

ISLAM AND MOSQUE ACTIVITIES IN JAPAN: A PRELIMINARY OBSERVATION

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ABSTRAK

Jepang dikenal sebagai salahsatu negara yang menggunakan prinsip sekularisme. Bahkan masyarakat Jepang dikenal sebagai masyarakat yang tidak memiliki kepedulian khusus dengan agama. Meskipun demikian bukan berarti agama benar-benar telah menghilang. Berkembangnya komunitas-komunitas beragama, termasuk Islam, di Jepang menunjukkan bahwa negara-negara maju yang dipandang tidak memiliki perhatian terhadap agama justru memberikan ruang bagi berkembangnya agama. Artikel ini ditulis berdasarkan penelitian kualitatif yang bertujuan mengungkap keberadaan komunitas Muslim di Jepang yang menunjukkan perkembangan Islam sekaligus bertujuan untuk mengetahui berbagai kegiatan yang dilaksanakan di masjid-masjid di berbagai kota. Penelitian tersebut dilakukan di kota-kota Tokyo, Kyoto, Kobe dan Osaka dengan melakukan pengamatan dan wawancara mendalam dengan para tokoh di masjid-masjid tersebut. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan keberagaman komunitas Muslim di kota-kota tersebut yang memiliki variasi berdasarkan asal-usul, kebangsaan, kesukuan dan ras. Hasil penelitian juga menunjukkan dilema yang dihadapi oleh komunitas Muslim yang memiliki kebutuhan khusus, terutama makanan, yang belum direspon oleh pemerintah Jepang yang memang tidak punya perhatian dengan agama. Meskipun demikian hal ini tidak menghalangi perkembangan komunitas Muslim, baik secara kuantitatif maupun kualitatif.

Kata-kata Kunci: Jepang, Islam, Muslim, masjid

ABSTRACT

Japan has been known as one of secular countries in the world. Japanese socciety has also been known as socciety that have no particular attention toward religion. However, this does not diminsh religion. The development of religious communities, including Islam, in Japan shows that developed countries that have been regarded as do not care of religion give enough room for religion to develop. This article was written based on qualitative research intended to reveal the existence Muslim communities in Japan that shows the development of Islam as well as to know activities undertaken in mosques. The research was conducted in the cities of Tokyo, Kyoto, Kobe and Osaka by observing mosques and interviewing important figures in the mosques. The results of research unearth dilemma of Muslims who have special needs, in particular food, that have no response as yet from Japanese government that indeed do not pay attention toward religion. However, this does not hamper the development of Muslim communities, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Keywords: Japan, Islam, Muslim, mosque

INTRODUCTION

Religion has never disappeared from our everyday life despite of a truth claim that modernity is always be accompanied by secularism. Parker and Hoon (2013) proved that secularisation theory has been failed to identify the continuing interest in religion and the resurgence of religions in the contemporary era. One would easily notice the worldwide resurgence (or rediscovery) of religious vitality that emerged in the 1960s and beyond (Berger, 1999). Beginning with the spate of new religious movements that accompanied the counterculture and continuing through the Islamic revolutions and the rise of the New Christian Right in the United States, religion again entered public discourses, be that scientific or popular discourse (Ammerman, 2014). Social and humanities studies have noted that religion does not become easily forgotten even in modern, secular societies.

The influence of religion in the everyday life of modern societies might have been not as strong as before, but Berger (1977: 162) saw signs of vigorous resurgence of religion in America, the site of capitalism, a place where one would have least expected the revivification of religion. There has been an increase in institutional participation in Christianity in America, starting from the early 1960s. One of the reasons of why religion is still present in modern societies is that religion could provide a set of resources to fulfil particular goals such as health, wealth and happiness (Zubaida, 1987). The re-enactment of religion in late modernity period encourage religious communities to construct a new religious habit that would involve either the invention of non-religious practices that adhere to religious values or a new emphasis on religious practices (Hariyadi, 2013). The new emphasis on religious practices can be found in both developed and developing countries across the world. Thus, it is no wonder that religious communities have been developed well in countries where commonly people do not associated them with particular religion. One of such countries is Japan that has no policy in regard to religion. It is interesting to reveal activities of religious communities in such kind of country.

