society toward foreigners. Such an approach would help ensure Japan's future as a stable, liberal democracy and position the country as a role model for other Asian nations.
- Such policies would also serve to prevent negative developments within the local Muslim communities themselves, thus avoiding the development of new problems in the future.

Muslims living in Japan comprise a small community of foreigners of many nationalities as well as some ethnic Japanese. Japanese society presents unique challenges for resident Muslims, and concern over the activities of Muslim minorities in many countries—for example, terrorist activities involving a handful of Muslims residing in Britain and other parts of Europe—has been high in the U.S. policy community. Does a potential for radicalization also exist in Japan? In addressing this question, this essay examines Japanese views and attitudes toward Muslims living in Japan and the possible implications for U.S. policy.

Although Muslim residents in Japan face many social difficulties, this essay concludes the risk of radicalization is very small. That said, policies encouraging the Japanese to adopt anti-discrimination laws (as UN representatives have encouraged) and to create a more open society toward foreigners in general would, in the long term, help ensure Japan's future as a stable, liberal democracy and would position the country as a role model for other Asian nations.

This essay is divided into five sections:

- pp. 91–94 provide an overview of religion in contemporary Japanese society and a basis for analyzing Japanese views toward Muslims
- pp. 94–99 examine the challenges faced by Muslims in Japan and their reactions to these challenges
- pp. 99–100 discuss the unique challenges that ethnic Japanese Muslims face
- pp. 100–102 examine the impact of the events of September 11 on Muslims in Japan
- pp. 102–4 consider the future development of Islam in Japan and the proper role of U.S. policy in shaping the outcome

RELIGION IN CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE SOCIETY

Many facets of the challenges and conditions of Muslim life in Japan are consequences of the role religion plays in Japanese society. An understanding of this broader context can provide a basis for analyzing Japanese perspectives of contemporary Islam and the country's Muslim minority.

Japanese Religions

Shinto and Buddhism dominate the religious landscape of Japan. Shinto is a native Japanese religion focusing on spirits of nature and human ancestors;

evidence of the practice of Shinto by the Yamato people dates back to the dawn of their recorded history.[1] The introduction of Buddhism from China in the sixth century, together with the earlier adoption of Chinese writing, marked the beginning of a period of significant cultural development on the Japanese islands. Both religions have deep and venerable roots in Japanese culture.

Of the many "new religions" appearing in Japan in modern times the oldest is Tenrikyo, established in 1838 by Miki Nakayama, a Japanese woman who claimed to have experienced divine revelations. Other noted new religions include Oomoto, Soka Gakkai, Mahikari, and Makuya. Although most of these belief systems are related to Shinto and Buddhism, some contain Jewish and Christian elements. An estimated 1.4 million Japanese practice Christianity, which has been present in the country in some form since 1549. Estimates place the number of Japanese Muslims at approximately 6,000; assuming this number is correct, Japanese Christians outnumber Japanese Muslims by nearly 233 to 1.

Japanese Approaches toward Religion

Although in some ways appearing to exhibit a profusion of religious sentiment, Japan is in other ways one of the most secular major societies in the world. Much depends on how religiosity is defined. With the exception of the more devoted followers of the new religions, most Japanese do not engage in daily religious practices or seem to concern themselves with broad philosophical questions regarding the meaning of life or the nature of existence. Studies of Japanese religion tend to agree that this-worldliness and lack of concern for abstract concepts characterize most Japanese religious attitudes.

