

Islam in Minority Muslim Countries: A Case Study on Japan and Korea

¹Fauziah Fathil and ²Fathiah Fathil

¹Department of History and Civilization, Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences (KIRKHS), International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM)

²Centre for Islamic Thought and Understanding (CITU), Universiti Teknologi MARA (UITM) Perak

Abstract: Little has so far been discussed or written on Islam and Muslims in Japan, even less so on Islam and Muslims in Korea. This is in marked contrast to nearby China, which, though is also a Muslim minority country attracted a wide attention from scholars of either Muslim or non-Muslim world. The reason is clear, that is, unlike China which consists of a sizeable number of Muslims, Muslim communities in both Japan and Korea is exceedingly small. This paper attempts to provide the much lacking information on the spread and development of Islam in these two countries, hoping that future research on the topic will be pursued by others in acquainting ourselves with fellow Muslims in Japan and Korea. To begin with, the paper will analyze the coming of Islam, the means through which Islamization process took place and the establishment of Muslim communities in Japan and Korea. Special attention will then be given to the factors which contributed to Islamic da'wah in both countries including the role of Muslim da'i, foreign and local, Muslim organizations, etc. Equally important to discuss is the contribution of overseas Muslim individuals, Muslim countries and international Islamic organizations in facilitating the da'wah movement in Japan and Korea. Next, the challenges and problems faced by the da'wah movement will be examined as they might explain the reasons for the minute number of Muslim population and the slow progress of Islamic da'wah in the countries. This is crucial since necessary actions can then be taken or solutions be sought to ensure smooth progress of da'wah activities in Japan and Korea. Finally, the prospects of Islamic da'wah will be discussed together with the reactions of the Japanese and Korean government towards Islam and Muslim population in the countries. In doing so, the impacts and outcomes of decades of da'wah in Japan and Korea can be assessed and this could also provide impetus for Muslims to find ways in promoting Islam further in these two East Asian nations.

Key words: Da'wah • Japan • Korea • Islam • Muslim

INTRODUCTION

Being the easternmost nation in the world does not prevent Japan from being widely known to others, especially in the realm of technology and economic progress. Yet, the same thing cannot be said with regard to Islam in Japan. Very little is known about the history of Islam in Japan and what is more, the little available information until present is either scattered or inconclusive.

The current statistic on the national population of Japan stands at 126,475,664 (July 2011 est.). Out of this number, the exact percentage of Muslim community in Japan is uncertain, for several reasons. To begin with, in Japan, the government simply does not keep any records

or statistics on the number of Muslims in the country. Unlike in many other countries, religion is not considered as an important demographic factor. It is deemed as a matter of individual's choice and religious freedom. No surveys done, nor people ever required to disclose their religious conviction in dealing with government agencies. Accordingly, the given total number of Muslims varies, ranging from 70,000 to 250,000 of the total population of Japan. The majority of estimates, however, of the Muslim population have been put at around 100,000 which include both ethnic Japanese Muslims and foreign Muslims residing in the country. That mentioned, there is, however, no conclusive or reliable data on the number of ethnic or local Japanese Muslims. The estimates range from as low as 1,000 up to as high as 10,000. One view

Corresponding Author: Fauziah Fathil, Department of History and Civilization, Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences (KIRKHS), International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM).
Tel: +60361964075, Fax: +60361965150.

states that 90% of Muslims in Japan are foreign nationals and only about 10% are locals, but still, it is just another assumption.

Having mentioned the various estimates, the Muslim community itself is extremely small that is about 0.08% in proportion to the Japanese national population of more than 120 million. In comparison to Shintoism and Buddhism whose followers constitute 83.9% and 71.4% respectively (many people in Japan belong to both Shintoism and Buddhism) of the national population of the country, Islam is a minority religion with its total number of follower even less than that of Christianity (an estimated of 2% of the total population of Japan practice Christianity). It is also important to note that foreign Muslims coming from countries like Bangladesh, Pakistan, Turkey and Indonesia constitute the majority of the Muslims in Japan while the ethnic Japanese Muslims form the minority. Having migrated to Japan in the 1980s and 1990s, these foreign Muslims consist of mainly factory and construction workers, businessmen and students, living primarily in major urban centers such as Hiroshima, Kyoto, Nagoya, Osaka and Tokyo.

As for Korea, first and foremost, it is important to point out here that the study only concentrates on Islam and Islamic da'wah in South Korea. The reason being information on Islam or Muslims in the other half of Korea, namely North Korea is almost non-existent. It is believed that there is no significant presence of Islam in the country nor are other religions such as Buddhism or Confucianism being widely practiced in North Korea due to the communist nature of the North Korean government. On the other hand, South Korea allows religious activities and with the availability of sources of Islam in the country, limited though they may be, renders the study of Islam and Islamic da'wah in South Korea feasible. Yet, in the following discussions, the word 'Korea' and 'South Korea' will be used interchangeably as it is easily understood that Islam in Korea means Islam in South Korea given the non-existence of autonomous religious activities in North Korea.

As with Japan, South Korea is particularly noted for its excellent economic growth and very little is known about minority religions practiced by its people including Islam. Similarly, the data on Muslims in the country as those Muslims in Japan is varied. Various estimates are given on the number of Muslims in South Korea, ranging from as low as 100,000 to as high as 250,000 out of the total population of around 48,754,657 (July 2011 est.). The majority, however, puts the Muslim population in Korea at around 120,000 – 130,000. Out of the total Muslim

population, the local Koreans according to some sources constitute up to 30,000 to 45,000. The rest are Muslims from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Indonesia and other Muslim countries who migrated as workers in the country or students during the 1990s and 2000s. However, unlike Japan where local belief Shintoism and Buddhism dominated the country, the followers of Buddhism form only 23.2% of the total population of South Korea and of the rest 26.3% practising Christianity, 49.3 % atheists or free thinkers and the followers of other beliefs about 1% [1]. Muslim community in South Korea is thus, a minority, that it constitutes about 0.25% (based on the majority estimate) of the South Korean general population. Like their fellow Muslims in Japan, the Muslims in South Korea are heavily concentrated in urban centers particularly in the capital Seoul area.

