**Title: Moving towards Multicultural Japan?: Muslim Immigrants and Identity Reconstruction of Japan to Embrace Differences**

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**Abstract**

*From the past to present, Japan has selectively accepted immigrants to preserve its homogenous identity. For instance, Japan opened the door more leniently to nikkei Brazilian (Brazilian who have Japanese ancestors), Korean, Taiwanese, and Chinese based on their cultural and physical similarities. As a shared understanding, Japan believes that the maintenance of Japan’s homogeneity is important for Japan’s unity, stability, and preservation of Japanese culture. However, the pattern of immigration has undergone substantial change since 1990s: continuous growth of Muslim immigrants. The purpose of this research paper is to provide multilayered understanding regarding social issues emerged from immigration process. Due to their minority status, insufficient attention has been paid towards the challenges of Muslim immigrants. Japan’s shortage of long-term views for multiculturalism gives tremendous difficulties, especially for the second and third generation of Muslim immigrant children. For instance, the Japanese education system is designed to develop "sameness" with the denial of “differences” as represented by Japan’s school uniform and school lunch system. This system automatically rejects to accommodate distinctive features of Muslim immigrant children. This paper is designed to reveal not only a series of challenges Muslim immigrants face in Japan but also cultural factors that prevent Japan from accepting change, aiming to answer the research question: Can Japan embrace differences while maintaining its homogenous identity? The ultimate goal of this paper is to provide a potential solution how to overcome Japan’s identity crisis between the myth of homogenous Japan and the imminent necessity to move towards multiculturalism.*

*There were no minority racial groups in Japan and that Japan therefore had no racial discrimination (Prime Minister Nakasone, 1986).*

In 1986, Prime Minister Nakasone made a notorious speech at Parliament. In his speech, the former Prime Minister declared that Japan is a homogenous country and no minority groups exist in Japan. Responding to criticism, Prime Minister Abe also said he does not find any problem with Japan’s homogeneity in 2007 (Kyodo News, February, 2007). Due to political confusions under Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and the Assad regime, millions of refugees flee from Syria and arrive at many other countries, including Japan, asking for asylum. On September 29, 2015, Prime Minister Abe promised that Japan would provide 1.5 billion dollars of financial aid for refugee protection and for stability in Syria. Prime Minister Abe further stated:

As an issue of demography, I would say that before accepting immigrants or refugees, we need to have more activities by women, by elderly people and we must raise (the) birthrate. There are many things that we should do before accepting immigrants (Daimon, January 1, 2016).

While the West accept millions of refugees, Japan rejects 99% of refuge application annually.

Responding to severe international criticism, Japan made a compromise; Japan agreed to become the first Asian country with a small-scale pilot program in 2010 (Nicholson, November 1, 2012). However, in reality, Japan utilizes the resettlement program as a tool to improve Japan’s image and identity rather than genuinely helping refugees to resettle in Japan. Under the program, Japanese officials cannot only improve their self-image but also can be selective to decide who are qualified to be a member of the Japanese society. The criteria set by the Japanese government for resettlement is extremely restrictive and has little flexibility. Japan sets strict requirements for potential refugee applicants such as “the capacity to adopt to Japanese society and capacity to get employed a living.” Apparently, these criteria are not based on the UNHCR policy: “resettlement should not be determined on the basis of integration potential or other non-protection criteria (Takizawa, December 2015).” The purpose of UNHCR’s third country resettlement program is humanitarian rather than “integration potential” from the view point of resettlement countries. As represented by this example, Japan requires non-Japanese immigrants to adjust themselves to think and behave like Japanese people in order to maintain social harmony and homogeneity, rather than allowing them to be who they are.

Weiner (1997) calls such Japan’s attitude “the myth of homogeneity.” However, in reality, Japan has two groups of indigenous people: Ainu and Ryukyuan. They have struggled for equal participation in the political, social and economic life for decades (Siddle, 2010). Furthermore, Japan is the only country which has a “fourth-generation immigrant issue” among developed democratic nations. Since the annexation of Korea in 1910, Japan dominated Korea as a colonizer to enhance its influence in Asia and to obtain cheaper labor forces and natural resources. While many developed nations are trying to solve issues regarding post-war immigrants, Japan still has difficulties resolving issues regarding pre-war immigrants: Koreans with permanent residence in Japan. These Korean immigrants are also minorities living in Japan (Young, 2010, p. 3), despite the claims of Prime Ministers. It is clear that these statements do not reflect realities, considering the growing number of non-Japanese population in the past thirty years (JICA Research Institute, 2007).