The Japanese approach to religion is also notable for its syncretism. An individual's religious beliefs will often incorporate elements of Shinto, Buddhism, and sometimes Christianity, making few distinctions among them. Most Japanese will offer prayers at a Shinto shrine or Buddhist temple without concern over which god is enshrined there or to which denomination the temple may belong. One prominent scholar aptly characterizes the Japanese as not living "in a system that demands full-blooded, belief-oriented and exclusive commitment that precludes any other" and suggests that as a

[1] "Yamato people" refers to ethnic Japanese in distinction to various ethnic minorities.

consequence "religious organizations that demand single adherence have not, as a rule, got very far in Japan."[2]

Indeed, though in Japan practices that are in some way linked to religion are common, the Japanese often view both discussion of religious beliefs and individuals who seem too interested in religion with a degree of suspicion. Religion, like politics, is a topic that many Japanese simply feel uncomfortable discussing and regard best kept confined to a person's inner thoughts and to interactions with family or a tight circle of friends. Public displays of religiosity outside of socially sanctioned periods such as *hatsumode* or *o-bon* are usually frowned upon.[3] Even these and other supposedly religious festivals are notable for their atmosphere of celebration (and intoxication) rather than for sustained religious solemnity. Most Japanese appear to view these festivals foremost as cultural rather than religious events.

To the extent that most Japanese do concern themselves with religion, it is usually as a family affair. Notions of family responsibilities and obligations are major components of religious practices such as the veneration of ancestors: cleaning the graves and maintaining the shrines of close family members consoles the spirits of dead relatives, and appealing to the spirits of one's ancestors or a merciful local god can provide the luck or skill necessary in times of trouble or special need. Ian Reader and George J. Tanabe, Jr., two scholars that have studied Japanese religion for many years, argue that Japanese participate in religious activities primarily in the hope of gaining tangible, this-worldly benefits. Amulets, charms, and small "miracles" lie at the heart of the Japanese religious experience. "Rather than being (say) 'Buddhist' or 'Shinto,'" Reader and Tanabe suggest, "Japanese people really are members of a common Japanese religion centered on practical benefits."[4]

A connection between religion and tradition also is central to the Japanese outlook. Religion is part of the cherished traditional culture of Japan; most Japanese regard maintaining old customs as important for the sake of family tradition and as part of their Japanese identity. Although not necessarily believing in the effectiveness of these kinds of measures, many Japanese do in any case figure that there is no harm in covering all the bases. For example, one Japanese woman, when pressed to explain why these customs were important,

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2 Ian Reader, *Religion in Contemporary Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991), 16.

3 Hatsumode is the first shrine visit of the new year and o-bon is a festival in which the Japanese commemorate their ancestors. These are two of the most important Japanese holidays.

4 Ian Reader and George J. Tanabe, Jr., *Practically Religious: Worldly Benefits and the Common Religion of Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998), 52–53.

speculated that the significance must be related to social stability and order.[5] Reflected in this view is a fear that abandoning traditions and adopting foreign ways too rapidly could lead to a breakdown in Japanese society.

THE CHALLENGES OF ISLAM IN A JAPANESE CONTEXT

Many of the challenges faced by Muslims in Japan are consequences of the differences between Japanese and Muslim approaches toward religion. Although both Islam and the religions more common to Japan involve rites and observances, in general the Japanese do not view the purpose of religious practices in the same way that many Muslims do. Another difference is that the main body of the Islamic community has been moving—especially since the late nineteenth century—away from syncretism and toward more puritanical and dogmatic forms of belief. The Japanese syncretic approach to religion does not correspond well in many ways to this contemporary trend in the Islamic world.

Japanese Perceptions of Muslims: Statistical Evidence

The majority of Japanese have no direct experience with Muslims. Japanese views of Muslims are therefore largely shaped by media depictions, most of which involve Muslims in the context of wars, terrorism, and acts of violence. Recently published research by Professor Toru Miura of Ochanomizu University and high school teacher Takaaki Matsumoto underscores the significant impact of the media on perceptions of Japanese students: 92% of high school students and 78% of university students surveyed identified television as their main source of information about Islam.[6] Of the high school students surveyed:

- 75% believed that Islam was aggressive
- 72% thought that Islam involved strange customs
- 70% associated Islam with a lack of freedom

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5 Author's interview with a Japanese woman, March 13, 2007.

