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Islamophobia in Japan: Possibilities and Controversies

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Abstract

The impact of socio-political developments on a global scale has led to an increased effectiveness of the counter-theological perspective on religions and cultures in print and broadcast media, especially since the early modern period. Even in regions where there has been no significant historical or religious interaction, the influence and imprint of different religious traditions on a particular religion can be discerned. In this context, theological or religious negative approaches to Islam in Japan can be evaluated within the framework of an influence that emerged in the West with modernity and has its roots in Christian religious traditions. Conversely, an examination of the historical development of Islam in Japan reveals that the country's multicultural and religiously pluralistic structure precludes the possibility of any religious group being perceived negatively on a collective level. However, it is important to acknowledge that the process of Western-style modernisation has occasionally led to negative cultural perceptions of other religions within Western societies. Considering the historical development of Islam in Japan, the country's multicultural and religiously pluralistic structure renders the collective portrayal of any religion as negative implausible. Consequently, the potential for Islamophobia in Japan today and the grounds for the discussions around it continue in this context.

Keywords: History of Religions, Japan, Islam, Japanese Islam, Islamophobia

Japonya'da İslamofobi: İmkân ve Tartışmalar

Öz

Dünyada sosyo-siyasî gelişmelerin etkisiyle, erken modern dönemde başlayan yazılı ve görsel yayınların, dinlere ve kültürlere yönelik karşı-teolojik bakış açısının etkinliğinde bir artış gözlemlenmektedir. Tarihî ve dinî olarak ciddi bir etkileşimin bulunmadığı bölgelerde dahi belirli bir dine yönelik farklı dinî geleneklerin bakış açılarının etki ve izleri görülebilmektedir. Bu bağlamda, Japonya'da İslâm'a yönelik teolojik veya dinî nitelikteki negatif yaklaşımlar, Batı'da modern dönemle birlikte ortaya çıkan ve kökleri Hristiyan dinî geleneklerine dayanan bir etki çerçevesinde değerlendirilebilir. Öte yandan İslâm'ın Japonya'daki dinî tarihi dikkate alındığında, ülkenin çok kültürlü ve dinî çoğulcu yapısı, herhangi bir dinin varlığının kolektif anlamda olumsuz bir imaja sahip olmasını mümkün kılmamaktadır. Bununla birlikte tarihi süreçte Batı tipi modernleşme, beraberinde Batı kültürünün diğer dinlere yönelik olumsuz-kültürel bakışını da beraberinde getirmiştir. Ancak İslâm, toplumsal dinî zeminde faaliyet alanı bulmuş ve Japon toplumu açısından farklı-olumlu dinî bir değer olarak görülmüştür. Günümüzde Japonya'da İslamofobi'nin imkânı ve etrafındaki tartışmaların zemininin bu bağlamda sürdüğü söylenebilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dinler Tarihi, Japonya, İslâm, Japon İslâmı, İslamofobi

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Introduction

The current estimate of the Muslim population in Japan is approximately 190,000. However, it is anticipated that the number of Muslims visiting or residing in Japan will increase in the future. While research has been conducted on the development of the Muslim community in Japan, there has been limited discourse on perceptions of Islam and Muslims in Japan. (Yamagata, 2019, p.1). The history of the Muslim community in Japan is inextricably linked to Japan's opening to the West following the Meiji Restoration (1868) and the subsequent modernisation process, which resulted in a significant influx of foreign individuals. Indeed, the history of the Muslim community in Japan is inextricably linked to the broader history of Japan, which refers to its relationship with the West. The initial cohort of Muslim immigrants was predominantly comprised of merchants. In the early twentieth century, representatives of the Ottoman Empire and other Muslim countries (Egypt, Iran) established diplomatic and trade relations with Japan. Following the Second World War, there was a notable increase in the number of Muslim workers immigrating to Japan, which contributed to the gradual growth of Muslim communities in the country. The contemporary Muslim community in Japan is comprised of individuals from a diverse array of ethnic and national backgrounds, including those of Indonesian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Turkish, and other Middle Eastern and South Asian origin. In this regard, Japan is exhibiting an enhanced capacity for multicultural coexistence. The term tabunka kyōsei, which translates as "multicultural life", has become a widely used term in Japanese society. The popular understanding of the term has been largely shaped by its adoption by the government, particularly local municipalities, as a policy to deal with the growing number of immigrants. In this context, it is perceived as an optimal state of "coexistence" between Japanese and non-Japanese individuals within local communities (Okai & Takahashi, 2023, p. 268).

In order to meet the religious and social needs of the Muslim community, mosques and Islamic centres have been constructed in Japan. With regard to perceptions and attitudes towards Islam and Muslims in Japan, there is a paucity of evidence to suggest an increase in negative attitudes. Conversely, Japan is perceived as a welcoming environment for Muslims (Komai, 2001, p. 80). While there are occasional examples of surveillance and conservative activism, these do not reflect specific discriminatory policies towards Muslims. While media portrayals of Muslims in Japan are generally neutral and informative, negative perceptions do occasionally emerge as a result of events such as terrorist attacks. However, this is not a common phenomenon in mainstream media portrayals. (Takahashi, 2021, p. 174).