Throughout this paper, Japan’s exclusive educational and social welfare system are analyzed, examining immigrant and refugee children’s difficulties to have access to education and social welfare service. From the past to present, Japan has selectively accepted immigrants for the purpose of preserving its unique culture and blood-tie as represented by *nikkei* Brazilian (Brazilian who have Japanese ancestors), Korean, Taiwanese, and Chinese; cultural, physical, and linguistic similarities enabled them to be assimilated and integrated into a Japanese society (Ito, 2005).

On the other hand, there is a growing concern, particularly about Muslim immigrants, since 1990s. Based of the lop-sided belief, the myth of homogeneity, Japan has turned its blind eyes towards social problems emerged from immigration (Weiner, 1997). That is to say, Japan’s shortage of long-term views for multiculturalism gives tremendous difficulties to Muslim immigrants, especially for the second and third generation of Muslim immigrant children in Japan. Many Muslim immigrants are from Indonesia and Pakistan. Because of their religious practices and race, their differences are more visible in comparison with *nikkei* Brazilians who have no significant physical and cultural differences. The purpose of this research paper is to provide multilayered understanding regarding immigration issues. I aim to reveal not only a series of challenges Muslim immigrants face in Japan but also cultural factors that prevent Japan from accepting change. The ultimate goal of this paper is to provide a potential solution how to fill the gap between immigrant communities and local government in Japan; how Japan can move from an exclusive homogenous society to a inclusive society, embracing differences.

**Why homogenous? Significant influence of Japan’s Homogenous Identity**

There are several factors Japan has generated and maintained its homogenous identity: 1) the Isolation policy over 200 years; 2) Japan’s religious background, Shintoism which places importance on blood-line; 3) Japan’s passive attitudes to accept drastic change because of social hierarchy and culture of obedience; 4) low degree of political participation among Japanese people because of “imported democracy.

**Japan’s Isolation Policy (1641-1853)**

Japan is known as a very conservative and homogenous nation. For instance, only 1% of the population in Japan is immigrants, which means the majority of people (98.5%) are racially and ethnically categorized as Japanese. Furthermore, approximately 84 % of the population is Shinto and Buddhist (O’Neil, 2013, pp. 260-261). Such Japan’s homogeneity is a legacy of the closed policy or xenophobic isolation. Since the late seventeenth century, Japan took the closed policy over 200 years because Japanese political elites had fear of Christian missionaries’ influence from the West; Christianity was not compatible with Japan’s political aim to concentrate power at the top. This closed policy led to Japan’s extremely limited interaction with other countries and non-Japanese people (O’Neil, 2013, p. 261). In other words, such a peculiar policy helped Japan to create its homogeneity and the unity based on strong blood-tie.

Furthermore, Japan developed the caste system beginning in the Edo era (Benedict, 1946, p. 57). Japanese people were divided into four social classes of samurai, farmers, artisans, and merchants in the Edo period. The outcaste group’s people called “the Burakumin” also should be mentioned. “The Burakumin” were forced to engage in detestable works such as burying the executed dead bodies and skinning dead animals. They were treated and discriminated against in the similar way as “untouchables” in India, and they are still suffering from severe discrimination even today (Howell, 1996, p. 179). The existence of different tribes such as the Ainu and Okinawan, and the ingrained caste system including the outcastes, created a primitive sense of superiority in the Japanese people. This primordialism led to the strong sense of supremacy and blood ties between pure Japanese people. The myth of racial supremacy played a key role in creating Japan’s exclusive social system based on the blood-tie.

**Shintoism and its Emphasis on Blood-Tie**

As Shintoism and its religious practice are deeply ingrained in Japanese culture, some say Shinto is not a religion but culture. Also, unlike Western religions, Shinto has no written holy scriptures. It is more devoted to focus on people’s way of life through rituals in Japanese people’s everyday life. In Shintoism, the emperor (Japanese hereditary monarchy) is placed on the top of social, cultural, and religious hierarchy. From legendary Jimmu to the present, the imperial system of Japan is generally considered to be the oldest dynasty that exists today. To be more precise, the Japanese emperor system is estimated to have continued for more than 2,600 years (Ohnuki-Tierney, 2002, p. 132). The mystic history that the ancestor of the emperor is the Sun Goddess also firmly believed among Japanese people.

