

# Muslims in Japan with the comparison of those in Europe

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## Introduction

A discussion of Islam in Japan needs first to identify the dates of earlier contacts between Japan and Muslim world. There were some direct encounters between Japanese and Muslims before Ottoman Turks sent a naval vessel Ertugrul to Japan in 1890,

First group consisted of 36 men led by Takeuchi Yasunori arrived in Suez on March 1862 for the overland journey by steam train to Alexandria. The Second group of Japanese travelers was 34 men led by Ikeda Nagaoki, bound to France, they arrived Egypt in 1864; they travelled to Giza to see the Pyramids! Also, it should be mentioned that the first merchant ship under a Muslim flag to reach Japan in modern times was the SADQIA of the BEY of Tunis in 1872. *(That time the Bey of Tunisia was Muhammad III assadiq, born Feb.1813 and ruled from Sept. 1859 till his death Oct. 1882, the beys of Tunis were the Monarchs of Tunisia from 1705 until 1957.)*

In 1880 Japan sent a mission to Persian Gulf, the descriptions Ienori Honjuku (1852-1891) provided in his report of the voyage were the first eyewitness report of the Persian Gulf Region in Japan.

Muslims began arriving in Modern Japan from the beginning of the OPENING of the country. Most of them were Malay and Yemeni sailors serving aboard British or Dutch ships. Few Arab, Turk and Indian Muslims have been living in Japan since 1865; some of them were import-export merchants. In 1883 Abu Bakar, Sultan of Johor was the first Muslim head of state to visit Japan and meet The Meiji Emperor and Japanese political officials and European diplomats. By the early 20 century few foreign Muslims lived in Japan started to introducing Islam to Japanese and a handful of ethnic Japanese began to convert to Islam.

## 1. Muslims in Japan

### Contacts between Islam and Japan

Contacts between Islam and Japan were not constant over the years. There were periods of interruption, because these contacts depended on political circumstances and economic interests that varied from period to period, and this affected the position of the Muslims in Japan. The presence of Islam in Japan depended on

- 1- the very few non-Japanese who came to Japan for various reasons,
- 2- Several Japanese who converted to Islam to serve the objectives of Japanese policy,
- 3- And a small number of Japanese who encountered Islam while traveling outside Japan and meeting Muslims.

The first Japanese Muslim is said to be Abdul Halim Shotaro Noda (1868-1904) followed by the second Japanese Muslim, Torajiro Yamada who met Noda when he arrived at Istanbul on April 4, 1892. The lifestyle of Noda was not praised as a Muslim one, that is why he was forgotten, and the people thought that Yamada was the First Muslim, Bunpachiro Ariga(Ahmad) who became Muslim in Bombay, India in 1900, did all his best to explain Islam to the people around him, he published

Islamic booklets and translating the meaning of The Holly Quran.

Sheikh Ahmed Ali Al Jirjawi arrived in Japan in 1906 to participate in the interfaith dialogue conference in Tokyo, he claimed that 12000 Japanese converted to Islam and the Indian Ulama also estimated the number of converted Japanese Muslims by 12000, but Sheikh Muhammed Barakatullah (1854-1927) who arrived in Japan in 1909 denied such information. On July 16, 1912 Japan Weekly Mail wrote: The propagation of Islam has recently commenced both in Tokyo and Yokohama, the principal preacher of this faith is Mr. Barakatullah. At present there is only one Japanese convert, but there are 2 Chinese and 24 converts belonging to other nations, they meet at Barakatullah's house every Friday. (Japanese converted is Mr. Hatano who wrote a small book entitled "Asia in Danger" that was sent all over the world, this booklet was translated into Ottoman Turkish by Abdurrashid Ibrahim. Japanese newspaper wrote nothing about Omar Yamaoka the first Japanese who performed Hajj, and wrote nothing about Ohara Takeyoshi, a military intelligence officer who converted to Islam on the advice of Abdurrashid Ibrahim, Ohara was named Abu Bakr, the same as the first Khalifa's name, while Yamaoka was given the name Omar, the same as the second Khalifa's name. In the year Sheikh Barakatulla arrived at Tokyo 1909, Omar Kotaro Yamaoka who became Muslim in Bombay started his Journey to Makah but that was not completely for the sake of Islam.