This study aims to examine perceptions of Islam in Japan in the context of historical developments and to identify factors that contribute to the potential for Islamophobia, particularly in the contemporary era. The study includes an examination of the position of Islam in the context of the socio-religious dynamics of Japanese society, as well as an examination of perspectives on other religions. Using historical and phenomenological comparative methods specific to the discipline of the history of religions, the study analyses the perception of Islam in the socio-cultural context of Japan and the factors that shape this perception. In this context, the study aims to contribute to the existing literature by providing an analytical perspective and a basis for further research on the phenomenon of Islamophobia in Japan.

1. Muslim-Japanese Relations in Japan

During the Tokugawa period (1603-1868), Japan pursued a policy of 'national isolation', which effectively cut the country off from the rest of the world. Towards the conclusion of this period, however, Japan initiated direct diplomatic negotiations with foreign countries, particularly those in the West. Concurrently, the reopening of Japan to the international community in 1853 resulted in the arrival of Western traders. It is thought that the Japanese were introduced to Islam during this period through commercial interactions with India, China and Russia. They were cognizant of Islam as a religion and its geographical reach. Nevertheless, the extant evidence pertaining to Islam in Japan remains inconclusive. Furthermore, there is a paucity of documentation concerning the extent and consequences of these interactions (Levent, 2020, p. 165). Conversely, some scholars posit that Japan and Muslims may have engaged in commercial activities as early as the 8th century AD. These contacts occurred along the renowned Silk Road, which linked the Middle East, Central Asia and East Asia (Fathil & Fathil, 2011, p. 132).

Moreover, it had an impact on Japan's geopolitical outlook, prompting the Japanese military to regard the Silk Road regions as a prospective buffer zone against the Russian and potentially Chinese empires (Esenbel, 2017, p.11). The Silk Road route necessitated traversing Egypt, which was then under Ottoman control, via the Red Sea and the Suez Canal. During their time in Egypt, the Japanese observed the existence of mixed courts (Levent, 2020, p. 165). Since the early 1900s, the presence of Muslim missionary activity in Japan has been limited to the individual efforts of Muslims from various countries, especially Indian Muslim merchants. The dearth of substantial, meticulously documented missionary activities during this era has rendered their incorporation into the historical record a challenging endeavor (Sat, 2018, p. 115). Islam's initial penetration into Japan occurred through diplomatic relations with Muslim countries, in addition to commercial interactions. The initial notable documented contact transpired following the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and the Ottoman Empire in the late 19th century (Anis, 1998, p.331).

1.1. First Period (1890-1947)

The Meiji period (1868-1912) was a time when Japan initiated the process of modernisation, with significant integration of Western influences into the domestic landscape of the country in the political, economic and social spheres (Meyer, 2022, p. 164). During this period, a number of initiatives were launched by European missionaries with the objective of disseminating Christianity in Japan. In addition to their religious activities, the missionaries were also engaged in commercial, political and social pursuits. During this period, Christian missionaries instructed the Japanese in the tenets of Shintoism, Buddhism and Confucianism from a Christian theological perspective (Teeuwen, 2017 p. 43). The missionaries were principally active in port cities such as Nagasaki. A pamphlet distributed in Nagasaki, entitled "Nagasaki Rumours - The Story of Satanic Doctrine", was designed to alert the public to the increasing activities of the missionaries. This booklet identified Islam as "the religion of Muhammad" in conjunction with Western religions (Kocalan, 2021, p. 62). Meanwhile, the Life of the Prophet Muhammad was translated into Japanese in 1877, which facilitated the integration of Islam into Japanese intellectual discourse (Anis, 1998, p. 331). However, Western sources portrayed Islam as a militant religion spread by the sword, which created prejudice against Islam (Esenbel, 2011, p. 59).

Japan established diplomatic relations with the Ottoman Empire. Nevertheless, these interactions were predominantly limited to the realms of politics and strategy. These relations were shaped by the Ottoman Empire's efforts to increase its influence in Asia and Japan's desire to pursue a balanced foreign policy against the Western powers (see Kuşçulu & Karaoğlu, 2022). The inaugural phase of diplomatic relations between Japan and the Ottoman Empire commenced with the visit of Prince Komatsunomiya Akihito to Istanbul in 1887. Akihito's visit to Istanbul served to increase the Ottoman Empire's interest in Japan and to foster a more cordial relationship between the two countries. In 1889, Sultan Abdülhamid II dispatched the frigate Ertuğrul to Japan with the objective of presenting a medal to the Japanese Emperor Meiji. The objective of this diplomatic mission was to reinforce the bonds of friendship and diplomatic relations between the Ottoman Empire and Japan. However, in September 1891, the frigate Ertuğrul was sunk by a typhoon off the coast of Wakayama Prefecture. The disaster resulted in the deaths of over 500 Ottoman sailors, with only 69 survivors. The Japanese warships Hiei and Kongo were dispatched to retrieve the survivors, who were subsequently conveyed back to Istanbul. The sinking of the Ertuğrul precipitated a marked intensification of relations between Japan and the Ottoman Empire, reinforcing the bond between the two countries. In 1891, a delegation from Japan was dispatched to Istanbul with the survivors of the incident (Levent, 2020, p.166).