The Coming of Islam to Japan: Compared to many other countries in Asia and Africa or even Europe, the presence of Islam in Japan is quite recent, that is over one hundred years ago. A substantial contact with Islam mainly took place following an increasing interest shown by Ottoman Turks in the country in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Yet, this is one view. There are many other theories as to the first encounter between Islam and the people of Japan. As with the actual number of Muslims in Japan, the absence of records gets in the way of presenting the true picture of what happened in the course of Islam getting a foothold in the country.

As for the period before 1868 (the starting year of Meiji era in Japan), there are no historical traces of any contact between Islam and Japan. This is despite a claim that there had been some isolated contacts following the arrival of some Muslims in Nagasaki even before the opening of the country to foreigners. More claims, however, relate to the events during the Meiji era (1868-1912). Following the opening of the country in 1853, Western traders started to come to Japan for trade and it was through this means, namely trade, that Islam is said to have reached the country. As the foreign traders settled in Japanese port cities such as Yokohama, Nagasaki, Kobe, Osaka and Niigata, Western knowledge began to infiltrate into Japan. In the late 1870s, the Japanese started to learn about Islam and the life of Prophet Muhammad s.a.w. through the Western books available to them. Nevertheless, at this stage, no serious study of Islam was embarked on as the locals viewed Islam as part of the history of world cultures or Western religious thought. There is also a claim that there had

lived in Tokyo, Yokohama and Kobe at that time a number of Indian Muslim merchants who formed the first small Muslim community in Japan and that it was through them that the people of Japan obtained the first glimpse of Islam. Moreover, there is a view which suggests that the first Muslims who made contacts with the Japanese were Malay sailors who served on board British and Dutch ships. While this is probable given the fact that Malay states and Indonesia at that time were under British and Dutch rule, there is simply no evidence to support such a view.

While many writings tend to concentrate on the nineteenth century events, there is however, a view that contacts between Japan and Muslims through trade had occurred as early as eighth century A.D. The contacts were made through the famous Silk Route which linked Middle East, Central Asia and East Asia. This is based on the existence of a set of collections of objects obtained from Persia and Middle East which belonged to Emperor Shomu who ruled Japan from 724 – 749. Apart from the acquisition of objects from such places, it is also argued the Silk Route also led to the influence of Islam on Japanese Buddhism which was practiced during the latter part of Heian period (1185-1333) and the Kamakura period (1185-1333) [2]. Interestingly, though it is difficult to substantiate this view, these periods of religious reform in Japan corresponded to the peak of trade relations through the Silk Route between the Abbasid Caliphate and the Far East [3].

Apart from trade, Islam had also reached Japan through diplomatic relations with Muslim countries. The first substantial contact, which is proven by documents, followed the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Ottoman Caliphate in the late nineteenth century. Being the only countries in Asia which remained independent and free from colonial rule at that time, both Japan and Ottoman were under increasing Western pressure. Consequently they started to exchange official visits. Despite the misfortune which had befallen onto a Turkish mission on its way home [4] in 1890, positive outcomes emerged out of the incident, much to the favour of the future of Islam in Japan. The most notable is the sympathy shown by the government and people of Japan towards Muslims in Ottoman Turkey in particular and Muslim Turks in general. Not only did the Japanese government build a memorial to commemorate the victims of the tragic incident, but also as revealed in recent studies, there were a few Japanese who went to Istanbul to hand over donations raised in Japan to the Ottoman authorities and they consequently

embraced Islam. Another significant impact is that it contributed to the later Japanese sympathetic attitude towards Turkish population in the early twentieth century, i.e. in the aftermath of Bolshevik Revolution. The Russian expansionism in Central Asia which followed the Bolshevik Revolution coupled with socialist ideology of the new Russian regime, had forced many Muslim Turks to leave their homes and migrate to Japan. The government of Japan gave asylum to several hundreds of Turks included Turkomans, Uzbeks, Tadjiks, Kirghizs and Kazakhs. Here, the Japanese policy was not driven by sheer sympathy towards the Turks alone, since in the Turks they saw a potential ally against their old enemy, Russia. Consequently, a significant Muslim community was established and Islam started to spread considerably in Japan. Apart from the Turks, there were also some Egyptians who came and settled in Japan. Unlike the Turks who came for survival reason, the Egyptians, who were mostly military officers, had volunteered to serve in the Japanese Imperial Army as they were impressed by the Japanese victory in the Russo-Japanese war (1904-05). Some of them returned back to Egypt, but some others remained and married Japanese women.

It is important to point out here that the coming of Islam in Japan is not a one-way process that it is merely a result of an external influence from outside of Japan. There were also serious efforts made the Japanese people to explore the religion. Yet, such efforts were not only of a later period, i.e. during the Second World War, but also with a specific strategic agenda. With the establishment of the Japanese empire in 1941, the military government of Japan had set out on the quest for necessary knowledge about Islam so that they would be able to effectively rule over Muslim communities in China and Southeast Asia. Thus, official organizations and research centers were formed and over a hundred of books and journals published on Islam and Muslim world with the aim not to propagate Islam but solely to facilitate the running of the Japanese administration in the occupied areas. Apart from these government-controlled organizations, there were also non-governmental associations formed during the period which showed their concern of the fate of Muslims living under Western colonial rule [5]. Sharing the same anti-West sentiment with Muslims in other parts of the world, Japanese intellectuals formed academic links with their counterparts in the Muslim countries and had intellectual exchanges and visits between them [6]. However, as most of these organizations and centers were founded on the basis of anti-West, with the end of the war and the defeat of Japan to Allied Powers in 1945, they

quickly faded away. Whatever that remained were either dissolved or banned by SCAP (Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers) during its occupation of Japan (1945-52) as they were seen as instruments of Japanese military campaign. With the end of Occupation rule in 1952, unhindered by any foreign control, there emerged a number of Muslim organizations in Japan, few of which were very active in da'wah activities.