### First Muslim Community in Japan

Although there were already some Muslims in Japan, it could be argued that Japan's first Muslim communities were formed when most of the Turkish immigrants based themselves in Tokyo and Kobe, and a number of Muslim traders from India and elsewhere reached Kobe to form a Muslim community there. This group established the Kobe mosque with the support of Indian traders in 1935, a few years before the Muslim community in Tokyo founded the Tokyo mosque in 1938. It is clear that the Muslim communities both in Kobe and in Tokyo, which included mostly non-Japanese Muslims, were not large, but the establishment of the Kobe mosque and the Tokyo mosque became a symbol of the presence of Islam and of Muslims in Japan.

It was expected that the Muslim community would grow year after year, but facts and evidence indicate that this did not happen. Perhaps the failure to grow was due to;

- 1- A split between Turk-Tatar members of the community.
- 2- The destruction of the Ottoman Empire.
- 3- And Japan's defeat in the Second World War, which destroyed the dream of establishing the Greater East Asia Prosperity Sphere. This led to the displacement of the leaders of the Muslim community or forced them to escape from Japan, and there has been no one to take any part in any kind of religious activities.

### New Start for Japanese Muslims

The first Muslim association consisting only of Japanese nationals was established in 1952, the total number of members was about seventy-four, Japanese Muslims began contacting the Islamic world, welcoming Muslims coming from outside Japan, and cooperating with Muslim businessmen and

Muslim students coming to study in Japan. Japanese Muslims formed a joint committee with non-Japanese Muslim residents in Japan and decided to establish the Islamic Center of Tokyo and a Muslim cemetery. It is noted that Muslims living in Japan were not a single Muslim community but formed independent associations according to their countries of origin, or nationalities. In 1968 the JMA began to open up to Japanese society through the establishment of social service activities and by explaining Islam in the Japanese media. Moreover, Japanese non-Muslim companies were invited to join the association as associate members. While strengthening relations with the Muslim world by representing Japan at conferences and other events, the JMA also received kings and other national leaders from the Arab and Islamic worlds. With the increase in the number of Muslims living in Japan, various Islamic associations have been founded by both Japanese and non-Japanese Muslim residents.

### Relation between Japan and Muslim Countries and its impact on Muslims in Japan

After the 1973 oil crisis, Japan's interest in the Gulf Arab countries and the Muslim world increased, and in turn Arab and Islamic countries started seeking to consolidate their relations with Japan. They competed with each other in this area. Some Arab and Islamic embassies opened cultural offices, and others established schools.

It is noted that Muslims in Japan have depended mostly on aid from the Muslim world, and their activities have depended more or less on the amount of that aid. Without such aid, these activities might come to an end. But some associations and other groups, which have been mainly self-sufficient and depended on voluntary contributions from their members, have continued to engage in activities and provide services to the community of Muslims in Japan and abroad. This can be seen by examining the activities of the JMA; the Islamic Center; and the Indonesian, Indian, and Pakistani communities. The Indian and Pakistani community is a good example of self-sufficiency. They fund themselves from within and have contributed many projects out of their own pockets and have succeeded in drawing Japanese into their charity activities. Their activities during the tragedy of Fukushima were covered by Japanese TV and newspapers and were appreciated by the Japanese public.

### Number of Muslims in Japan and roll of Mosques

The existence of a religious community applying the teachings of its religion is not only important but also essential. Japanese people came to know about Islam when they saw Muslim immigrants in Japan practicing their religion.. It was necessary from the very beginning to establish mosques in Japan because a mosque is more than a place of prayer or worship. It plays a central role in the life of Muslim communities everywhere. Before the 1980s the number of Muslims in Japan was small, and there were only two mosques, in Kobe and Tokyo. But in the mid-1980s, the number of Muslims in Japan grew rapidly. Most young Muslims have families, and their children go to Japanese schools, but their parents also send them to the mosque to learn the Qur'an and the Arabic language.