After the end of Isolation policy in 1853, Japan politically strengthened the status of the emperor, Shintoism, and people’s worship for them in order to maintain people’s unity and to confront with Western influence. After the end of the Tokugawa military government in 1868, the political power was returned to the Emperor. Being pressured by the great military strength of Western countries, the newly born Meiji government established the Constitution in 1889 in order to unite Japanese people and strengthen the foundation to establish a strong Japan. According to the constitution, the Emperor was a living god who had a sacred ancestral line (Li, 2003, p. 6). This Constitution created the emperor’s indisputable position as the top of Japanese hierarchy which no one can violate without severe repercussions or punishment (Wetzler, 1998, p. 5). The Meiji government started to control 110,000 shrines all over Japan, and there was the temple of the Sun Goddess on the top of these shrines.

The Meiji government used a patriarchy which gave the father the strong position as the head of a family. The father had not only an absolute supremacy above any other family members, but he also had an authority to make any decision about his family such as children’s marriage and future life. In addition, the father had to be treated respectfully by his family members. For example, meals had to be served to the father first, he got to take a bath before anyone else in the family, and family members had to make a respectful bow to him (Benedict, 1946, p. 52). Thus, Japanese people did not only have strong loyalty toward fathers, but also defiance toward fathers was not tolerated resulting in a very strict authoritarian, patrichical system. The loyalty to the emperor was an expansion of this family system. In other words, Japan established a definite top-down decision-making style based on the family structure. According to Ohnuki-Tierney, the whole of Japan has become one family having the emperor as a father (Ohnuki-Tierney, 2002, p. 78).

Even after ending Isolation policy, Japanese people have maintained their homogenous identity based on blood-line deeply disseminated and ingrained by Shintoism. This identity resulted in racially discriminatory immigration policies as well as nationality law in Japan. As already mentioned, Japan adopts lenient immigration strategies toward *nikkei* Brazilian because of their racial and cultural similarities. While some countries as the United States give people citizenship based on a place where people are born (territory-based), namely, *jus soli*, Japan give people citizenships based on their blood-tie, namely, *jus sanguinis* (Blitz & Lynch, 2011, p. 7). This principle of *jus sanguinis* has not changed since the Japan’s first nationality law. That is to say, Japanese racial and gender discriminative nationality law as well as immigration strategies is an expansion of the ingrained caste system, the sense of supremacy over other races including the Ainu and Okinawan, Japan’s hereditary monarchy and Shintoism

**Hierarchical Society and Cultural Obedience**

Japan’s unique social structure, namely, centralized feudalism generated the culture of obedience, training Japanese masses to be obedience to authority. Till the end of Second World War, Japan maintained this political system: centralized feudalism. That is to say, its society maintained a strict hierarchy for a large portion of its history due to Japan’s former system of centralized feudalism (Donahue, 1998). The teaching of Chinese Confucianism played a significant role in establishing and strengthening the ethical and political system in Japan. Confucianist concepts were imported to Japan since the early 6th century. Confucianism is more than religious beliefs and practices. It actually helped to develop a set of political and ethical rules as well as norms. For instance, it generated rules which place importance on piety, respect for elders, social obligations, harmonious societal relationships, worship for lords (Schumacher, May 2007). Combined with Confucianism, Japanese people ethically tend to praise the so-called “loyalty” to authority as represented by the tale of fourty-seven Ronin.

The *Tale of the Forty Seven Ronin* tells us about Japanese people’s incredibly strong faithfulness and a kind of family love to one’s lord. The “Tale of the Forty Seven Ronin” is a real story that happened in 1703, and it has been loved and admired by many Japanese people since then (Benedict, 1946, p. 199). The story of “the Forty Seven Ronin” is about the relationship between the Lord Asano and his forty-seven faithful retainers. Their bond is a blood relationship. In other words, their faith in the lord is beyond an obligation: a kind of family affection. In 1701, the Lord Asano was assigned as a person responsible for the preparation of the traditional ceremony to welcome the emperor by a shogun. In order to fulfill his mission, it was necessary for him to have appropriate instruction of the ceremonial rules of etiquette from the Lord Kira. Although there are a variety of interpretations about what made the fissure between the Lord Asano and Kira, it is generally believed that the Lord Kira somehow told the Lord Asano the wrong instructions about the traditional ceremony and put the Lord Asano to shame. Then, the angered Lord Asano struck at the Lord Kira with a sword injuring the Lord Kira’s forehead. For better or worse, the Lord Kira survived due to the intercession of other people. However, the Lord Asano was immediately commanded to commit hara-kiri by a shogun without defense for what he did (Benedict, 1946, p. 200). Even worse, the feudal clan of Asano was broken up and the fief was confiscated by the shogun. As a result, all Asano’s retainers became “ronin”: a samurai without a lord (Benedict, 1946, p. 201).