In the 1970s, there was a widespread inclination in Japan to look up to the Muslim World, which consequently led to the increasing number of Japanese Muslim converts in Japan. This trend known as "Islamic Boom" followed the outbreak of the "Oil Crisis" in 1973. The importance of oil and Arab countries as primary oil-producing countries to Japan were acknowledged and so, much publicity was given to Islam and the Muslim World. As the people began to know more about Islam, many Japanese converted to Islam. While there were sincere Muslim converts among them, there were also those who converted out of admiration or just to keep up with what was viewed at that time as fashionable trend. With the end of the "Oil Crisis", many of the insincere Muslim converts abandoned their belief for a new one [7]. In the decade of 1980s, there were more positive signs of Islam getting a foothold in Japan. This followed the migration to Japan thousands of Asian workers from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iran, Indonesia and Malaysia who responded to the problem of labour shortage in Japan. Having worked mainly in small businesses or factories at first, by the 1990s, some managed to obtain legal residence in Japan by marrying Japanese women. In the 1990s, many students from Muslim countries enrolled in Japanese colleges and universities with some of them finding jobs in Japan and staying in the country after graduation.

The Coming of Islam to Korea: If substantial contact between Islam and Japan started over one hundred years ago, i.e. following the diplomatic relations between the Japanese and Ottomans, Korean experience of Islam was relatively new. It started over fifty years ago when a war broke out in the Korean peninsula known as the Korean War (1950-53). Yet, to say Islam was totally unknown to Koreans before the event would be inaccurate. There are a few views which are worthy to mention here with regard to the early coming of Islam to Korea. The earliest contact between Koreans and Muslims is said to have taken place in the seventh century A.D. through trade. According to this view, Arab and Persian traders had travelled from the Middle East to China and later established contact with the ancient Korean kingdom of Silla (668-936 A.D.)

Another view, however, states that real contact with Silla was not made until two centuries later, that is in ninth century A.D. From either view, it can be deduced that trade factor is one commonality that characterized the early contacts between Islam with both Japan and Korea. When Huang-ch'ao Rebellion occurred in 879 A.D. in China, some Muslim traders might have also migrated to Korea to save their lives, thus, making direct contact and made Islam known to the Koreans [8]. Similar to Islam in Japan, it is difficult to assess the impact of these early contacts on the local population. Given the lack of records on Muslim community in Korea during the early period, the impact of Islam can be said, was minimal. There is no solid evidence to suggest that the early Arabs or Persians resided permanently in Korea in large number or involved in the spreading of Islam vigorously during this period.

More positive developments for the future of Islam in Korea took place in the twentieth century with Muslim Turks at the forefront of the proselytising process. Having been assigned by the United Nations to provide military forces and other assistance to Republic of Korea (South Korea) during the Korean War alongside other forces from 15 different countries, the Turkish army through their da'wah activities had attracted some local Koreans to embrace Islam. The first mosque in South Korea was in fact, built during the presence of the Turkish army in the country. Since then, the Muslim population has been steadily increasing. After the Turkish troops left Korea, Islam continued to be spread by Turkish soldiers who chose to remain or stay in the country [9]. However, it is erroneous to presume that this was the first contact between the Turks and Koreans. Earlier, some Turkish Muslims from Central Asia particularly of Uyghur origin reached Korea during the rule of Koryo dynasty (1270-1368). Some had permanently settled and formed their own Muslim community in the peninsula. Unfortunately, due to a decree against foreign cultures issued during the reign of Chosun dynasty (1392-1910), the Muslims began to assimilate local culture and customs, eventually abandoning their own [10]. The Turks reached the Korean peninsula for the second time in considerable number in the 1920s following the Russian expansionism in Central Asia. Attempted to escape from Russian rule, some Turks fled to Korea and some went further and reached Japan. Despite these early contacts between the Koreans and Muslim Turks, it is widely accepted that it was not until the outbreak of the Korean War that the influence of Islam was strongly felt which resulted in the religion being slowly re-introduced and getting a foothold in Korea.

In relation to twentieth century events, it is worthy to mention that Islam is also said to have spread in Korea through contacts between Koreans and Muslims in Manchuria. It is estimated that at least 1 million Koreans went to live in Manchuria between 18905 – 1928 for political and economic reasons. It was in Manchuria that some Koreans converted to Islam after having established contacts with Muslim people in the region [9].

As with Islam in Japan, the economic boom in the Middle East in 1970s plus the improved commercial relations between Korea and Arab or Muslim countries had resulted in more Koreans embracing Islam. Seizing the opportunity of the "Boom of Middle East" as it was called in Korea, many Koreans went to the Middle Eastern countries for economic reasons to work as foreign workers. As they developed contacts with local Muslims of the Arab countries, some of the Koreans converted to Islam. Furthermore, the coming of Muslim workers and students in the 1990s and 2000s from other Muslim countries such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iran, Iraq, Malaysia, Indonesia, etc, further contributed to the spread of Islam in Korea. Like in Japan, some of these foreign-born Muslims resolved to stay permanently in Korea, thus, led to the steady growth of Islam and Muslims in the country.

Islamic Da'wah: Definition, Concept and Methodology:

Before we continue with Islamic da'wah in Japan and Korea, it is relevant to bring to light the definition, concept and methodology of Islamic da'wah. The explanations, however, will be brief as the paper seeks to present the process of Islamic da'wah in the two countries without going into in-depth discussion on the term da'wah itself. Literally, da'wah is from an Arabic word which means to call upon or invite towards something. The word implies one's effort and commitment in achieving the desired goal and thus, connotes in Islam the elements of jihad and 'amal. Furthermore, in Islam, da'wah is a specific concept as it is made obligatory[11] upon each Muslim who is qualified to carry out the da'wah to other people whenever appropriate in various forms and ways.

In principle, da'wah is to be done without coercion since Islam emphasizes no force in the matters of belief or religion. It should be carried in an apt manner considering the time, place and people to whom Islam is introduced either through speech, writing or any other suitable means. There are three ways, which according to *ahlul tafsir* describe effective da'wah namely, through wisdom or *hikmah*, good advice or *mau'izah hasanah* and proper dialog or debate. This is based on Allah's saying in surah

al-Nahl: verse 125 [12]. Looking at the da'wah process in both Japan and Korea, one will find that it was done in line with the above methods of Islamic da'wah. For that reason, no negative repercussions had so far resulted from the da'wah activities in the two countries despite Islam being minority religion and Muslims in these countries being minority group. The following discussions will highlight readers on the means through the da'wah was carried out and other related aspects of da'wah in the two countries, Japan and Korea.