Scholars say that the number of mosques in Japan has increased more rapidly than the number of Muslims, which has not increased as much as expected despite the passage of many years. The

establishment of mosques, associations, unions, and Islamic cultural centers in Japan does not reflect the number of Japanese and non-Japanese Muslims living in Japan. In other words, these organizations do not reflect the size of the Muslim community in Japan. There is no accurate record of the number of Muslim residents in Japan, but scholars estimate the number of non-Japanese Muslims at eighty thousand to one hundred thousand and Japanese Muslims at eight thousand to ten thousand.

**Is there a Muslim Community in Japan? The Situation of Muslims nowadays. Can Muslims establish their own community in Japan?**

We must shed light on the reasons why the number of Muslims in Japan is not increasing and why the lack of growth may affect the survival of the Japanese Muslim community. A decreasing number of Muslims in Japan would affect the stability of the Muslim community itself. The Muslim community faces divisions among its members, and there are divisions or disputes between Muslims even of the same nationality. A few examples can be noted from the beginning of the Muslim presence in Japan.

Although the number of Muslims in Japan seemed to increase, they were unable to establish a real Muslim community in Japan because the Muslim students coming to study or receive training went back to their home countries soon after finishing their study or training. In addition, many Japanese Muslims were deployed by Japanese corporations to work outside Japan for long periods, and some of them did not return home. This had a negative impact on the Muslim community, which needed their help. The number of female Japanese Muslims far exceeded the number of males, which created a problem for Japanese Muslim women who wanted to marry and have children and have stability in their lives as Muslims, and they had difficulty finding suitable work.

Add to this the religious freedom of Japan, which allows family members to belong to different religions. A son and daughter may belong to a religion different from that of their parents and vice versa. Hence it is not easy to form a united Japanese Muslim family within Japanese society. The father may be a Muslim while the mother is a Christian, or a son may be a Muslim while his parents are non-Muslims, and so on. Islam in Japan is not a matter of birth but of faith, and no one is compelled to embrace its doctrines.

Muslims who come to work or do business in Japan face difficulties for reasons that need not be mentioned here. They cannot necessarily continue to live or settle in Japan, but some Muslim men have married Japanese women and found refuge with their wives and their wives' families and struggled to settle in Japan.

Marriages between young male Muslim immigrants in Japan and Japanese women is considered the real beginning of groups of Muslim families that live near each other in areas close to the workplace of the head of the family or of the wife or her family. This phenomenon is evident in Tokyo and its suburbs, and here we can say clearly that the Muslim community really exists in Japan. This fact has drawn the attention of Japanese officials, who have begun to study this situation in areas where there are many Muslims. They have polled local people on their attitudes toward their Muslim neighbors, and the polls show favorable attitudes.

## Issues and problems

With the increasing number of Muslim families and the expansion of areas where Muslims are gathering, Muslims have begun to think about building more mosques and schools as well as holding religious ceremonies and reviving Islamic events throughout the year. The number of mosques in Japan has grown rapidly every year. The Muslim community supports the building of mosques with the help of Islamic organizations outside Japan as well as people who give donations for the building of mosques.

Since mosques in Japan offer Qur'an and Arabic classes, a few mosques plan to register themselves as educational corporations and establish Islamic schools. Some offer day care centers with no legal status for Muslim children. With the presence of small children in Muslim families, there is a need to establish schools suitable for this new generation of Muslims. Members of the community are eager to establish such schools, which are also keenly committed to the curriculum of the Japanese schools, since they do not want to split the young from their society.

With the emergence of what can be called a Muslim community in Japan, Muslims have faced some internal and external problems. The internal problems are related to the community itself, which consists of both Japanese Muslims and non-Japanese Muslims living in Japan, Muslims who want to work in Japan, and Muslims who come for a period of study or training.