6 Toru Miura, "Perceptions of Islam and Muslims in Japanese High Schools," *Annals of the Japan Association for Middle East Studies* 21, no. 2 (March 2006): 173–91; and Matsumoto Takaaki, "Nihon no Kokosei ga Idaku Isuraamu-zo to sono Zesei ni Muketa Torikumi" [Images of Islam among High School Students in Japan and Proposals for Correction of Student Misperceptions], *Annals of the Japan Association for Middle East Studies* 21, no.2 (March 2006): 193–214. A summary is available in Michael Penn, "The Perception of Islam in Japanese Schools," *Shingetsu Newsletter* 261, May 7, 2006.

- 69% found Islam to be mysterious or exotic
- 59% thought that Islam was intolerant
- 54% believed that Islam involved rigid doctrines
- 53% associated Islam with backward regions of the world[7]

Based on these survey results Matsumoto concluded that his high school students held the following perceptions of Islam:

- rigid, many commandments, and not free
- strange and incomprehensible
- intolerant and aggressive
- practiced by bearded men living in desert areas[8]

Miura also indicated that some high school textbooks present a similar view. One such passage cited, for instance, states that "the belief and doctrine of Islam has been established in severe natural conditions (of the desert) and characteristics of strictness and strength, quite different from the Japanese preference for mildness, warmth, and ambiguity."[9]

Most Japanese view Islam negatively as having characteristics very different from the typical, easygoing Japanese religious practices. Indeed, every Muslim residing in Japan interviewed by this author agreed not only that the Japanese had a negative view toward Islam but also that the predominant feeling of Japanese toward Islam is fear. The events of September 11 have played a major role in these negative perceptions; precise data on the evolution of Japanese opinion over the years, however, does not exist. Overall, though, the general reception of Islam in Japan involves a high degree of both ignorance and suspicion. In the words of Takuo "Amir" Arai, a representative of the Japan Muslim Association, "In the Islamic world today there are many cases of wartime conditions, terrorism, poverty, and chaos. Because this is what appears on TV, many Japanese have a negative image of Islam."[10] Both non-Muslim Japanese and resident foreign Muslims share this analysis.

The social environment for Muslims in Japan, however, is not as adverse as the foregoing suggests. Japanese keep their thoughts to themselves, keeping

7 Matsumoto, "Nihon no Kokosei ga Idaku Isuraamu-zo to sono Zesei ni Muketa Torikumi," 211–13.

8 Ibid., 194.

9 Miura, "Perceptions of Islam and Muslims in Japanese High Schools," 182.

10 Author's e-mail with Takuo "Amir" Arai, March 10, 2007.

any negative views quiet and private for the most part. Unlike in some parts of Europe, in Japan there is no threat of violence and little vandalism against resident Muslims, whose personal, physical security is as assured as it is for any other group of foreigners in the country. Though Muslims may encounter a sense of fearfulness or evasiveness when interacting with most Japanese, any displays of emotion are usually quite subtle, with the most direct action limited to unfriendly stares by some passersby. The problems that Muslims do encounter in Japan relate not to personal safety but to the conveniences of everyday social life.

Daily Challenges Facing Muslims in Japan

In many respects, Islam is a community religion. When Muslim communities are small and isolated as they are in Japan, however, the social challenges can be formidable.

As also noted in Keiko Sakurai's essay, one of the greatest challenges for Muslims in Japan is finding halal food. When at home, of course, Muslims can prepare their own foods and assure themselves that all of the dishes are halal; eating out, however, is a challenge for devout Muslims in Japan because ordinary Japanese have little consciousness of Muslim dietary practices.

Another challenge is the limited extent of social services and community-building that resident Muslims can provide for themselves. Muslim women who do not fit readily into the typical categories of married students, laborers, or Japanese Muslim housewives face additional challenges, as testified by one Pakistani-American woman:

> I am a young, single Muslimah, and there aren't many options for me socially as far as my age group goes, or those who may share similar hobbies, etc. I am no longer a student, nor in a university here, so I don't get to meet people of my own age range. The Muslim women here tend to be Japanese, which leads to a language barrier. Additionally, the few Pakistani women I have met, as sweet as they are, are not in my age range and have the responsibilities that come with married life…This has been the most disappointing aspect of being a practicing Muslim here, since sometimes it feels as though you're in a glass cage and there is (in most cases) a complete lack of any *real* unity among Muslims in Japan.[11]