Islamic Da'wah in Japan and Korea: In doing da'wah in Japan and Korea, the role of foreign Muslim missionaries or da'i is indispensable. Coming from countries like India, Pakistan, Russia, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, etc, the da'i gave Islamic lectures and called the local Japanese and Koreans towards Islam. Their intention was clear, that is to propagate Islam and perform da'wah. In the case of Japan, da'wah activities by foreign Muslim da'i started after the end of the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05) amidst news that the Japanese showed an interest in Islam. Among the early da'i included Sur Faraz Hussein and Muhammad Barakatullah from India and Abdur-Rasheed Ibrahim from Russia. Of the later group who came in the ensuing decades of 1930s – 1970s included Turkish preacher from Central Asia Abdul Hayy Qurban Ali, Alimullaah Siddiqi from India, Sheikh Abdullah Togai from Al-Azhar University Egypt and Abdur-Rasheed Arshad and Sayed Jameel from Pakistan. Apart from calling the people to Islam, the da'i also involved in publishing Islamic reading materials such as magazines to spread the message of Islam to the people. One of the earliest Islamic magazines is '*Islamic Fraternity*' issued by Muhammad Barakatullah for the period of three years from 1910-13 and '*Yapan Makhbari*' in a Tatar or Turkish language by Abdul Hayy Qurban Ali. [13] They also contributed in the establishment of early mosques in Japan such as in the capital Tokyo, having established good contacts with the Japanese government and succeeded in getting donations from Muslim community from inside and outside of Japan. Similar setting can be witnessed in Korea whereby in the early stage of the spread of Islam da'i from foreign Muslim countries had greatly involved in the da'wah process in the country. The most notable were Imam Abdulgafur Karaismailoglu, Imam Zubeyir Koch and Imam Abdul Rahman who were assigned to the Turkish army during the Korean War, Al-Fathil Maulana Syed Mohammed Jamil and Dr. Mohammed Iliyas from Pakistan in the 1960s. Other da'i included Muhibul Haq Arif and Fazlul Qadir Siddiqui from Libya who came to Korea in the 1970s.

In addition to foreign Muslim da'i, acknowledgment and credit should be rendered to local Muslim da'i without whose efforts the former might encounter greater challenge in doing da'wah in Japan and Korea. Committed to disseminate Islam to their fellow Japanese and Koreans the local Muslim da'i actively involved in the da'wah activities, giving Islamic talks and seminars, setting up Muslim organizations and societies and organizing various activities for Muslim community. Among the prominent Japanese Muslims who involved in such works are like Mustafa Komura, Umar Mita, Umar Yamaoka, Abdul-Muneer Watanabe, Sadiq Imaizumi and Umar Yukiba [14]. In Korea, having inspired by the da'wah work of Turkish Imam Abdulgafur Karaismailoglu, Muhammad Yoon Doo-Young, Umar Kim Jin-kyu and Abdullah Kim Yu-do undertook the preaching of Islam to their fellow Koreans. Other notable Korean Muslim da'i included Kim Myung Hwan and Abdullah Jun Deuk Lin.

The existence of various Muslim organizations and societies also facilitated Islamic da'wah in Japan and Korea. Having received recognition from local authorities, the organizations carry out the da'wah openly or publicly. Some were founded by overseas Muslim da'i or scholars and others by local Muslim leaders. The most prominent organizations are *Japan Muslim Association* [15] and *Islamic Center Japan (ICJ)* [16] in Japan and *Korea Muslim Federation (KMF)* [17] in Korea. They are centered in the capital Tokyo and Seoul respectively. The main da'wah activities of these organizations consist of undertaking translation of Quran, publication of Islamic reading materials, organizing regular Islamic seminars and conferences for non-Muslims, offering Arabic classes, conducting Islamic circles or *halaqah*, providing Islamic education or lessons to Muslim children, arranging training programme for Muslim leaders and sending students to further studies on Islam in Muslim countries. They are also instrumental in acquiring donations from Muslim governments and agencies in building mosques and setting up Islamic schools and institutes. The KMF for one even went further by reaching out to Koreans who are working overseas especially in Muslim countries. For this purpose, the KMF established its branch and Islamic Centre which provide regular Islamic lecture and education to Koreans in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia (1978), Kuwait (1979) and Indonesia (1982). As a result, several thousands of Korean workers in these countries embraced Islam up to now. Apart from the leading Muslim organizations, there are other active Muslim societies such as those established by Muslim students who studied in local universities [9] and smaller societies founded at prefectural level.

Equally important to highlight is the contributions by various foreign Muslim countries, international Islamic organizations and overseas Muslim individuals to the cause of Islam in Japan and Korea. Representatives of Muslim governments such as Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Indonesia, Egypt and Turkey, international Islamic agencies and sincere Muslim individuals provided fund, Islamic publications, manpower, sponsorship to Korean Muslim students, etc to facilitate Islamic da'wah in Japan and Korea. For instance, the government of Saudi Arabia in 1974 had despatched a group of da'i to preach Islam in Japan. The first twentieth century mosque in South Korea built in 1976 was a result of the fund donated by Malaysian and other Muslim governments. In 2008, the government of Saudi Arabia provided a large fund which led to the establishment of the first Islamic school in South Korea [18]. The money donated by foreign Muslim governments was also used to sponsor young Japanese or Korean Muslims to further their study on Islam at various institutions in Muslim countries. As for international Islamic agencies, Islamic Development Bank, Jeddah for example, had sponsored the enlargement of the Seoul Central Mosque and Islamic Centre, Korea. In Korea, several individual Muslim donors built mosques, making it easier for Muslims in the country to practice Islam and perform da'wah [19].