The story does not end at this point. “The forty seven ronin” who had strong faith in the Lord Asano, carefully made a plan to revenge themselves on their lord’s enemy, the Lord Kira. In order to conduct the revenge successfully, they pretended as if they had no interest in revenge nor any faith in the Lord Asano. For example, one of the ronin, Oishi, intentionally spent a life of drunkenness to relax the Lord Kira’s wariness of revenge. Some of the ronin even sold their wives to a brothel to make money for revenge, and another sent his own sister to be a maid and a lover of the Lord Kira to get information about the precise structure of the Lord Kira’s castle and his schedule. These ronin sacrificed themselves and even their families only for the purpose of showing their strong faith in the Lord Asano by getting revenge (Benedict, 1946, p. 203).

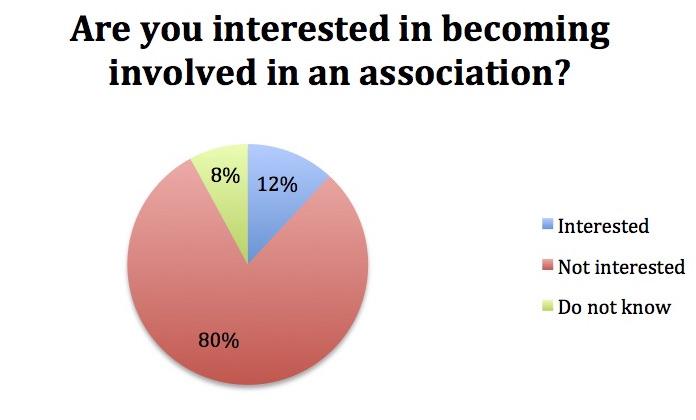
This strong faith in one’s master was a very specific character which Japanese people held. From the perspective of rational choice, each ronin should have chosen the best way to benefit themselves (Chong, 1996, p. 39). In other words, since their lord Asano already passed away, all the ronin had to do was to find new jobs or masters who would give them benefits. However, they chose to conduct the revenge even though this act would only lead to severe punishment by the shogun and to danger that embroiled their innocent family members in the crime. Finally, they carried out their vengeance on December 14 in 1703, two years after the death of the Lord of Asano. The forty seven ronin broke into the Lord Kira’s castle and cut off the Lord Kira’s head (Benedict, 1946, p. 204).

Interestingly, soon after accomplishing their vengeance, the forty seven ronin visited the Lord Asano’s grave with the head of the Lord Kira in order to announce their accomplished revenge toward the Lord Kira and to pledge their eternal loyalty to the Lord Asano. Then, they just came back to their homes and stayed there quietly until the Shogun ordered them to do seppuku. Their act was beyond obligation toward the lord: the forty seven ronin treated their lord Asano as if he were their father. This story reflects Japanese peoples’ ingrained shared values on the deep loyalty for their beloved lord because many Japanese people enthusiastically admired the forty seven ronin’s revenge (Benedict, 1946, p. 205). Moreover, the fact that this story is loved by Japanese people even today proved how the loyalty continues to have significant meaning in Japanese society. Cultural obedience as well as loyalty for authority is closely related to Japanese people’s passive attitude regarding political participation. To be more precise, this reflects Japanese people tendency to accept what authority decides as it is without questioning and protesting.

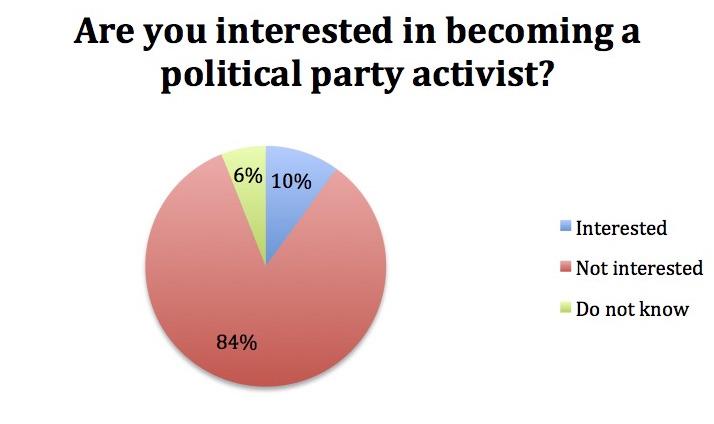
**Imported Democracy and Weak Political Participation**