The size and resources of the Muslim community in Japan are still quite limited, even in Tokyo. The lack of services is more acute in regions outside

[11] Author's e-mail with a Pakistani-American, February 27, 2007.

of the big cities, where local Muslims in a given region sometimes number in the single digits.[12]

Another key challenge is fulfilling the Islamic injunction to pray five times daily. Muslims who take a more relaxed attitude toward performing prayers find adapting to Japanese society easier than those who take a stricter approach. For example, a committed Muslim community leader in western Japan stated that when in a public place at the time for prayer he has been told by some business owners to leave the premises if he wants to pray. "Some people, of course, look at me like I'm crazy when I do my prayers," he added.[13] Similarly, an Egyptian Muslim residing in a rural area of Japan complained that he had no place to pray except at home with his family. Although a small community of Muslims resides at a local Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) facility nearby, this individual has been barred from performing his prayers at the JICA dormitory because local regulations discourage use of the facilities by non-residents, a policy this man views as inconsiderate of his religious needs.[14]

More troubling can be the difficulty of praying at work. As a matter of courtesy, many Japanese employers allow employees to pray but are not legally obligated to do so. Cases of discrimination do occur, a most egregious example of which was reported in the *Daily Yomiuri* newspaper. An Indonesian woman in her twenties who was working in eastern Japan as a trainee at a sewing factory was forced to sign a note promising neither to pray at company facilities nor to fast for Ramadan. Employers also kept her in prison-like conditions, prohibiting her from owning a phone, having guests, or sending or receiving letters. The *Daily Yomiuri* quoted a Japanese human rights activist as speculating that "the prohibitions were likely enforced in the service of two aims: [to raise] worker efficiency and [to] prevent [the trainees] from escaping."[15]

Cases as extreme as this one likely are quite rare, yet the fact that Muslims have few legal protections from discrimination at work remains a real concern. Although most ordinary Japanese are considerate enough to allow Muslims personal space, Muslims have little official recourse when facing discriminatory practices.

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12 Another challenge related in part is the education of Muslim children, which is addressed in Keiko Sakurai's contribution.

13 Author's interview with a Muslim community leader, Fukuoka, Japan, March 15, 2007.

14 Author's interview, Kitakyushu, Japan, March 18, 2007.

15 "Factory Denies Muslim Basic Human Rights," *Daily Yomiuri*, December 5, 2006.

Wearing *hijab* presents similar problems for Muslim women. Not every Muslim woman wears a headscarf or a *burkah*; those who do not probably face fewer social obstacles in Japan. Those Muslim women who do accept more conservative Islamic practices, however, are likely to encounter suspicion and doubt or be stared at in public. Japanese Muslim women, in particular, may face criticism from family and friends. Generally speaking, most ordinary Japanese associate hijab with the oppression of women and are reluctant to see veiling through any alternative framework. Japanese women—often deeply concerned with issues of fashion and style—find it incomprehensible that some women would give up contemporary attire.

The common Islamic practice of abstaining from alcohol can also cause difficulties. Drinking not only is quite common in Japan but in some social contexts is almost required. Even more than in Western countries, alcohol serves an important social role in Japan by allowing work colleagues to relax together and share thoughts that are not always expressed in the workplace. In many Japanese companies supervisors expect employees to attend after-hours drinking sessions where social bonds are more easily forged. A Muslim or other non-drinker refusing to participate in these affairs can easily experience a lack of trust and intimacy with coworkers that can be a serious disadvantage in some types of business.

The experience of a devout Muslim couple who opened an Egyptian restaurant in western Japan illustrates the difficulties faced by observant Muslims.[16] The couple would not serve or allow alcohol at their restaurant, and although business went well during the lunch period (when few Japanese drink), the restaurant was usually empty for dinner. The ban on alcohol, they were sure, was to blame. On one occasion an angry customer even lectured them on the unreasonableness of not allowing alcohol, arguing that it was unacceptable for them to impose their beliefs on others. The restaurant eventually closed, although the enterprising couple rebounded by catering Egyptian meals at a major university.