Young cohort of religious communities is the particular focus of the research leading to this article considering the important role of young people in reviving religions across many societies. Berger (1977: 152) asserts that it was younger people who became more active in the churches in large number. The important figures of Islamic movements in many Muslim societies Iran, Lebanon, Algeria and Egypt were youngsters educated in the

modern education system and their masses live with the values of the modern city (Hariyadi, 2013). Japan is chosen since it has diverse religions and represents a kind of speech community that concerns with the use of honorific language to glorify God (Rahayu, 2014: 142). The article takes a closer look at how Islam developed in Japan and the activities conducted by Muslims in mosques.

RESEARCH METHOD

A. Research Approach

The research belongs to descriptive qualitative since it tries to reveal and describe phenomenon of Islam and mosque activities in Japan. This research employs explanative dimension by viewing the language to be observed not on what can be seen but it is also explained why the object is like it is based on the reality. Since the research question has been determined in the proposal beforehand, this research strategy is then called as embedded case study research (Sutopo, 2006:227).

B. Research Sites

The research has been conducted in Tokyo, as well as in Kansai region that has Osaka, Japan's second largest industrial metropolis, and Kyoto and Nara, the ancient capitals of Japan. In Kobe, also in Kansai region, there is a biggest mosque in Japan. Thus the region has been both the ever growing modern area and the place where traditional values are well maintained. In this context, religious communities in Japan are vibrant and younger generation play a significant role in their respective community of faith.

C. Data

Data of this research consists of primary and secondary. Primary data came from research participants who are Muslims living in Japan, while secondary data are information collected from journal articles and newsletters.

D. Technique of Data Collection

This research employs observation and interview. Observation has been taken by observing events and activities of Islamic communities in mosques and taking notes for necessary information and relevant data completed by its setting. To accomplish the data, interviews have been taken with the informants from mosques in Tokyo, Kobe, Kyoto and

Osaka. Unstructured interview was employed to gather the information. In doing so, researcher only holds the question guidelines. Once the informant answers the first question, it is then followed by a deeper second question, and so on. When it is considered clear and adequate, the researcher asks another topic of question. To reach a complete data, it uses elicitation (Spolsky, 2003: 9), a strategy to stimulate or lead an informant to give the real condition. This strategy is often considered similar to in-depth interviewing method.

E. Technique of Data Analysis

Technique of analysis that is used in the research is the technique involving data collection, data reduction, data display and conclusion (Miles and Huberman, 1992). In this model, the analysis is conducted starting from data collection. It is done to avoid data accumulation. In other words, reduction is done by selecting data related to the research question and simultaneously done in data collection. Then the data is analyzed that finally a conclusion can be drawn.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first Muslim community in Japan came into being in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution with the arrival of several hundred Turko-Tartar Muslims from Central Asia (Olgun, 1997). By 1923, the number of these Muslim refugees exceeded three thousand and they were given asylum by the strongly anti-Communist Japanese government. Under the leadership of Muhammad Abdul Hai Kurban Ali (1890-1972), who was provided with the job of teaching Turkish and Russian to the Japanese military, the Muslims in Tokyo improved their situation rapidly (Morimoto, 1980). They opened a school in 1927 which was later also used as a mosque for Friday and Id congregations until 193. In 1931 with the support of non- Muslim Japanese an office and an Arabic printing press were set up. With this assistance, a monthly magazine in the Tartar language, and the first Arabic printing in Japan of the Qur'an were realized.

Muslim traders from India reached significant numbers after World War I in Kobe. With the migration to Kobe of Turko-Tartars, the Muslim population there increased to such an extent that it became necessary to have a mosque. The Kobe Mosque was built in October 1935 with donations, a great portion of which was given by Ferozzuddin of Calcutta (Morimoto, 1980). Another mosque was built in Tokyo in May 1938 through the active

efforts of the same Kurban Ali, with support mainly from Japanese political and business circles, as well as government leaders all of whom were non-Muslims. This mosque was demolished because of irrecoverable damage in 1986, and a new one was projected. Turkish-Tartar settlers built another mosque in Nagoya around 1938 but it was destroyed during air raids in 1945 and they too migrated to Kobe.