Unlike the Western democracy chosen by people themselves, democracy in Japan is so-called ‘imported democracy.’ Professor Yoshida demonstrates strong concerns regarding the degree of democracy in Japan. He insists that democracy should embrace not only voting rights but also people’s active participation in politics. Yoshida further states that Japanese people lacks shared understandings how important their political participations are.[[1]](#footnote-1) According to the data provided by a think tank, Fondapol, only 11 percent of Japanese youth (16-29 years old) responded positively to the question, “Are you interested in becoming involved in an association?” Considering the fact that 36 percent in average answered positively, this score is quite low.[[2]](#footnote-2)

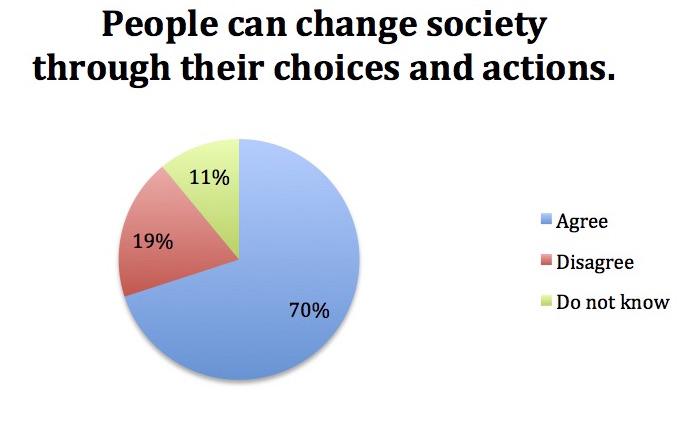
While 22 percent in average responded that they are interested in engage in political activities, becoming a member of political party, 90 percent of Japanese youth answered that they are not interested in becoming a political party activist.[[3]](#footnote-3) Finally, approximately 70 percent of Japanese youth answered positively to the question, “people can change society through their choices and actions.” However, this score is the third lowest, followed by Spain (69 percent) and Hungary (65 percent).[[4]](#footnote-4)



**Figure 13**: “Are you interested in becoming involved in an association?[[5]](#footnote-5)



**Figure 14**: “Are you interested in becoming a political party activist?”[[6]](#footnote-6)



**Figure 15**: “Do you think people can change society through their choices and actions?”[[7]](#footnote-7)

**Significant Influence of Japan’s Homogenous Identity**

Martha Cottam (1994) argues how state identities influence states’ and people’s behaviors. In other words, it has significant impact on how they treat “others.” According to Cottam (1994), policy makers tend to simplify their environment to understand behaviors of other countries efficiently (p. 18). Cottam (1994) argues why the US sometimes prefers to take forced military intervention rather than choosing diplomatic negotiation and accommodation. She proposes her theory about how images help to shape such American foreign policies. If the US perceive other countries as “dependent” and they are under influence of enemy (the US image of the enemy), the United States is more likely to take coercive and forced military intervention rather than selecting diplomatic negotiations. Furthermore, the US perceptions of asymmetric power also influence the US foreign policy determination. While the United States perceives itself as a superpower (self-image), the US recognizes non-western countries as, barbarous, inferior, and dependent. Parents merely order their children what to do because children do not know what is right and wrong but parents know what is the best for their children; negotiation is meaningless between parents (US) and children (non-Western less civilized countries). In short, as the US believes that it knows better solutions than inferior countries, there was no room for negotiation (p. 22).

I argue that Cottam’s theory can be generalized and applied to Japan’s or any other countries cases as well. Because of Japan’s homogenous identity and belief in racial supremacy, Japan automatically perceive non-Japanese as “others.” This identity generates strong belief that Japan is not suitable for immigrants to be a part of Japanese society. Consequently, it led to many racial discriminatory immigration and refugee policies, nationality and citizenship laws, and exclusive social and education system. Hence, it is crucial for Japan to reconstruct its identity in order to move towards a more inclusive society and to embrace differences.

**Change in Japan’s Immigration Strategies and Demography**

Because of Japan’s homogenous identity, Japan places importance on preserving homogeneity, social unity and harmony.To be more concrete, Japan has long been reluctant to accept immigrants for the purpose of preserving homogeneity, social unity and harmony. As mentioned previously, Japan successfully maintained its ethnic and racial homogeneity due to the closed policies over 200 years during the Edo era, which led to Japanese people’s strong sense of unity based on blood-tie. In other words, Japan strongly believes that the maintenance of Japan’s homogeneity is important for Japan’s unity, stability, and preservation of Japanese culture.