The journalist 野田 正太郎 Shōtarō Noda (1868-1904), who was employed by the Jiji Shinpō, converted to Islam as a consequence of his participation in the team that visited Istanbul. Shōtarō Noda was the inaugural Japanese Muslim. He subsequently adopted the name Abdulhalim. Additionally, he gained insight into Islamic and Ottoman history (Misawa & Akçadağ, 2007, p. 98). Nevertheless, historical evidence suggests that he repudiated his Islamic faith upon his return to Japan in 1893, following a two-year sojourn in Istanbul. In contrast, Yamaoka Kotaro was the first Japanese individual to undertake the pilgrimage to Mecca. He served as a Russian translator during the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905). Subsequently, he was commissioned by the Japanese military authorities to undertake the pilgrimage to Mecca. At that time, he was not a Muslim. However, while serving in Mumbai, India, he underwent a religious conversion to Islam after learning from fellow Muslims that non-Muslims were forbidden to enter Mecca (Misawa, 2011, p. 122). A conversion to Islam is indicative of a comprehensive understanding of the religion, including the Five Pillars of Islam and the Six Pillars of Faith. However, Yamaoka interpreted the phrase "Allahu Akbar", which translates as "Allah is the greatest", as "Amaterasu Ōmikami". This interpretation demonstrates that Allah is identified with Shinto deities (Karaoğlu, 2023, p. 176).

Tanaka Ippei, a Muslim during this period, underwent a conversion to Islam while in China and even undertook the translation of Liu Zhi's Tianfang Zhisheng Shilu (The True Biography of the Last Islamic Prophet) into Japanese. Tanaka's identification of Allah with the Shinto god Ame no Minakanushi (Heavenly Sovereign) represents a divergence from Yamaoka's approach as early as 1925. He advanced the proposition that the Japanese spirit was compatible with Islam (Krämer, 2014, p. 624). During his pilgrimage to Mecca, he became aware of the concept of syncretism between Shintoism and Islam. He advanced the idea that Shintoism, Buddhism, and Islam could coexist peacefully, establishing links between these religions and Confucianism. Tanaka's outlook was influenced by two seminal traditions: Japanese Shinbutsu Shūgō (Shinto-Buddhist syncretism) and Chinese Kai-ju or Hui-ru (Islamic Confucianism) (Misawa, 2011, p. 124).

Ariga Amado (Ahmed) (1868-1946) underwent a conversion to Islam in India at the age of twenty-five. Similarly to Yamaoka and Tanaka, Ariga advocated a form of cultural nationalism that integrated pan-Asianism with a religious mission. In 1933, he advanced the proposition that Japan should "conquer the world" through Islam, proposing that Islam was the most suitable religion for the Japanese spirit of 大和魂 (Yamato Damashii). At that time, the religious environment in Japan was characterised by the prevalence of folk beliefs. The prevailing religious orientation was reflected in Japan-specific sects of Buddhism, including Zen, Nichiren and Shingon. Nevertheless, a significant proportion of Buddhist monks dedicated themselves to theoretical pursuits, thereby neglecting the practice of ritual. Ariga considered the principle of non-violence espoused by Buddhism to be incongruous with the national character of Japan and incompatible with the teachings of Christianity. Consequently, he proposed Islam as a more suitable choice, citing its disapproval of the wars of the time and its lack of fear of death. Ariga sought to disseminate Islam in Japan, translate the Qur'an and establish an organisation of Japanese Muslims to lead the global Muslim population. He perceived this as an opportunity for Japan to assume a leadership role among the yellow race, that is to say, the East Asian countries (in contrast to the white race – in contrast to the West), and for the Imperial House to be held in high esteem by all the nations of the yellow race. Ariga's critique of religion did not extend to Shintoism, which he characterised as an essentially pagan sect centred on the imperial dynasty and national heroes. Ariga identified a typological parallel between Allah and the Shinto deity Ame no Minakanushi. This syncretic approach was reflected in the 1938 translation of the Qur'an, which drew on earlier European translations and used the term "Great God" to translate Allah. Prior to 1945, however, Shinto interpretations of Islam and the Qur'an were not prevalent in Japan. Conversely, a Buddhist-inspired interpretation of Islam gained greater currency in Japanese culture. This phenomenon can be observed in the works of Ōkawa Shūmei and Izutsu Toshihiko (Krämer, 2014, p. 626).