Important to underscore is that despite these challenges Muslims residing in Japan encounter little to no active hostility. Though held widely, the negative image of Islam is not held deeply. The Japanese are quick to revise their impressions upon personal experience and, given a chance to interact with Muslims, can usually be won over. The problems that Muslims face stem almost entirely from ignorance and inflexibility in some parts of Japanese society.

16 Author's interview with an Egyptian Muslim couple, Kitakyushu, Japan, March 18, 2007.

Most Muslims, quick to understand these facts, generally exhibit a distinct lack of bitterness toward the Japanese. When interviewed, many foreign Muslims describe episodes of discrimination but in the next breath make excuses for their hosts. Pointing out that the Japanese merely do not know about Islam and mean no harm, those interviewed regard Japanese views as natural for an isolated, island country.

In contrast, this lack of bitterness is not characteristic of Muslim minorities in many parts of Europe, where evidence of heightened sensitivity in response to insults and instances of prejudice may be attributable to the intense history of conflict in the relationship between Europe and Islam and to continuing clashes in Israel and Palestine, Iraq, and Iran. The eager optimism of Muslims in their dealings with the Japanese may be in part a reaction to the sourness of the Muslim relationship with Europe and the United States. Muslims in Japan are usually quick to absolve the Japanese for prejudices and policies often arising from ignorance of Islamic or foreign customs. Much of the prejudice and discrimination is aimed at foreigners in general, not necessarily at Islam in particular.

THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF BEING A JAPANESE MUSLIM

Native-born Japanese Muslims, subject to the sometimes onerous requirements of being "Japanese," may be in a more difficult situation than foreigner Muslims. In Japan, people are expected to study hard and work long hours with few open complaints. By and large, discipline is maintained by cultural norms prizing cooperation and conformity rather than by intrusive policing measures or heavy official penalties. These values are drilled into Japanese from a very young age through their families and schools. By the time young people reach adulthood, the requirements of being "Japanese" are already second nature.

Of course, even Japan has its rebels. The price of rebellion in Japan can be social ostracism or denial of the economic and social security associated with employment in government or a major private enterprise. Converting to Islam, an "un-Japanese" act at some level, can expose an individual to these real-world effects. Some Japanese Muslims thus behave outwardly as any other Japanese would do but keep their faith to themselves and their families. Others seek new forms of employment that allow them to practice their faith with fewer hindrances. Still others brave the social and economic consequences. Many face objections to conversion from family members.

From a Japanese perspective, discontinuing practices that honor one's ancestors in the traditional way may be seen as a betrayal of family ritual responsibilities—a kind of selfishness that places personal beliefs ahead of family or collective duties.

Full fluency in the local language and a native understanding of Japanese behavior do give Japanese Muslims a distinct advantage over foreign Muslims in Japan. As one of the major problems that she faced, the Pakistani-American Muslim quoted above cited the language barrier, an obstacle contributing to a sense of disconnectedness between Japanese and Muslim communities. Ethnic Japanese Muslims, however, are presumably more skillful in navigating the challenges of their native society.

THE IMPACT OF SEPTEMBER 11 AND THE WAR ON TERRORISM

The September 11 terrorist attacks in New York City killed 24 Japanese citizens and deepened the association of Islam and terrorism in the minds of most Japanese. Several Muslims interviewed insisted that terrorism alone dominates the Japanese view of Islam today. Allegations that al Qaeda and other radical Islamist groups have established a presence among the Muslim community in Japan have deepened this association.

Naturally, many Japanese were alarmed when a message from Osama bin Laden airing on *al Jazeera* in October 2003 included a verbal threat against Japan. Threatening retaliation if the Self Defense Forces were sent to Iraq, bin Laden declared, "We reserve the right to respond at the appropriate time and place against all the countries participating in this unjust war, particularly Britain, Spain, Australia, Poland, Japan, and Italy."[17] The next month a more specific al Qaeda threat followed, stating that Tokyo would be attacked.