The first Islamic organization recognized in Japanese law as a religious entity in Japan, now called the Japan Muslim Association, was established in 1953 with Sadiq Imazumi (1905-60) elected as its first president. Its membership in 1959 was almost entirely made up of indigenous Japanese Muslims, a characteristic which this association has continued to maintain (Olgun, 1997). Another organization, Islamic Centre- Japan, came into being in 1966 consisting mainly of foreign (i.e. non-Japanese) Muslims. Both associations have gone a long way to propagate the message of Islam in Japan by arranging seminars and publishing books etc. They have also sent many young Japanese Muslims to Muslim countries for Islamic training and education.

It is an admitted fact that Japan is a hard land for Islam to penetrate, not only on account of its religious culture but also its rushed imitation of Western materialist civilization and the indifference to religious values that is a part of the cultural baggage of that civilization. After World War II the Japanese Constitution was reformed and a clear separation of politics and education from religion was instituted. As a result, ordinary Japanese youngsters nowadays do not know what religion they belong to. On the other side, the abnormal growth of a few new religious cults suggests that Japanese youngsters are in search of a way to satisfy their spiritual needs.

Even though Japanese do not generally take care of religion, but they do have a concept of believe in God. The concept is, essentially, believe in something beyond human that would deeply affected human lives. However, this concept of God does not have supernatural effects toward human, as it does in religions. The effect of the concept toward human lives is in terms of psychological ones. The Japanese approach to religion is also notable for its syncretism. An individual's religious beliefs will often incorporate elements of Shinto, Buddhism, and sometimes Christianity, making few distinctions among them (Nakhleh, Sakurai and Penn, 2008). Most Japanese will offer prayers at a Shinto shrine or

Buddhist temple without concern over which god is enshrined there or to which denomination the temple may belong.

By and large, the Japanese people get their information about Islam mainly from Western media and Christian-oriented and managed news organizations. Hence they do not have a good impression of Islam. In a broadcast television interview, a Japanese stated that Islam was a religion to be afraid of simply because he did not know enough about it to think otherwise. Although several pamphlets and explanatory books have been published in Japanese, the need for reading materials on Islam, particularly on the interpretation of the Qur'an, is still enormous.

According to an imam at Tokyo Mosque, until few years ago, Japanese Muslims could not conduct their funerals in accordance with the stipulations of Islam and were obliged to comply with Japanese law which requires cremation. Thanks to the efforts of the Japan Muslim Association, a cemetery was bought in 1968 and made available to any Muslim who wants to be buried there (Morimoto, 1980). Muslims in Japan worry seriously about the education of their young, for the fact is that quite a number of the children of Japanese converts to Islam are also Muslims. The problem of education for Muslims exists 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 (Maruyama, 2007). 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. A modern boarding school with special arrangements for Islamic education for Muslim children is the long cherished desire of Muslims in Japan.

According to an imam at Kobe Mosque, the number of Muslims of Japanese descent in Japan is roughly 50,000, compared to 150-200,000 Muslims of non-Japanese

descent (Nakhleh, Sakurai and Penn, 2008). Foreign Muslims constitute approximately 80% to 90% of the entire Muslim population in Japan. The largest share of this population consists of Indonesian, followed in number by Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, and Iranians. In 2004 Indonesians living legally in Japan numbered 23,890. The number of legal immigrants from Pakistan (8,610), Bangladesh (10,724), and Iran (5,403) totaled slightly fewer than 25,000. Taken together, Indonesian, Iranian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi immigrants (48,627) represent 70% of this group. Although a considerable number of Malaysians live in Japan, the majority of these residents are of ethnic Chinese decent and are not Muslim. But the younger generations have aspirations to increase these numbers. The imam of Tokyo Mosque said that someday Islam might be as popular a religion in Japan as it now is in most of the rest of the world.