The period following the Sino-Japanese War in 1895 represents a significant juncture in Japan's engagement with Muslim communities. Information derived from intelligence and travel reports, in conjunction with the establishment of strategic alliances with Uighurs and Chinese Muslims, constituted the foundation of Japan's pan-Asian ideology. The concepts of kokutai (national policy) and hakkō ichiū (universal brotherhood) are of great importance in the context of Japanese nationalism and have had a central influence on the political and ideological development of modern Japan. These concepts have served to shape the foundations of Japan's national identity and foreign policy, with an emphasis on the uniqueness and superiority of Japanese society and state (Kimitada, 2007, p. 22). In particular, the concepts under discussion are Pan-Islamism, which posits the unification of the Asian continent under a single administration, and Japan's leading position within the scope of the Greater Asia Policy (Karaoğlu, 2023, p. 173). The triumph in the Russo-Japanese War of 1905 served to further reinforce Japan's standing in the Islamic world, augmenting its influence and intensifying intercultural ties. Indeed, Japan's Asian strategy in the early 20th century was aligned with its efforts to cultivate alliances with anti-Western movements in Asia and to capitalise on the geopolitical opportunities presented by ethno-religious conflicts in these regions. The establishment of organisations such as the Asiatic League demonstrated Japan's imperial aspirations, reflecting a comprehensive strategy to expand its regional and global influence. Accordingly, the objective was to establish the Muslim population of Asia as a unified community under Japanese governance (Dündar, 2006, p. 95). Japan's realisation of this policy was made possible by the Ottoman Empire and the institution of the caliphate. Indeed, during the first

half of the 20th century in Japan, Islam was integrated with Japanese religious traditions, influencing the development of Pan-Asian ideology (Karaoğlu, 2023, p. 173).

The initial Muslim communities in Japan were constituted by Turkish immigrants who settled in the country, predominantly in Tokyo and Kobe. Moreover, a contingent of Muslim merchants from India and other regions arrived in Kobe and proceeded to establish a Muslim community there. In 1935, the Kobe Mosque was constructed with the assistance of Indian merchants. This was preceded by the establishment of the Tokyo Mosque by the Muslim community in Tokyo in 1938. Despite the relatively small number of non-Japanese Muslims in both Kobe and Tokyo, the establishment of the Kobe Mosque and the Tokyo Mosque became emblematic of the presence of Islam and Muslims in Japan (Nouh, 2012, p. 3).

The phenomenon can be traced to the arrival of hundreds of Turkmen, Uzbek, Tajik, Kyrgyz, Kazakh and other Turkic-Tatar Muslim refugees from Central Asia and Russia following the Bolshevik Revolution (1917) during the First World War (1914-1918). During the First World War, there was a notable expansion and development of Islamic organisations and activities in Japan. The military government established organisations and research centres with the specific purpose of studying Islam and Muslim countries. This was due to the presence of sizeable Muslim communities in China and Southeast Asia, which were occupied by the Japanese military. In total, over one hundred books and journals on Islam were published in Japan between 1935 and 1943. In 1952, the inaugural Islamic organisation in Japan, the Japan Muslim Association, was established, marking a pivotal moment in the dissemination of Islam in Japan (Anis, 1998, p. 331).

As a result of a combination of historical and geographical factors, including political relations with China and Russia, the effects of World War I, and Japan's geographical remoteness, it was only in the early 20th century that Islam was officially recognized as a religion in Japan. Until the end of the 20th century, only a modest proportion of the Japanese population had the opportunity to interact with Muslims, which resulted in a lack of knowledge and understanding of Islam and Muslims in Japan. This presented a considerable obstacle to the advancement and acceptance of Islam in Japan (Yulita & Ong, 2019, p. 52). Subsequently, the Japanese government implemented a colonial policy in northwestern China and later in Southeast Asia. Prior to and throughout the First World War (1914-1918), individuals of Japanese descent who were not Muslim promoted Islam as a means of advancing the Japanese government's Islamic policy. It can be argued that this period saw the spread of Islam by non-Muslim Japanese individuals. Indeed, the propagation of Islam was endorsed as a state policy.