A report released at the end of 2005 suggested that a member of Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan—a banned Sunni extremist group—had entered Japan in 2003 and told worshippers at a mosque that he sought to establish a cell of the organization inside the country.[18] Apparently finding little or no support among Muslims in Japan, the agitator later departed. More recently, ABC News quickly fingered al Qaeda as the likely culprit behind two small

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17 Guido Olimpo, "Japan: A Target for al-Qaeda?" Jamestown Foundation, Terrorism Monitor 4, no. 5, March 9, 2006 ~ http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2369922.

18 Sudha Ramachandran, "Terror: What Japan Has to Fear," *Asia Times Online*, January 12, 2006 ~ http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/HA12Df02.html.

explosions outside the U.S. military base at Zama on February 12, 2007. The report included claims attributed to unnamed intelligence analysts that al Qaeda had "a small but powerful presence" in Japan; days after the release of the report, however, a Japanese leftist group claimed responsibility for the statement.[19]

Within the Japanese government, the National Police Agency (NPA) has also been spreading fearful tales about the domestic threat of Islamist terrorism. The rhetoric in NPA pamphlets can be heavy-handed and overheated. A selection from a December 2005 pamphlet, for example, reads:

> Japan is not immune to the threat of international terrorism… Many people from Islamic countries are living and forming communities in Japan. It is of concern that in the future, Islamic extremists may take advantage of such communities to procure funds and materials, as well as to take various opportunities to influence youths into becoming extremists.[20]

The truth regarding allegations that Islamist terrorist networks exist inside Japan is impossible to know with certainty. Apparently based on thin evidence, the allegations are probably exaggerated. Regardless, the Japanese public does perceive a domestic threat of terrorism, and certain vested interests are willing to exploit these fears for their own purposes. This perception no doubt affects the responses of Japanese to all Muslims residing in Japan.

Interviews have revealed that many Muslim leaders in Japan have been directly contacted by the police, who have asked these leaders point-blank whether they had information regarding any Islamic terrorist plots in Japan. Some Muslims regarded this as a form of official intimidation, while others were more philosophical toward such questioning. One case involved the Egyptian couple from Western Japan (mentioned above) who reported that in 2002 the police appeared at their shop to question them about terrorism. The husband, who became upset, told the policemen to leave immediately. The police did leave and the couple heard nothing more on the matter.[21]

Another Muslim interviewed spoke of a university's Muslim Student Association, which had purchased land to construct a mosque, being asked by the police to work with the local community to avoid friction.[22] The Muslim

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19 "Blasts Near U.S. Base in Japan Could be Al-Qaida's Work: ABC News," *Kyodo News*, February 19, 2007.

20 "The Oncoming Threat of Terrorism: The Growing Severity of the International Terrorism Situation," National Policy Agency, Focus 271, December 2005 ~ http://www.npa.go.jp/keibi/kokutero1/english/index.html.

21 Author's interview with an Egyptian Muslim couple, Kitakyushu, Japan, March 18, 2007.

22 Author's interview with a Muslim community leader, Fukuoka, Japan, March 15, 2007.

association extended an invitation to the local Japanese community offering an opportunity for representatives to observe prayers and learn about the basic character of Islam. Although the local Japanese at first strongly objected to having a mosque in their neighborhood, most of the residents gradually were won over and reached agreement with the association. This all took place unofficially with coordination from the local government and police.

Local police departments around Japan, apparently taking the alleged threat of domestic Islamist terrorism seriously, are keeping a close watch on the foreign Muslim community. Some of these efforts, however, seem rather awkward—more akin to the harassment of Muslims living ordinary lives than to the detection of any genuine domestic terrorist plots. Seeming nonetheless to cope well with these police intrusions, some Muslim leaders in Japan apparently even welcome such visits as a chance to connect with and reassure mainstream Japanese society and to explain the nature of their faith.