Japanese who commit to Islam (being converted) are doing so for some reasons: want to marry Muslims, merely want to try something new, or feel having enlightenment (*hidayah*, in Islamic terms). Japanese society are far more friendly to the coming of Muslim people (or any other religiously inclined communities) from overseas than societies in other countries (including Western) since almost of them do not really care about religion but really care about treating other people in good manners. The imam at Kobe mosque admitted that in many cases, there are many non Muslim Japanese who behave as look they are religious persons since they are friendly, disciplined and display very good manners to others.

The mosque in Kyoto has *jamaah* (regular attendants) from many nationalities and ethnicities. However a significant portion of them come from Turkey and Malaysia. Most of them work either as companies' employees or students. The mosque is situated within Kyoto Islamic Cultural Centre which has been established by Turkish communities. It is the reason why rituals in the mosque are modelled after specific Islamic rituals in Turkey, including how to decide the beginning and the end of Ramadan. The maintenance of the mosque and its activities is undertaken by donations from the *jama'ah* who have been in Kyoto for more than a year. The main activity in the mosque is Arabic course who is delivered by a Japanese Muslim professor at Kyoto University.

The mosque in Kobe is the second oldest mosque in Japan after the mosque in Nagoya which has been destroyed during an earthquake in the 2000s and is yet to be rebuilt. The mosque *ta'amir* (management) is composed of many nationalities, from Pakistan, South

Africa, India, Turkey, Malaysia and Indonesia. Indonesians make up the most significant portion of *jama'ah*. Even though Japanese society are more than welcome to Muslims, the government do not have any policy on halal industries, unlike governments in other countries (such as Australia and United Kingdom) who support halal industries (food, finance and attire) and give financial aid to religious councils (including Islam). The absent of Japanese government's attention toward halal industries causes the difficulty for Muslims to find halal food in public places (Maruyama, 2007). The mosque has hosted Islamic marriage ceremonies as well as *syahadat* event (when people pledge his/her allegiance to Islam) since 1990s. The *ta'amir* and *jamaah* have decided since 2003 to follow Malaysian government rule on the beginning and the end of Ramadan. The decision was taken by voluntary consent from all *jamaah*, not just the *ta'amir*. The *ta'amir* themselves are chosen by collective consent by the *jama'ah*. Some part of the mosque's funding come from parking space next to the mosque which has been rented for general public, not only the ones who come to the mosque.

In the Osaka mosque, there were Pakistani *jama'ah* who have been stayed for 4 days and were about to continue their journey to other mosques in Japan. They are the *Tabligh Jama'ah* who, by their own rule, left their country since July. For this *jama'ah*, there is an obligation to leave their residence to do preaching mission to other areas, even other countries. Most of them are independent workers, and have sufficient fund to travel overseas. The head of *ta'amir* at Osaka mosque is Muslim-converted Japanese who works as a government employee. In the Osaka mosque, there were also Indonesian attendants who are actually *jama'ah* from the city of Hammamatsu. Most of Indonesian Muslims in Hammamatsu are students. However, the majority of Hammamatsu mosque *jama'ah* work as employees for factories and outlets. Indonesians are relatively active in the mosque, even though the mosque in Hammamatsu is mainly taken care by Pakistanis. The schools are tolerant enough for Muslims to do their religious duties. During public holidays, a sizeable number of Indonesian Muslim in Hammamatsu travel around Japan to visit mosques. They told that they did so in order to maintain solidarity among Muslims in Japan, to have enough time to get together with their fellow Muslims across the countries as in daily life, they barely have enough time to do so. Going with fellows would remind Muslims the spiritual need they need to fulfill.

CONCLUSION

Muslims in Japan comprise a small community of foreigners of many nationalities as well as some ethnic Japanese. Japanese society presents unique challenges for resident Muslims as Japanese people in general and their government do not have the sense of religiosity. The lack of sense of religiosity disables official support for Islamic requirements for Muslims but also enables Muslims to live peacefully in the same time. Despite of some disadvantages, Muslims have been able to maintain their existence by establishing activities and mosques in some cities. Muslims have been developed the sense of commonalities among themselves regardless their origin, ethnicity and nationalities. Thus, it is conceivable that even though individual mosques have their own associations depending on which communities mostly take care of mosques' activities; it would not hamper the sense of belongingness among Muslims in Japan.

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