While the above points are the main factors facilitating the Islamic da'wah in Japan and Korea, there is a more subtle way of how Islam touched the hearts of local population of the countries. Some Japanese and Koreans converted to Islam as a result of their personal contacts with individual Muslims who are practising Islam. Interestingly, the majority of those who converted due to such a contact are young men and women. In Japan, many local women married foreign Muslims men from countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iran and Indonesia [20]. As to what motivated these women to change their religion to Islam, while one may cast doubt on their intentions, many of the women confessed that they had been searching for a meaningful religion and they found the beauty of Islam through their association with practising Muslims. This reason seems to be the most valid as the life after conversion is not always easy as it requires many changes in nearly every aspect of life. Not only local Muslim convert have to perform religious duties as Muslims, but also to change their way of dressing, eating habit, etc. Worst still, some even have to experience alienation from family and friends because of their decision to embrace Islam.

Challenges and Problems of Da'wah: In explaining the reason for the small number of Muslims in Japan and Korea, some people tend to point to the slow progress of da'wah of Islam in these countries. Unlike in some other countries where the number of Muslim converts reached few thousands per year, the recorded number of new converts among the Japanese and Koreans is low, most likely about a few hundred per year [21].

In looking at the challenges and problems facing the Islamic da'wah in Japan and Korea, some factors are worthy of discussion. To begin with, the slow progress of Islam among the people in Japan and Korea is to a large extent caused by the people's ignorance of the religion. Even in the present day, a large proportion of Japanese and Koreans are ignorant of what Islam is. They know very little about Islam and whatever that they know of are either sketchy or misleading. This ignorance is more a result of their misunderstanding of Islam, lack of interests in getting to know Islam, lack of personal contacts with Muslims, limited or ineffective programs conducted by Muslim groups to acquaint non-Muslims with Islam and lack of Muslim *da'i* who are fluent in Japanese or Korean language.

The misunderstanding of Islam among the people of Japan and Korea today is mainly caused by inaccurate or distorted information conveyed in the printed and electronic media. Coming primarily from the West, the twisted information is meant to portray a bad image of Islam in the minds of people worldwide. As the majority of Japanese and Koreans have no direct experience with Muslims, their views on Islam and Muslims are therefore likely to be shaped by the media. Due to this, the stereotyped images of Islam as violent, intolerant, lack of freedom, involves rigid doctrines and a strange religion of underdeveloped countries, which characterized the views of non-Muslims in Japan and Korea in the 1950s and 1960s continue to be held by many Japanese and Koreans of today [22]. Unfortunately, the September 11 attack and the subsequent policies especially of the Western governments which related to the war on terrorism have intensified these negative views of Islam and Muslims as a whole. If Islam is seen as a religion that propagates terrorism, the Muslims are suspiciously viewed as potential terrorists. All these developments coupled with constant media reports about Islamic terrorism caused fear and led the non-Muslims to distance themselves from Islam. For instance, the recent allegations that al-Qaeda and other radical Islamic groups have established a presence among the Muslim community in Japan, have further enhanced this fear and negative attitudes towards Islam and Muslims alike. Similarly, threats from certain

Islamic groups including al-Qaeda to attack Japan for being a close ally of the United States and various explosive incidents in few other countries did not help to reduce these unwanted perceptions about Islam and Muslims. As the Japanese or Koreans hold to such negative views of Islam, consequently, they have little interest to get to know Islam.

In addition, the ignorance of Islam among the local Japanese and Koreans can also be attributed to the lack of contacts with Muslim communities in the respective countries. While the immigrant Muslim workers constitute a large percentage of the Muslim community in both countries, they are mainly concentrated at major urban centers such as Hiroshima, Kyoto, Nagoya, Osaka and Tokyo in Japan or in case of Korea at Seoul, Gwangju, Pusan and Daegu. Having placed in such locations, very seldom they could conduct effective *da'wah* programs or activities involving non-Muslims who live in other parts of the countries. The small number of Muslim communities also made it difficult to organize activities involving the non-Muslims as effective programs require a great amount of resources and manpower. Furthermore, there is also a lack of contact between Japanese or Korean Muslims and their fellow countrymen who are non-Muslims. Although they share the same language which provides an effective means of communication, many of the local Muslims chose to live nearby and to be closely connected with the already established foreign Muslim communities. While such a decision could be motivated by a sense of brotherhood between the local and foreign Muslims or for convenience, it led the non-Muslims to think of Islam as something foreign and thus, to be avoided or kept away from.

A more direct factor which poses challenge to the Islamic da'wah in Japan and Korea is a lack of Muslim *da'i* especially among locals. Consequently, some foreign Muslims have to be brought in normally through personal contacts from countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh, Egypt, etc to become *da'i* and imams at mosques and involve in the da'wah activities. Having been brought up in their home countries, communication problem is thus, inevitable since many of the foreign-born *da'i* are not fluent or have limited knowledge of Japanese or Korean language. Instead, the predominant languages of the foreign *da'i* and imams are Arabic, Urdu, Bengali and English. Not only are they handicapped in the local language but also with respect to the knowledge of local culture and customs. Furthermore, the majority of the *da'i* and imams did not receive prior training as *da'i* or imams. Hence, given all these shortcomings, the da'wah to non-Muslim population has not always been very effective.

Lack of fund to carry out activities and programs also caused problem in the efforts to spread Islamic da'wah. Very often, the Muslim communities or organizations in Japan and Korea have to seek for donations and contributions from overseas Muslims governments, agencies or Muslim communities to build the much needed facilities such as mosques and educational institutions. The mosques are particularly crucial in spreading da'wah since these institutions served not only as places of worship but also information centres for those who wish to learn more about Islam. Reading and audio materials on Islam are given for free to those who visit the mosques. Despite the contributions by the Muslim governments and communities, the accumulated fund always falls short that some of the proposed projects to build mosques or Islamic schools sometimes have to be postponed until sufficient money could be obtained from other potential sources.