The Muslim community also includes Muslims from many different countries, such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iran, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Arab countries. The Muslim community also includes Muslims of various sects and embracing various doctrines, Japanese Muslims are few in number, even though they are distributed among the various sects and schools of Islamic thinking. There are Japanese Sunnis and Japanese Shiites, and there are Salafis and Asharis and so on. However, they never engage in sectarian conflict, because the nature of Japanese culture allows differences while maintaining friendliness and respect. This has impacted the members of the Muslim community as a whole. Japanese and non-Japanese seek to integrate into the community by taking advantage of all that is well and good. The members of the Indian, Pakistani, Bengali communities are a good model, since they are the most actively devoted to their religion, and they are appreciated by Japanese society.

The Muslim community in Japan is still trying to solve the problem of educating its children, since Japanese recognition of Islam is extremely low in the education ministry and local governments, which is basically because they have had little experience of direct communication with Muslims. Therefore most religious education of Muslim children in Japan is supported by individual efforts, without official assistance. That is because Muslims are a small minority, and small minorities do not receive special attention. Private international schools may give more attention to a child's religious background, but a public school is the only choice for Muslim parents with limited means. Muslim parents have objections about Japanese school uniforms, school lunches, and mixed-sex physical education activities, such as swimming. The textbooks used in Japanese schools lack correct information about Islam and Muslim life. Some kind of more organized approach is necessary to address the specific education needs of Muslims in Japan.

The key issues and problems faced by the Muslim community include the difficult circumstances that arose after the events of September 11, 2001, when the U.S. government stereotyped all Muslims as terrorists and pressured many countries to tighten control on all Muslims,

without consideration, and Japan was not an exception.

In that situation, the Japanese people faced difficult questions: What is Islam? Is Islam really responsible for what happened on September 11, it was not only the Muslim community that attempted to answer these questions; a number of Japanese researchers tried to explain Islam and its principles as well. They concluded that what happened on September 11 was not related to the religion of Islam, but U.S. pressure made Japanese officials take extra security precautions and monitor Muslims living in Japan. As a result, the Japanese media launched an attack on the counterterrorism unit of the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department's Public Security Bureau. The media said it exceeded its jurisdiction by listing as terror suspects many Muslims who had lived and worked in Japan for decades. Apparently the Japanese police, under pressure from U.S. authorities, adopted this attitude toward Muslims in the aftermath of 9/11 in search of intelligence data among the city's tiny Muslim community. The Public Security Bureau was set up during the Junichiro Koizumi government after 9/11 to coordinate and gather antiterrorism intelligence.

## Conclusion

I myself feel that non-Japanese Muslims in Japan have widely retained their sense of religious and cultural identity and have generally become established as members of Japanese society. However, the Japanese police and the Japanese public must continue to accept these religious and cultural differences in order to maintain a functional society in which the rights of all people are protected.

Though the Muslim community is very small, the Japanese public of today has generally accepted it as part of Japanese society. For the most part, Japanese people accept cultural differences as colorful aspects of the world and understand that other cultures are actually not very different from their own. There are currently between thirty and forty single-story mosques in Japan, plus another hundred or more apartments used as *musalla*. The pious activities of the JMA members have made the JMA a core organization among religious organizations in Japan. JMA members are doing their best with the combined efforts of all Muslim groups in Japan to contribute to world peace and the social peace of individual members. Islamic circle of Japan (ICOJ) is playing a great roll in explaining Islam and Islamic culture to Japanese people.

Last year, after the tragedy of the earthquake and tsunami in Fokushima, the Muslim community proved that Muslims in Japan genuinely share the joys and sorrows of Japanese society. Members of the Muslim community contributed immensely to the relief efforts, and they continue to help the affected communities in the Tohoku region. Islam teaches its followers to generously offer humanitarian aid wherever the need may arise. Muslims have gone on supporting relief efforts in Japan along with Japanese and foreign relief agencies. One notable Muslim organization is Japan Islamic Trust, which has been supplying food and other necessities since the disaster took place. Other organizations were also visiting the affected areas and victims, helping the residents resettle in areas of their choice.