However, the major demographic change occurred along with Japan’s economic recovery. Since the 1950s, Japan’s economy gradually recovered. Beginning with the late 1960s, the Japanese economy had experienced rapid growth, resulting in the increase of non-Japanese population. In order not only to preserve homogeneity but also fill the gap of labor force, Japan strategically adopted discriminatory immigration policies. Japan adopted immigration policies favorable for Brazilians of Japanese ancestry (*nikkei*). The immigration policies enabled *nikkei* Brazilian migrants to easily attain work permit in Japan. For instance, *nikkei* Brazilians are entitled to stay in Japan as long-term residents with status of residence (*zairyushikaku*), and therefore, they are entitled to have legal protection, such as the access to national health insurance system, and social securities (Ito, 2005, p. 55).

By the mid-1980s, Japan’s economic miracle transformed Japan into the second largest economic power, following the United States. Japan’s rapid economic growth created a demand for foreign unskilled labor. This demand resulted in accepting not only *Nikkei* Brazilians but also other groups of labor migrants. In 1980s, Japan made an economic agreement with neighboring Muslim-majority countries, including Pakistan and Bangladesh. Consequently, the large number of Muslims arrived, seeking for economic opportunities (Tanada & Okai, March, 2015). Most of these Muslim labor migrants engaged in unskilled labor for factories and construction business. As a flexible cheap labor force, they significantly contributed to Japan’s economic development (Sawa, 2007, p. 2).

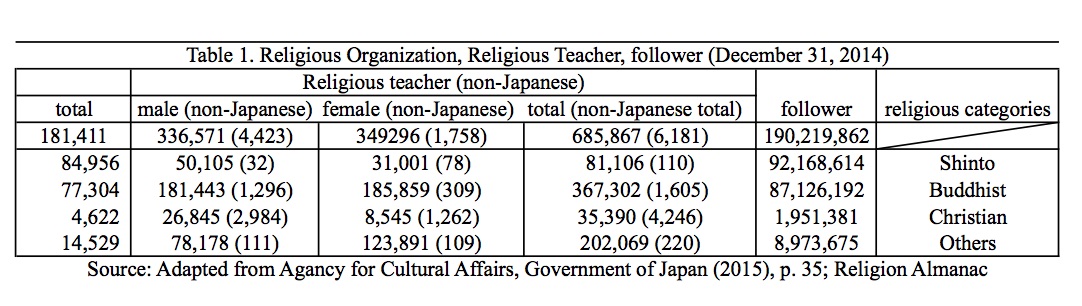
**Invisible Muslim Immigrants in Japan, being Categorized as “Others”**

The false belief of homogeneity created the clear demarcation between “us” and “them” among a Japanese society, and consequently, Japan often displays indifferent attitudes towards matters’ relating to non-Japanese people. Due to political confusions under Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and the Assad regime, millions of refugees flee from Syria and arrive at many other countries, including Japan, asking for asylum. On September 29, 2015, Prime Minister Abe promised that Japan would provide 1.5 billion dollars of financial aid for refugee protection and for stability in Syria. Prime Minister Abe further stated:

As an issue of demography, I would say that before accepting immigrants or refugees, we need to have more activities by women, by elderly people and we must raise (the) birthrate. There are many things that we should do before accepting immigrants (Daimon, January 1, 2016).

This speech indicates that a homogenous Japan is not ready to accept non-Japanese people as members of a Japanese society.

Due to Japan’s faise belief and indifferent attitudes towards matters relating to non-Japanese people, insufficient attention has been paid to one of the country’s smallest minority groups: Muslims. As the data on Table 1 shows, Muslims are one of the smallest minority groups in Japan that are categorized as “others.”



Though it is still only 0.009% of the entire population, approximately 100,000 non-Japanese Muslims and 10,000 Japanese Muslims are estimated to live in Japan (Tanada & Okai, 2013).Again, the former Prime Nakasone’s as well as Prime Minister Abe’s statements do not reflect these realities and they falsely demonstrate the myth of homogeneity.