In addition, personal reasons related to local custom and culture also forms obstacle for Islamic da'wah. Among the prospective Muslim converts, there is a fear of being isolated by their families and friends or discriminated at work if they converted to Islam. Such a feeling is primarily obvious among the Japanese since in Japan religion is part of the cherished national and traditional culture which needs to be maintained in order to avoid breakdown in the Japanese society. To most Japanese, abandoning religion is thus, seen as an act of selfishness on the part of the converts who place personal beliefs ahead of family or collective duties. Consequently, some Japanese converts have to face rejection by their families and alienation from friends as their conversion is seen as "un-Japanese" or an act of betrayal of Japanese customs and traditions, which form the Japanese identity. Apart from social ostracism by family and friends, conversion could also affect one's economic security or employment in government or private enterprise [23]. While the Korean people are less attached to their culture and tradition compared to the Japanese (as shown in the low percentage of Koreans who professed as adherents of traditional religion, i.e. Buddhism as opposed to Japanese), still, some Koreans who converted to Islam experienced alienation and rejection by their families and friends. Another problem which is applicable to both Japanese and Korean society are accustomed practices associated with local custom and culture which prospective converts may find difficult to let go such as drinking alcohol, eating pork, etc. Because of these reasons, some Japanese and Koreans chose not to convert to Islam despite their interest in the faith.

There is, however, one challenge which is peculiar to the da'wah activity in Japan, namely, syncretism. The Japanese religious beliefs are generally associated with syncretism where they often mixed elements from different religions such as Shintoism, Buddhism and in some cases Christianity. The "tawhidic" concept of Islam which demands full exclusive belief in one God and the elaborated religious injunctions and principles to that effect are, thus, seen as too rigid and difficult to adhere. This explains the large number of people in Japan who admitted to be adherents of Buddhism and Shintoism as compared to Korea where the Buddhists only constitutes about only 20% of its total population. Another point to mention which is also related to Korea is that, both the Japanese and Koreans are often described as having developed high materialistic tendencies in life and to suit that inclination they adopted a relaxed and easygoing attitudes towards religion. Unlike Muslims, most Japanese and Koreans do not engage in daily religious practices or concern with broad philosophical questions regarding the meaning and purpose of life or the nature of existence. Instead they adopt a casual practice of religion and this is illustrated in some of their religious activities. For instance, during religious festivals, drinking is considered as both religious and social event. Neither do they consider discussions on religious issues and beliefs nor assertion of one's belief especially in public as necessary.

Prospects of Islamic Da'wah: As to the future of Islamic da'wah in Japan and Korea, the prospect as a whole is promising. While some problems related to the da'wah activities such as the fear of being isolated as encountered by new Muslim converts and the syncretism in the Japanese belief system will remain, some will subside and things will likely improve with time especially as the Muslim population slowly grows in number. Despite the small number of Muslim community in present Japan in Korea, it is encouraging to see that Islam is steadily growing and that many of the converts are young people. For instance, over 65% of the total local Korean Muslim population belongs to the 20–30 and 30–40 age groups, representing primarily students and employees respectively [24]. With the steady increase of the number of Muslims in Japan and Korea and the existing trend which saw more young people converted to Islam, contacts between Muslims and non-Muslims either at workplace or in other areas will increase substantially and this would help the local non-Muslim population to have a better understanding about Islam.

In line with the growing Muslim population, the number of mosques, Islamic schools and Muslim organizations, which could enhance the da'wah process further, is expected to increase. Mosques can now be found in almost all major cities in Japan and Korea. Many Muslim communities in different parts of the countries planned to build mosques in the near future and for such purpose, many overtures were made to local and international Muslim governments and communities from time to time to obtain funds or donations. It is estimated that there are currently twelve well-established mosques, between thirty and forty single-story mosques and one hundred or more apartment rooms for prayers in Japan [25]. It is noted that Pakistani Muslims is the most active group with regard to the opening and operating of mosques in Japan. Having acquired the resident status through their marriage with Japanese women, some Pakistanis set up their own businesses and it is from their business profits that they contributed in the financing of the construction and operation of mosques. They have also created organisations to build mosques like the *Islamic Circle of Japan* and the *Japan Islamic Trust* [26]. In Korea, there are currently ten mosques in major cities like Gwangju, Pusan, Anyang, Jeonju dan Daegu with the biggest at Itaewon district in Seoul. This number is certainly satisfactory given the non-existence of proper mosque in Korea until mid 1970s. Apart from the mosques, there are also about five Islamic centers and about forty to sixty musolla in Korea [27].

Similarly, there exist relentless attempts by Muslims in Japan and Korea to establish full-time regular Islamic schools. In Japan for instance, the *Japan Islamic Trust* built in 2004 an International Islamic School located next to Otsuka Mosque, Tokyo. Yet, as it received no official status as educational institution from the Japanese government, it now provides preschool-level education for Muslim children. Another leading Muslim organization, the *Islamic Center Japan* has also for some years attempted to set up an Islamic school. Though the idea did not yet materialize, serious efforts are now being made to establish the school [28]. In Korea, Muslim achievements in Islamic education implies a better prospect for da'wah as there were already Islamic schools established in few major cities. Currently, the Muslims are working on the plan to set up a Da'wah Institute, having received permission and land from the Korean government [29]. Moreover, there is also Korea Institute of Islamic Culture (1997) founded at the Korean capital with the aim among others to disseminate accurate information on Islam to non-Muslim community in the country.

Also increased are the number of Muslim organizations in Japan and Korea. For instance, there are currently about forty active Muslim organizations in Japan [3]. Some of the organizations are very enthusiastic in doing da'wah and this indicates a positive sign towards a better future of Islam. Equally encouraging is the more active approach taken in recent years by some Muslim organizations in spreading da'wah. This is done through publication and distribution of books, magazines and pamphlets on Islam in Arabic, Urdu and local language. Apart from the conventional da'wah activities such as Islamic lectures by prominent Muslim scholars and off-print publications, the organizations also provide Islamic guidance through telephones and e-mails, dissemination of knowledge on Islam on websites, conducting training *hajj* programs, Arabic classes, the study of Qur'an, etc [30]. For instance, in Japan there are now more than twenty places all over Japan teaching Arabic language and literature and more and more books on Islam find their way on bookshelves in book stores throughout the country. In Korea, currently there are about twenty Muslims organizations, inclusive small associations throughout the country. While the da'wah activities in Korea are generally similar to those in Japan, Arabic courses are being offered at university level, such as at Korea Islamic University and Hankuk University of Foreign Studies.