## 2. Muslims in Europe

### Presence of Muslims in Europe

It is well known that the presence of Muslims in Europe is old. It dates back to the Middle Ages, there have been Muslims living in Europe for many centuries and as Tariq Ramadan asserts, it is and it was a reality, within many fields, the legal field, the philosophical field and the scientific fields. Ramadan added, we very often forget that Islam and Muslims, the Islamic tradition, and Muslim philosophers, scientists and thinkers were and are a part of the structure of European Identity. Muslims have been part of European society contributing to its economic, social and political development. For some European countries former colonial ties played a significant role, in France migration was largely from Morocco, Algeria and other north African countries, in Netherlands Muslim Emigrants came from Indonesia, in the U K Muslim migrants came mainly from subcontinent India and Pakistan and after 1980 Muslim refugees arrived in Europe from Iran, Iraq and Turkey, and after 1990 from Balkan, and North Africa. Muslims also arrived as students, professionals and investors (Turkey 2.3 million, Morocco 1.7 million, Albania 0.8 and Algeria 0.6) There are estimated to be 15- 20 million Muslims living in EU, and it is expected to double by 2025, ( The OSI ( Open Society Institute, At Home in Europe project , A Report on 11 EU Cities 2010 Printed in Hungary) some Muslims in Europe are recent immigrants, others are second or third generation Europeans, there are five European countries with significant Muslim population: France 4,704,000 next Germany 4,119,000 then United Kingdom 2,869,000 followed by Spain 1,021,000 and Netherlands 900,000 ( January 2011 CRS Congressional Research Services Report prepared for the Congress title is *Muslims in Europe: Promoting Integration and countering Extremism – This report examines policies aimed at promoting integration, combating terrorism and countering violent extremism in France, Germany, the Netherlands and United Kingdom* )

Most of Muslims live in Capital cities and large industrial towns and they are suspicious. (The OSI “Open Society Institute”, At Home in Europe project, A Report on 11 EU Cities 2010 Printed in Hungary)

### Clash with Islam in Europe:

Nowadays distorted image of Islam is spreading in Europe, especially in France, the country which has taught the world liberty, fraternity and equality. Thousands of books, articles and statements of officials reveal hatred towards Islam explicitly or implicitly.

Clash with Islam began very early, but it appeared evidently in the modern era after European countries occupied Muslim countries, in case of France, after France occupied Algeria, and clash with Islam began in Egypt when Egyptian started resistance to British occupation,

Clashes, conflicts and violence in a country like France are in fact political not religious, and they, I mean clashes and violence, were the only way to express anger at the attacks on the rights and the dignity and independence of Muslims in their country and Jihad was only a liberation movement.

I take France as an example, anti-Semitism is a crime under French law, but anti-Islam is not a crime, it is a legitimate exercise of freedom of opinion, the tragedy of French thinker Jaroudi is a model for both who dare to say a word against Zionism or would say a word of truth about Islam,

according to Garoudi, Islam is an obstacle to the West's policy of economic and cultural domination on Islamic world. Garoudi says: Islam does not deny Christianity, the Quran mentioned Jesus and Mary with great respect, while Western intellectuals think all the time that Islam is an enemy to them. Salman Rushdie who continued insulting Islam, Quran and prophet of Islam is favored and welcomed and honored by western countries.

### Islam as a second religion in Europe:

In recent years, France officially recognized Islam. Islam became the second religion in France where the number of Muslims who have French citizenship is estimated by four millions, so intolerance has been increased among the French officials. The French newspaper Le Figaro published articles raised concerns and fears among the French about Islam such as the article titled "Europeans are wondering about how to coexist with Islam" Le Figaro wrote that the Europeans do not understand the reality of the threat of Islam. So the European officials started focusing on such threat and want to control immigration from Islamic countries to Europe especially after Muslims arrived in Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden.