**The Demographic Data (by Countries)**

Non-Japanese Muslims who reside in Japan came from various countries. In fact, non-Japanese Muslims came from more than 100 countries. According to the data provided by the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) in December, 2015, Indonesia is the largest country, accounting for 50 % of non-Japanese Muslim population: approximately 50,000 Muslims in Japan with Indonesian origin. The second largest is Malaysia, with 20,000, or 20 %, followed by Pakistan, with 13,000, or 13 % and Bangladeshi, with 11,000, or 11%. Turkish and Iranian, 4,000 or 4-5 % for each. There are 2,700 Afghans, 1,200 Saudi Arabians, and 500 Syrians. The number of Japanese Muslim is estimated to be approximately 10,000.

Japan has relatively strong bonds with Indonesia. After the end of the Second World War, they developed their relations particularly in the field of economy. Through Official Development Assistance (ODA) project, Japan keeps providing monetary and technical assistance with Indonesia in the past 40 years. The data of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (MOFA) suggests that Japan is the largest supplier of economic assistance to Indonesia. Also, Japan is Indonesia’s largest export partner, accounting for 13.1 % of Indonesia’s export. The recent significant change is the increase of Indonesian care-workers in Japan. Through the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), both Japan and Indonesia launched a project of technical training program since August, 2007. Facing an acute shortage of nursing care workers for the elderly, Japan decided to accept thousands of Indonesian care-workers to fill this gap (Sato & Kobayashi, May 22, 2008). According to MOJ’s data, approximately 15,000 Indonesians are currently in Japan through this technical training program. However, these Indonesian care-workers in Japan face significant obstacles due to the high bar set by the Japanese government.

For instance, in order to participate in this program, Indonesians need to have at least bachelor’s degree and to receive 6-month training in Indonesia, or to have professional experiences as a nurse. Japan requires Indonesian care-workers to pass the nursing exam in Japanese within two years. In addition, only 175,000 yen per month is paid to them, despite tough labor conditions (Sato & Kobayashi, May 22, 2008). Failing to pass the exam and being disappointed with harsh working conditions, many Indonesian care-workers drop out or quit in the middle of their technical training in Japan.

Referring to Malaysia, the majority of Malaysian visits Japan for the purpose of traveling. MOJ’s data indicates that approximately 10,000 Malaysian tourists visited Japan in 2015. Furthermore, a number of Malaysian students receive higher education in Japan. Around 2,800 students are from Malaysia, which is the eighth largest in terms of the number of international students by country of origin. There are 2,500 Malaysians with permanent residency in Japan. Considering these facts, most of Malaysians stay legally in Japan either for the short-term (travel, study) or the long-term purpose (permanent residency). Furthermore, some Malaysians are ethnically categorized as Chinese but not Muslims (Nakhleh et al., p. 72). As mentioned earlier, Japan had visa exemption agreement with Pakistan and Bangladesh up until 1989. Through the visa exemption program, hundred thousands of Pakistani and Bangladeshi came to Japan, particularly in the 1980s. Some of them attained permanent residency, married Japanese citizens, or remained in Japan without having legal statuses.

The significant feature of Turks in Japan is its large number of asylum-seekers. In 2014, 845 Turks filed applications for refugee status in Japan, which was the second largest, following Nepal (MOJ, March 11, 2015). The majority of Turkish asylum-seekers are Kurds, who is a minority groups in Turkey. Due to their minority status, Kurds are politically and culturally persecuted throughout history. However, Japan is known as its high rejection rate of refugee status. Almost 99 % of applications are rejected every year. Due to Japan’s concern about diplomatic relationship with Turkey, none of Turkish Kurds attained refugee status in the past. In 2005, two Turkish Kurds were forcefully deported to Turkey after being denied to attain refugee status. (JAR, 2010). Consequently, there are many Turks living in Japan illegally. While the majority of Turks living in Japan are not Muslims but Kurds as such, hundreds of Turk Tatar-origin people are estimated to live in Japan. Due to the recent rise of crimes committed by Turks and the shortage of Japanese people’s knowledge about Islam, Japan started to demonstrate their concerns about Turks as well as Muslims as a whole.

**The Contemporary Challenges Muslims Face in Japan**

The duration of Japan’s compulsory education is 9 years (6 years in an elementary school, 3 years in a junior high school). Japanese children are obliged to receive education when they turn to 6 years old. The compulsory education system is designed to promote the sense of ‘sameness,’ ‘group,’ and ‘homogeneity.’ According to David Blake Willis (2002):

In the Japanese context any cultural transmission being enacted throughout the educational system has been predicated more or less on a pre-war structure, very much dominated by Confucian ideas (in practice if not name), with an overlay of modernistic rhetoric. Class sizes remain large, like the pre-war era. School rules are strict, more or less, for secondary students. Patterns of authority and obedience have shown little change. At the same the outside world is now intruding into this closed and shuttered scene (p. 25).