Moreover, the effort undertaken by Muslim community or organizations in sending young local Muslims to study about Islam in established Islamic universities overseas is also worthwhile to mention. The aim is to produce effective Muslim *da'i* who can teach Islam to the local population in their own language. The *Japan Muslim Association* and *Islamic Center Japan* for instance, had sent a small number of Japanese converts to Egypt, Pakistan, Malaysia and Saudi Arabia in the 1960s and 1970s to master Arabic language and study Islam. Now, some of them are active *da'i*, working and teaching Arabic in Japanese universities and also in companies. In Korea, the attempt to recruit local *da'i* began as early as 1962 when eleven young Muslims including women were sent to Malaysia to learn Islam. In 1977, sponsored by Muhammadiyah group (Indonesia), seventy young Muslims went to Indonesia to enhance their knowledge in Islamic studies. In recent years more Japanese and Korean Muslims were sent to various higher learning institutions in Muslim countries in the Middle East, South Asia and Southeast Asia. Though the number of recruits is generally small, still, with the knowledge they acquired, the work to propagate Islam among non-Muslims in both Japan and Korea can be done more effectively.

With regard to the prevailing negative images of Islam and Muslims broadcasted in the mass-media, as the memories of the September 11 slowly fading away, it is hoped that Islam and Muslims will become more accepted in Japan and Korea. It is worth to note here that despite the negative perceptions, Muslims residing in Japan and Korea encounter little to almost no hostility from the local population since the bad feeling is not held intensely as in Europe or the United States. Moreover, in the case of Japan particularly, most Japanese by their nature often restrain their emotions in front of others and keep their thoughts to themselves. This explains the absence of the kind of reactions noticeable in the Western society towards Muslims. Interestingly in Japan, as much as terrorism associated with the Islam or Muslims conveyed in the Western media enhanced the negative perceptions of Islam and Muslims among the Japanese, it is argued that the recent aggressive Western policies towards Muslim countries like Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran and Palestine led to increasing interest among the Japanese to know more about Islam. NHK, the semi-official television and radio channels in Japan, for instance, now broadcasts more news on Islam and activities or events of Muslims in Japan [3]. Surely the Muslims also have a role to play to reduce the negative perceptions among the Japanese or Koreans. The Muslims in the two countries should promote more interactions and contacts with the larger local population and more importantly, the Muslims themselves need to portray a good image by behaving righteously.

It is interesting to find a view, as projected by some people, that Islam can be actively promoted in minority Muslim countries such as Japan and Korea through Sufism. While Sufism has not always been the main tool in carrying out da'wah, according to this view, Sufism is the most suitable means especially in the case of Japan since both Sufism and Japanese religion adopt a syncretic approach. Both for instance, allow for veneration of saints. Such a commonality implies that Islam in the Sufi form would be better tolerated in Japan than would be the strictly Sunni doctrines. This is supported by the recent development in Japan where most of the new religions in the country which are increasingly popular contain a mixture of components from different religions [24]. In fact, as proven in the history of Islam in Japan, some Japanese had embraced Islam as a result of da'wah activities by Tabligh group (Sufi group) from Pakistan which came to Japan between 1956 and 1960. Equally refreshing is a view that the spread of Islam in these countries could perhaps be best affected

through some liberal forms of Islam coming via North Africa or Europe due the untoward feelings which the non-Muslims in Japan and Korea felt towards Islam and Muslims originated from the Middle East.

As far as the local Japanese and Korean authorities or government are concerned, it can be said that they are not hostile towards the Muslim community since full freedom of religion is guaranteed by the countries' constitution. Moreover, such an attitude of the Japanese and Korean governments towards the Muslims is partly attributed to their Middle Eastern policy. Having recognized the economic benefits derived from cordial relations with rich Muslim countries in the Middle East, the local governments especially of Korea adopted an open-minded approach towards Islam and Muslim community. Not only did the government of Korea recognize the Korea Muslim Federation but in several occasions had donated lands as building sites for major projects for Muslims such as the Central Mosque and Islamic Center in Seoul and Korea Islamic University. Amidst the outcry against Islam and Muslims worldwide following the September 11 attack, the Korean government had organized, much to the relief of the Muslims in Korea, a Korea-Middle East Forum to convey message to the non-Muslim population in the country that not all Muslims are aggressive or violent. The government had also conducted exhibitions of Islamic art, cultural performances, film screenings on Islam and food festivals to improve ties between non-Muslims in Korea and the Muslim world [31]. In comparison to Korea, the Japanese government, though it gave recognition to Muslim organizations in the country, until now did not permit official Islamic school to be established in the country. Nor did the government donate lands for the purpose of the construction of mosques or Islamic schools. To explain this policy of Japan, it is mainly due to the cautious approach adopted by the government to ensure that there would be no strong opposition amongst non-Muslim population who are, as mentioned earlier, still adhere closely to their culture and tradition. The Korean government, on the other hand, apart from the economic profits which it wished to reap having made good impression to Muslim countries in the Middle East, is also looking for diplomatic and political support from Muslims worldwide. This was prompted by the long unending dispute between North and South Korea [20]. By adopting such a cordial attitude towards Islam and Muslims in Korea, the Seoul government anticipated unwavering support from Muslim countries in case of serious conflict occurs with communists of North Korea.

CONCLUSION

No accurate statistics of Muslims is so far recorded, nor is clear history of the first coming of Islam to Japan or Korea available. There are rather, various views with respect to the coming of Islam and number of Muslims in both countries. In brief, substantial impact of Islam onto these countries was not until recent decades, i.e. about over one hundred years in the case of Japan and over fifty years in the case of Korea and that the Muslim population undoubtedly is very small in both countries. Regardless of these facts, Islam is slowly growing in both Japan and Korea. While some challenges and problems in carrying out Islamic da'wah are expected to continue or persist, yet, over time, Islam hopefully will find a better place in the two countries. With the recent positive developments in Japan and Korea, i.e. the increasing number of Muslim converts, especially young people and the growing number of Muslim organisations and Islamic institutions such as mosques and schools, etc, the future of Islam in Japan and Korea is certainly looking bright.