Consequently, a considerable number of bureaucrats, politicians and military personnel within the Japanese government converted to Islam. Conversely, the acceptance of Islam as a religion was not as prevalent among the general population as it was among the government. In 1939, at a time when the relationship between Asianism and Islam was being debated in the context of opposition to communism and the Soviet Union, a new religious law (宗教団体法, Shūkyō dantai hō) was being considered in the Diet. The question was whether Islam should be recognised as one of Japan's official religions, alongside Buddhism, Shinto and Christianity. In fact, Islam was not considered a religion per se. Rather, it was seen as the basis for an international movement capable of countering communism (Esenbel, 2011, p. 11). However, since the conclusion of the First World War, Japanese Muslims have been attempting to disseminate the tenets of Islam in Japan without

the influence of external entities. The first reason is that Islam is presented to Japanese society as a Japanese policy; the second reason is that Islam is perceived as a foreign religion; and the third reason is that there are theological issues. It can be argued that the theological principles of Islam are challenging to comprehend within the context of Japanese religious and cultural traditions. The translated works on Islam from Western sources that have been made available in Japanese since the 1870s exhibit certain deficiencies. The initial issue is that translations from European languages into Japanese, as opposed to those from the original Arabic, impede an accurate comprehension of Islam. Consequently, Sakamoto's 1899 biography portrays the Prophet Muhammad as a hero who literally carried the Qur'an in his left hand and a sword in his right. A second negative aspect is that the concepts employed in the translations of the Christian deity are considered to be valid for Islam. In the context of Islamic doctrine, the term 'deity' is considered to be a valid concept within the Islamic tradition. This is evidenced by the fact that the Arabic word 'Allah' was translated into Japanese as 'Kami', which is the term used for God among Japanese Christians at the time. This rendered the concept of Allah as a universal one. However, it is also important to note that the term was also used to refer to Shinto deities and was elucidated in Buddhist religious terms (Krämer, 2014, p. 621).

Until the 1890s, the assessment of Islam was conducted from a position of neutrality. During this period, Islam was perceived as a religion that was contingent on political and social circumstances, and thus was regarded as an artificial religion. However, it is evident that between 1890 and 1950, there was a shift in the evaluation of Islam from a neutral to a negative stance, influenced by translated and copyrighted works. In this context, it can be argued that the foundations of Islamophobic thinking about Islam in Japan were established during this period. Conversely, Japan has been highly active and successful in developing Islamic studies. As a non-Western society, Japan offered an alternative perspective to Western Orientalism and was not involved in colonialism in the Muslim world (Buskens, 2016, p. 259). The Institute for the Study of the Islamic World (Kaikyoken Kenkyujo), established in Japan in 1938, conducted significant academic research on the Islamic world. The Institute's most notable publication is the academic journal Kaikyoken, which was established with the aim of publishing research on the Islamic world. The journal offers a critical perspective on Western centrism and colonialism (see Suemori, 2019).

1.2. Second Period (1947-2001)

In the period preceding and extending throughout the Second World War, individuals of non-Muslim Japanese nationality played a role in the promotion of Islamic political ideologies. However, following the conclusion of the Second World War, Japanese Muslims were compelled to pursue the dissemination of Islamic teachings in Japan on a civil and autonomous basis, without the benefit of state support. At that time, Japanese Muslims were primarily concerned with the socio-political aspects of Islam, rather than its religious principles. Consequently, the foundations of Islam in Japan were established in collaboration with foreign Muslims who were engaged in studies or employment in Japan at the time. Similarly, the 1973 oil crisis resulted in an increase in the number of Japanese Muslims, largely due to an influx of individuals employed in the oil industry in the Middle East and those pursuing studies in Islamic countries in the Middle East and Southeast Asia. The formation of a formally recognised Muslim community in Japan became evident as young Japanese began to travel to Arab and other Muslim countries (Anis, 1998, p. 332).

Since then, the growth of the Muslim population in Japan and the situation of migrant workers has been particularly evident, especially in the late 1980s and early 1990s. During this period, Japan's economic growth and labour needs created opportunities for migrant workers from Muslim-majority countries such as Pakistan, Bangladesh and Iran. These migrants played an important role in the Japanese economy, particularly in sectors such as construction and manufacturing (Yamagata, 2019, p. 6).

The conclusion of the Second World War marked the resurgence of academic inquiry in Japan. However, this process of revival remained subject to the residual effects of the war and the potential for changes in foreign policy. In particular, Japan's international relations and foreign policy exerted a significant influence on the course and scope of academic research in the post-war period. The Institute of Islamic World Studies, which had been temporarily suspended during the war, resumed its research activities on the Islamic world. The Institute of Islamic World Studies continued its mission of conducting objective and unbiased research on the Islamic world (Suemori, 2019).

In the late 1970s and 1980s, a distinctive Islamic organisation, the Japanese Islamic Congress (JIC), emerged as a notable phenomenon in the history of Islam in Japan. The group was successful in converting approximately 1,000 Japanese individuals to Islam within a relatively short period of time (Karaoğlu, 2023, p. 173). In the 1980s, the JIC emerged as a potential new religious movement in Japan, combining Islamic and Buddhist concepts and engaging with the wider society. Subsequently, the JIC experienced a period of rapid growth, reaching a membership of over 50,000 in the 1980s. This was a notable achievement for an Islamic organisation in Japan, establishing the JIC as one of the largest Islamic organisations in the country. The JIC fostered connections with Muslim-majority countries and prominent figures in Japan, engaging in a range of activities. The majority of these activities were concentrated in the medical and political fields (Obuse, 2017, p. 242).