Willis further argues that globalization imposes significant pressure on Japan, elevating a tension, fear, and concern to lose their homogenous identity, culture, and social unity. Due to Japan's resistance to accept multiculturalism, there emerged various concerns how to deal with immigrants, particularly Muslim immigrant children. Muslim immigrants are scattered throughout Japan. Furthermore, the number of Muslim immigrants is significantly low. In other words, it is unfeasible to establish an Islamic Education School. Though private international schools offer multicultural education programs, many parents who engage in low-skilled labor cannot afford to their expensive tuition (Samir Abdel Hamid Nouh, 2012). Under the Japanese education system which predominantly focuses on the sameness and homogeneity (Kudo, p. 110), Muslim immigrant children face a series of challenges such as the School Lunch System in Japan.

Japan's principle of separation of religion and education conflicts with Ramadan. Due to cultural misunderstanding, some professors feel this tradition is a child abuse (Kuwano, 2012). Furthermore, Japanese people’s level of understanding of halal food is significantly low. For instance, the non-profit organization, Japan Halal Business Association (JHBA), was established in October, 2012, to promote better understandings of halal food. JHBA provides around 120 seminars about halal food every year. Through his experiences at seminars, the director of JHBA got an impression that approximately only 5 out of 100 participants have very basic knowledge about halal food (Yasuda, June 19, 2015). For seasoning, soy sauce and mirin are often utilized for Japanese food. As alcohol is utilized in the process of producing soy sauce and mirin, most of Muslim children cannot eat school lunch. Consequently, Muslim children bring their own lunch box to a school. This results in generating unfavorable view towards them. Some Japanese people see it that Japanese students are treated unequally and that Muslim children are violating the principle of separation of education and religion (Kuwano, 2012).

In addition, there are many obstacles Muslim children face, including school uniform system (all children are required to wear same uniforms despite their religious beliefs), mixed-sex physical education activities which is incompatible with Islamic ethics, identity crisis because of the shortage of education opportunity about Islam and Muslim life, the absence of school prayer (no prayer room in public schools because it conflicts with Japan’s principle of separation of religion and education), and language barriers (Japanese education program is designed only for Japanese students who already know how to write, read, and speak Japanese).

Though further research is required, it is estimated the number of non-Japanese children who do not go to school has been continuously increasing due to cultural and language barriers (Kojima, 2016). Due to their apparent visibility, Muslim children are more likely to face more obstacles. Because of Japan’s lopsided attitude to force non-Japanese to follow Japanese culture, they are less likely to have enough support. More importantly, they are likely to be denied who they are. This would potentially marginalize Muslim children, making them more vulnerable and invisible in Japan.

**Future Directions of this Research**

Finally, in order to answer the following research questions, “how does Japan overcome Japan’s identity crisis between the myth of homogenous Japan and the imminent necessity to move towards multiculturalism?” I believe that it is crucial to examine Japan’s theologies and religious backgrounds. According to Pew Research conducted by Brian Grim, Japan is considered as the lease oppressive country in terms of religious freedom regulations. There is also a tendency in recent academia to place emphasis on “visible” violence and regulations, including religion-related terrorism and blasphemy laws help to label Japan as the least oppressive country in terms of governmental control over religions and religion-related violence. A close examination of religious history in Japan is likely to demonstrate that there are hidden social, cultural, and political restrictions which automatically exclude different others which prevent pluralism and religious freedom.

Even today, Shinto remains dominant religion. However, no one really notice how Japan’s identity and behaviors are influenced by “religion” itself. Shintoism is so deeply ingrained in culture and communities that people are not aware that they are actually practicing and following a religion. People who refuse to follow Japanese religious beliefs are considered not to fit in “our” society. The growing number of Muslim immigrants slowly reveals Japan’s hidden issues and factors which keeps Japan’s homogenous myth as well as exclusive social systems. Religion cannot be separated from policies and specific political and social phenomenon. Religion helps to create one’s identity, who you are, how you see the world, how you draw a line between us and them, how you understand and treat “others.” Hence, the next step of this research will be through examination of Japanese theologies, religious history, and religious freedom. I think the promotion of the concept of “religious freedom” would be a key to move homogenous Japan to a more inclusive pluralistic Japan, embracing differences but also mainlining its unique culture.

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