CONCLUSION: IMPLICATIONS FOR JAPAN AND THE UNITED STATES

From a Christian or Muslim perspective, Japan may seem to be a "religious vacuum" waiting for true faith to take hold. In reality, however, the Japanese have persistently held to their own religious beliefs for many centuries, even with the waning of active displays of faith. Brought to Japan by Europe over four centuries ago, Christianity was systematically propagated by any number of sects; yet today estimates are that only one in ninety Japanese claims to be Christian. Though Christianity has now gained a degree of acceptance as a "Japanese" religion, Islam remains very far from gaining such a status.

Japanese religion encompasses specific notions of Japanese culture and identity. The "common Japanese religion"—a blend of Shinto and Buddhism—is practiced casually in religious festivals or at times of ancestral veneration. Most Japanese thus see Islam not as a universal religion that applies to them but rather as the ethnic custom of peoples from other parts of the world.

Moreover, the line between secular and religious in Japan is not well defined. Festivals that involve drinking and socializing are both religious and social events. Though most Japanese do not stop to deeply ponder or intellectualize these issues, traces of religion permeate Japanese society. Japanese identity is a total system, involving notions of race, language, nationality, character, and religion. Even those converting to a "new religion" are quick to incorporate distinctively Japanese elements into their faith. As Reader notes, "Many of the new religions of Japan have taken on strongly

ethnocentric and nationalistic undertones, placing Japan at the centre of the world and positing it as the vehicle for world salvation."[23] Most Japanese shy away from religions that—as characteristic of most forms of Islam—demand full, exclusive belief. To have a major impact on the religious future of Japan, Islam would likely need to appear in a heterodox form—a blend of Islam with the pre-existing religious attitudes of the Japanese. Such a blend might involve some kind of Sufism integrated into a new religion, similar to the mixed elements of Christianity and Judaism found in the Makuya faith, for example.

The major trends within the Islamic world would, however, argue against this possibility. Globally, for over a century Islam has been moving toward "reform" movements that emphasize orthodoxy and the Salafist vision of "true Islam." Sufism and heterodox movements, usually frowned upon as corruptions of the faith, are weakening in many parts of the Islamic world. With the Muslim world's understanding of Islam growing more austere, a syncretic form of the religion with Japanese characteristics seems unlikely to generate much enthusiasm. The only possible exception might be if some liberal form of Islam were to arrive in Japan via North America or Europe.

Whether this comes to pass or not, the number of foreign Muslims in Japan might still increase. Population decline may lead to more aggressive efforts to promote immigration, conceivably resulting in many Indonesians, for example, being invited into the country as laborers. The economic logic behind such a possibility would, however, clash with the persistent cultural conservativeness and quite strong elements of xenophobia in Japanese society. A large-scale influx of immigrants—from any source—would require flexibility and a cultural adaptation that most Japanese seem loathe to make. Encouragement of immigration for economic reasons is a major national issue that goes far beyond the much smaller issue of Islam in Japan.

Islam in Japan will likely remain a marginal issue for the foreseeable future. By most estimates less than 100,000 Muslims reside in the country now, and there is no certainty that this population will grow much larger anytime soon.[24] The Japanese are not hostile toward Islam, but neither are they welcoming. The overall attitude of Japanese has been one of indifference, with increased elements of fear and suspicion having crept in after September 11. Because the political influence of the Muslim presence in Japan is still

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[23] Reader, *Religion in Contemporary Japan*, 28.

[24] See Keiko Sakurai's contribution to this roundtable for more information on the demographics of Japan's Muslim population.

inconsequential, little need exists for the United States to formulate any specific policies toward these Muslim communities. Rather than framing this minority's presence as a security issue, the United States could assume a general approach that encourages Japan to adopt anti-discrimination laws and to create a more open society toward foreigners. By reducing Muslims' alienation from their host society, such an approach would serve to prevent negative developments within the local Muslim communities in Japan. Such an approach would also help ensure Japan's future as a stable, liberal democracy and position the country as a role model for other Asian nations. ◈