In this process, a movement designated as "Japanese Islam" emerged, founded upon the tenets of "Mahayana Islam." In his publication, The Religion of Islam, Haruo Abe, the leader of the Nihon Ishuramu Kyodan (Japanese Islamic Movement), draws a comparison between the characteristics of this ideology and those of Hinayana Buddhism. Abe posits that both Mahayana and Hinayana possess intrinsic values, yet that Hinayana is more susceptible to stagnation and has a more circumscribed universal scope. He further postulates that there may be an inherent proclivity towards Hinayana Buddhism among Muslim communities. Abe expresses concern that Japanese Muslims unduly emphasise the formal aspects of Islamic doctrine (Karaoğlu, 2023, p. 178).

In the late 1980s, Islamic society in Japan underwent a significant process of change. This occurred concurrently with Japan's accelerated economic expansion and the influx of foreign individuals seeking economic advancement. Furthermore, a notable number of Muslims from a variety of Islamic countries relocated to Japan. Of these countries, Iran, Pakistan and Bangladesh were particularly prominent. This was due to the fact that visas were not required for entry into Japan from these countries at that time. It was not uncommon for foreign Muslims who migrated to Japan as part of the labour force to remain in the country for an extended period of time. The growth of the Muslim population in Japan has also created opportunities for many Japanese people to gain insight into Islamic teachings. The precise number of Japanese Muslims is unclear; however,

there has been a gradual increase in the number of Japanese individuals converting to Islam. These conversions can be classified into two principal categories. The initial cohort is comprised primarily of male individuals who have developed an understanding of Islamic culture through the pursuit of Islamic studies or the study of the Arabic language, or through direct contact with Muslims while travelling, studying or working in Islamic countries. The second group is comprised primarily of women who have married foreign Muslims. This group constitutes the majority of Muslim women in Japan. The children of these marriages are considered to be Muslim by birth, resulting in an increase in the Muslim population in Japan (Sakurai, 2008, p. 76).

The growth of the Muslim population in the country has resulted in the emergence of specific demands, which have been shaped by the unique circumstances of this particular demographic. To illustrate, the Muslim population has petitioned for the establishment of facilities for the preparation and consumption of halal food, the construction of places of worship, the creation of educational institutions and the provision of cemeteries. While some of these demands have been met, new challenges have emerged. It would, however, be a misrepresentation of the facts to suggest that these challenges are a reflection of Islamophobic sentiment among the Japanese population. Moreover, the absence of sectarian or communal disputes among Japanese Muslims demonstrates that Japanese individuals are capable of maintaining harmonious relationships. However, new Muslims frequently encounter difficulties in gaining the understanding of their families and friends, who are deeply rooted in Japanese culture and traditions, making it challenging for them to maintain their religious practices (Anis, 1998, p. 341). It has been documented that there have been instances of discord with the local community during the planning stages of mosque construction. However, it has been observed that these conflicts tend to occur in mosques that are built with the assistance of Muslim university students who have immigrated to the area. The principal reason for this is that university students have only recently arrived in Japan and are therefore not yet well acquainted with the customs and regulations of Japanese society. Consequently, their actions may be regarded as unacceptable by Japanese society, which could potentially give rise to conflict. Conversely, immigrant Muslim communities who have resided in Japan for an extended period and are well-acquainted with the local population, customs, and regulations will conduct themselves in an appropriate manner when seeking to construct a mosque, thereby circumventing the aforementioned conflicts. In the construction of mosques, long-term resident Muslims prioritise addressing the concerns of their Japanese neighbours. This may include adherence to local regulations regarding waste disposal or the minimisation of noise pollution (Kocalan, 2021, p. 76).

Islam was persistently regarded as a foreign religion within Japanese society and in the broader context of religious understanding. Islam was gradually accepted as a religion in Japan, despite being defined by the Japanese as a religion with a Christian perspective shaped by Western culture. As the Muslim population in Japan grew, the image of Islam shifted from neutrality to a dual image of cultural neutrality and positive neutrality. Prior to 2001, Islam was perceived as a culturally foreign religion, although it did not attract nationwide attention. The negative image of Islam is largely attributed to a lack of information and cultural differences.