REFERENCES

1. Another estimate puts Buddhist followers at 20%, Catholics and Protestants 20% respectively, 1% other faiths and the rests are free thinkers or atheists.
2. Compared to the previous Buddhism, new concepts were introduced such as the concepts of Hell and Paradise, which are very similar to those of Islam.
3. Siddiqi, M.A.R., 2008. *Islam Shines in Japan: Perspectives and Prospects*, Kuala Lumpur: A. S. Nordeen, p. ix.
4. In 1890, Sultan Abdul Hamid II (reigned 1876-1909) dispatched a naval vessel called "Ertugrul" which carried more than six-hundred officers and soldiers led by Admiral Uthman Pasha to Japan to acknowledge the visit made by Japanese Prince Akihito Komatsu to Istanbul several years earlier. The vessel was capsized in a storm along the coast of Wakayama Prefecture drowning 540 people.
5. One such organization was Greater Japan Muslim League (Dai Nihon Kaikyo Kyokai) founded in 1930. It was the first official Muslim organization established in Japan.
6. Some of them were nationalistic organizations like Ajia Gikai Society, which called for co-operation between Japanese and Muslims against Western colonialism.
7. Fascinatingly, the same inclination was shown by the Japanese during the early modernization of the country during the Meiji period. As the government and the people at that time highly viewed everything to do with the West, there was a proposal made by Meiji leaders to have all the people of Japan converted to Christianity in the name of progress.
8. The Huang-ch'ao Rebellion was an anti-foreign movement in China in which many thousands of Arabs, Jews, Christians and other foreigners were killed, particularly at Canton. Lee, H.S. 1997. *The Advent of Islam in Korea: A Historical Account*, Istanbul: Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture, pp: 8.
9. 4500 Turkish soldiers arrived in October 1950 and some continued to remain in Korea for several years after the war as part of U.N. peace keeping force under a mission called 'A Force for Peace'. See Sun, Y. K. 1972. *Islam in Korea*, University Microfilms International, Michigan, pp. 45-47, pp. 34, 37-38. Around 1900 A.D. local Muslims in Manchuria, according to one view, numbered several hundred thousand. Many Koreans fled to Manchuria as political refugees during Japanese occupation of Korea
10. The Royal decree enacted by the Chosun ruler in 1427 A.D. prohibited the performance of Islamic religious practices and the wearing of traditional dress and headgear.
11. There are many verses in the Quran which enjoined Muslims to perform da'wah, for instance see surah al-hajj: verse 67 where Allah says, "and call to your Lord; most surely you are on a right way...."
12. The verse reads, "Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation and have disputations with them in the best manner." Ramli, A. H. 2002. *Konsep Dakwah*. in *Insan dan Manhaj Ketuhanan 1*, Eds, Mamat, M. N. Mamat, Selangor: Pusat Pendidikan Islam UiTM, pp: 312-315.
13. Samarra, S.M., 2009 article entitled "Islam in Japan: History, Spread and Institutions in the Country", Tokyo, pp: 3-9. in <http://islamcenter.or.jp>.
14. Other leading Japanese da'i included Prof. Abdul-Kareem Saito, Dr. Umar Kawabata, Zakariya Nakayama, Ali Mori and Amin Yamamoto.
15. The association was established 1953. It was the first Muslim organization established in Japan.
16. Islamic Center Japan was founded in 1975 and the pioneer of Islamic da'wah in Japan.

17. Previously known as the Korea Islamic Society, the KMF was founded as an Islamic da'wah organization in 1965 and officially registered in 1967. Apart from doing da'wah activities, it also oversees the Korean Muslim Students Association and the Korea Institute for Islamic Culture.
18. The school is known as Prince Sultan Bin Abdul Aziz Elementary School. Opened in 2009, it accepts both Muslim and non-Muslim students. Sponsored by the Saudi government, the school offers national educational school curriculum as well as Arabic language and Islamic studies.
19. They include Dr. Ali B. Fellagh from Libya who sponsored Fellagh Masjid at Busan and Abdul Aziz Al-Reeys who sponsored Gwanju Masjid. Sik, J. D. 1985. *Gerakan Islam di Korea dan Indonesia pada Awal Abad ke Dua Puluh: Suatu Studi Historis*, Yogyakarta: Dua Dimensi, 123: 121.
20. Japan Times, November 19, 1992 in <http://japantimes.co.jp>.
21. It is recorded that Japanese converts who registered at the Islamic Center Japan is about eighty to one hundred every year. Combined with the conversions at other places throughout Japan, the number of Japanese Muslim converts can be said to be around a few hundred every year.
22. This can be seen for instance, in some textbooks currently used in Japanese high schools which present Islam as a harsh religion moulded by the harsh environment of the Arabian deserts.
23. Because of these difficulties, some Japanese Muslims are reluctant to profess and practice Islam in public. They behave like any other Japanese would do while keeping their faith to themselves and their families. Penn (2008), *Public Faces and Private Spaces: Islam in the Japanese Context*. Asia Policy, No. 5 in <http://asiapolicy.nbr.org>, pp: 99.
24. Suh, B.I., 1982. Economic Status of Muslims in Korea: A Preliminary Report, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, (Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs), 4: 1-2.
25. The Asia Shimbun, May 4, 2007, posted at <http://japanfocus.org>, May 30, 2007.
26. Sakurai, K., 2008. "Muslims in Contemporary Japan", *Asia Policy*, 5: 81 in <http://asiapolicy.nbr.org>.
27. *Islam di Korea Bukan Perkara Asing*. posted at <http://bharian.com.my>, June 16, 2011.
28. With the help of donations from local and international Muslims, it has succeeded to buy a piece of land which is located next to the Tokyo Mosque. Nevertheless, as for now, the construction is still incomplete as the centre is short of fund and now waiting for more donations by Muslims in order to complete the project.
29. The Muslims initially planned to build Korea Islamic University but had to opt for a lesser project due to financial constraints.
30. Other services include providing via websites location of mosques, halal food stores and restaurants, halal & haram foods, dates of Islamic days and festivals, supply of books and Islamic materials, solat timings, qibla direction, circumcision hospitals, Islamic marriage procedure, etc.
32. Haque, M. *Islam and Muslims in Korea*, March 2011 issue, posted at <http://motamaralalamalislami.org>