### European Islam

Scholars are interested in discussing issues and perceptions of the west to Islam and its role with European countries, European Islam and its role and trends, and why interest in Islamic phenomenon increased in Europe after the rise of so called war on terrorism.

Scholars are also interested in discussing Muslim presence in Europe, and why the increasing of the number of Muslim immigrants is considered a danger to European identity? Because Islam is a religion and values, and the people who believe in it, are seeking their rights as a separated religion group, so there is a conflict of identity and integration resulting from the construction of Islamic (community) in Europe. There are fears and suspicious about the integration of Muslims in the existing national groupings in European countries.

In France the Islamic presence is shifting from just a simple social phenomenon to the issue of national public opinion; in Britain the most encouraging factors, for the integration of Muslims in British society are education and Islamic schools, the role of universities, the role of mosques and Imams, and the economic and social conditions of the Muslims, the role of media and British foreign policy towards the Muslim world.

It is clear that there are several factors contributed to the evolution of Islam phobia in the West and bringing it to the stage of obsessing, and increasing fears of Islamic fundamentalism and Jihad, even the vast majority of Muslims in Europe are not involve in radical activities.

### Attitude of European governments towards Muslims in Europe

European governments are doing more efforts to improve Muslim integration, such as introducing new citizenship laws, promoting dialogue with Muslim organizations, developing Imams who are more familiar with European culture and traditions and improving educational and economic opportunities for Muslims but in the same time European governments have also sought to



strengthen security measures and tighten immigration to combat (so called) terrorism ( January 2011 CRS Congressional Research Services Report prepared for the Congress title is Muslims in Europe: Promoting Integration and countering Extremism) Countries such as Germany and Spain remain cautious about limiting the rights of freedom of speech and assembly, as well as security policies that could intrude on the right to privacy or on religious freedoms.

The CRS Congressional Research Services Report suggests that: Recently, Europeans have come to recognize the necessity of better integrating their Muslims population, to reduce social tensions and inequalities, to help prevent radicalization and counter violent extremism.

The OSI research report suggests that Religious discrimination against Muslims remains a critical barrier to full and equal participation in society, research suggests that level of religious discrimination directed towards Muslims have increased in the past five years. European –born Muslims identify the police as a key source of unfair treatment and discrimination, for Muslims, the persistence of discrimination and prejudice affects the sense of national belonging. But The OSI research finds many positive initiatives taken by European officials at the local level to engage with ethnic and religious organizations, and there are ideas to support Muslims and non-Muslims communities strengthen their trust in each other and increase their ability to work together to achieve common goals. PP 26-29 )

Young Muslims, with more education and familiarity with political institutions, have greater confidence in their ability to effect local change than the older generations; Muslims are active in mainstream political parties. Parties based on ethnic and religious identity have not gained the support of Muslim votes.

### What Muslims in Europe should do according to Tariq Ramadan?

Tareq Ramadan asserts that Muslims today are required to abandon all sectarian tendencies; it should not be confused with the assembly of faith and methods of sectarian tendency dumped in isolation and uniqueness at the social, political and legislative levels.

He added, there is something that is clear now within the mainstream public Muslim discourse: Europe is home, it is not perceived as though we are not at home, this old business of Dar al Harb and Dar al Islam is something which is still in some discourse, but those who speak this way are on the margin of Muslim communities, the reality is that the main stream Muslim leaders, organizations and even citizens feel at home in Europe. Problem of Immigration in Europe is similar to that one in Japan, but in Europe it is perceived a threat, and yet at the same time a necessity, it is that Europe needs 11 million workers within the next fifteen years. Where are these workers supposed to come from? Europe is thinking now and having new laws and new security rules that are very tough because Muslim presence is perceived as a threat. Now I want to end asking you; do you think it will be perceived as a threat in Japan as well?! I leave you to think about it!

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