1.3. Third Period (2001-Present)

Since 2001, there has been a notable surge in Islamophobia not only in the United States but also in Japan, where American cultural influence is pervasive. This is largely attributed to the proliferation of media and propaganda narratives that portray Islam as a violent religion. Subsequently, in the aftermath of the events of 11 September, the government initiated a series of research projects on Islam. This led to an increased focus on this area of enquiry within Muslim associations, particularly at the university and research institute levels. Consequently, a plethora of conferences on Islam have been conducted in collaboration with national and international organisations. The focus on the shared values between Shinto, Buddhism and Islam is intended to facilitate a more constructive engagement between the Japanese and Muslim communities. To provide an example, the Japanese Association for Religious Studies convened an international conference in August 2002. During the course of the conference, it was observed that a dialogue between Islam and Japanese Buddhism might prove a fruitful avenue for further research. Consequently, the Centre for Monotheistic Religions at Doshisha University (CISMOR) was established with the objective of conducting research and engaging in dialogue with the three monotheistic religions, as well as Eastern religions such as Buddhism. CISMOR has initiated a number of research projects and conferences with the objective of promoting a deeper understanding of monotheistic religions, including Islam. In 2006, the conference "World Religions for Peace" was held in Kyoto. The conference was attended by representatives of various religions, including Japanese Buddhism and Islam (Mateen & Sher, 2016, p. 52).

In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, Muslims residing in non-Muslim societies, including Japan, frequently encountered suspicion and discrimination. Consequently, members of the Muslim community have begun to experience feelings of vulnerability as a result of their religious activities. This new challenge has reportedly had a significant impact on some individuals within this group. Nevertheless, there is currently no evidence to suggest that this population has been radicalised or poses a threat to Japanese society (Sakurai, 2008, p. 87). It is of the utmost importance that Muslims in Japan have access to contemporary Islamic literature in the Japanese language. A number of organisations, including the Islamic Centre, the Islamic Cultural Association, and the Muslim Association of Japan, have sought to address the dearth of reliable literature on a range of topics, including Islamic beliefs, values, and contributions to humanity and the Islamic world. These organisations are currently engaged in the publication and distribution of books, including Japanese translations of the Qur'an, as well as magazines and newspapers in Japan. For instance, the Islamic Centre alone distributes over 300,000 books annually. It has also produced or translated over 30 publications, including books and pamphlets, and distributed them to educational institutions and various organisations for Muslims and non-Muslims in Japan. Moreover, the Centre provides assistance and support for Islamic publications produced by a diverse range of scholars, including both Muslim and non-Muslim experts. In recent years, there has been a notable increase in the demand for Islamic literature in Japan, particularly among Japanese youth and business professionals. This growing interest in Islam and the Muslim world can be attributed to the proliferation of negative stereotypes about Islam in the wake of the events of 11 September. Consequently, Japanese Muslim scholars are keen to produce new, engaging, useful and relevant literature on a range of topics related to Islam (Mateen & Sher, 2016, p. 49).

The role of religion in the cultural landscape of contemporary Japan is not a prominent one. While Japanese people do not hold any particular prejudices against Islam or other religions, they

may find many religious practices to be unfamiliar. Furthermore, the perception of individuals of diverse religious affiliations as "the other," irrespective of their specific religious identity, contributes to the formation of misperceptions about Islam in Japan. Consequently, Islam in Japan is frequently regarded as an alien cultural phenomenon rather than as a religious identity in its own right. Furthermore, Muslims are frequently regarded as a monolithic foreign entity, rather than as a faith community comprising individuals from diverse cultural and national backgrounds (Abidoğlu, 2023, p. 297). Consequently, from the perspective of the Japanese police, Muslims are perceived as a distinct other on two levels. In addition to being perceived as belonging to a foreign and unfamiliar religion, Muslims are also regarded as alien to Japanese society. This further contributes to their reluctance to assimilate. It has been proposed that even if a foreign-born Muslim is granted Japanese citizenship, they will continue to be viewed by non-Muslim Japanese individuals as an enigmatic 'other' whose affiliation remains uncertain (Takahashi, 2018, p. 203).

Notwithstanding the considerable growth in the number of Muslims in Japan in recent times, they continue to constitute a relatively minor proportion of the total population, representing less than 0.2% based on the findings of the aforementioned surveys. However, the ageing population in Japan is creating a demand for foreign labour. A greater openness to foreign workers could potentially result in an increase in the population of the Muslim community in Japan, both in the medium and long term. There is a pervasive lack of knowledge about the Muslim community in Japan. This lack of visibility presents certain challenges that require further investigation. However, the lack of visibility of the Muslim community also presents potential advantages. Such advantages include the facilitation of activities such as the establishment of new mosques or the implementation of Islamic educational programmes, which may be undertaken without the hindrance of Islamophobia and discrimination. The restricted familiarity and understanding of Muslims in Japan offers a substantial opportunity for Muslim communities in the country. In contrast to numerous Muslim diasporic communities elsewhere in the world, Japanese Muslims are not compelled to navigate the pervasive prejudices that exist within their communities. The representation of Islam and Muslims in Japanese media is predominantly negative, largely due to the fact that the majority of coverage originates from Western media outlets. It is therefore essential that further measures be taken to challenge the negative portrayals of Islam and religion in conjunction with violence or radicalism. It would be beneficial to implement programmes that reflect a more balanced representation of religion. It seems reasonable to posit that programmes which prioritise the cultural richness and depth of Islamic civilisation, as opposed to its theological and dogmatic aspects, will foster openness and sympathy among the Japanese public (Global Muslim Diaspora: Muslim Communities And Minorities In Non-Oic Member States, 2019, p. 43).

One rationale for the diminished trust in religious organisations within Japanese society can be attributed to historical occurrences and the impact of radical religious movements, most notably Aum Shinrikyō (オウム真理教). The 1995 sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway perpetrated by Aum Shinrikyō caused widespread outrage in Japan. The attack resulted in the deaths of thirteen individuals and injuries to thousands more, leading to a profound sense of distrust in Japanese society towards religious movements and groups (Yamashita, 2022, p. 87).

It can be argued that the constraints faced by Japanese Muslims as a minority in the population have evolved beyond the initial challenges of food, language, and employment. Moreover, they must also navigate the pervasive negative portrayal of Islam in the media. A survey

of high school students in Japan conducted in 2006 revealed that 75% of students perceived Islam as an aggressive religion, and 92% identified Islam from television media. The execution of two Japanese citizens by ISIS in 2015 served to reinforce negative perceptions of Muslims. Some representatives of Japanese mosques have reportedly requested that the media refrain from using the term "Isuramu-koku," which literally means "Islamic state," to refer to ISIS. Such misunderstandings and hostilities have the potential to have adverse consequences for the Muslim population in Japan. Such circumstances have the potential to result in an increase in social distance between Japanese citizens and Muslims. Conversely, Japan is focusing on the representation of Islam and the country's efforts to counter the negative portrayal of Islam in the mass media on an international scale. In the context of the 2020 Olympic Games, the Japanese government and local organisations throughout the country have implemented initiatives with the objective of fostering a more welcoming social environment for foreigners, including those of the Muslim faith (Yulita & Ong, 2019, p. 24).

2. Issues on Islamophobia in Japan

Modern Japan is a secular society, defined by the absence of any state-sponsored religion. The majority of Japanese people tend to exhibit a degree of scepticism with regard to religion. Notwithstanding their scepticism about religion, Japanese people still engage in religious ceremonies. Such practices are frequently perceived as social rituals rather than a reflection of their beliefs. For instance, Japanese individuals regularly attend Shinto rituals during the summer festival season, get married in a Christian church, and attend a Buddhist funeral. Consequently, religion is not a fundamental aspect of their identity. Nevertheless, while there are Japanese who adhere to a specific religion, religion is largely excluded from the public sphere (Takahashi, 2021b, p. 170).

There is a paucity of official data on the religious affiliation of individuals in Japan. Opinion polls indicate that 62% of the population adhere to no religious beliefs, with this figure increasing (Toshiyuki, 2019, p. 53). The majority of individuals who identify as having religious beliefs adhere to Buddhism, while the proportion of those who identify as having Shinto beliefs is relatively insignificant. Additionally, a Christian minority comprising approximately 1% of the population exists. Since 1945, three Christian prime ministers have held office, with two preceding them. However, as religion is largely regarded as a personal matter in Japan, the fact that prime ministers adhere to Christian (or other) faiths has not been a significant issue in Japanese society and media (Takahashi, 2021b, p. 170).

It is estimated that there are approximately 200,000 Muslims in Japan today. This equates to approximately 0.17% of the population. Of this figure, it is estimated that approximately 90% are foreign nationals with ties to predominantly Muslim countries, primarily Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Turkey and Iran. Approximately 10% of the total population (20,000) are estimated to be Japanese converts to Islam (Tanada, n.d., pp. 1–22).

The Muslim population in Japan is experiencing growth, including the Japanese Muslim population. Consequently, the construction of new mosques is currently underway. As stated by Tanada, by the conclusion of 2018, there were 105 mosques in 36 of Japan's 47 prefectures (Mainichi Shimbun, 2019a). Some of these structures were originally designed with the intention of serving as places of worship for the Muslim community. In 2014, there were 80 mosques, representing a

significant increase from the 14 recorded in 1999. (Tanada, 2017, pp. 27, 36). In 2016, a mosque with a particular focus on Japanese Muslims was established. In contrast to other mosques, where the sermon and khutba are delivered in different languages (e.g. Urdu) according to the majority of the congregation, the sermons in this mosque are delivered in Japanese (Asahi Shimbun, 2016). The establishment of a mosque addressed in Japanese is significant as it indicates the presence of a significant group of Japanese Muslims (Takahashi, 2021b, p. 170).

Despite the considerable development and potential of Islam in Japan, it is argued that the religion's social impact remains ambiguous. The principal reason for this is that Islam is predominantly depicted in public discourse as an incomprehensible and foreign entity, a perception that is widely held by the general public. A significant majority of books and media articles on Muslims residing in Japan concentrate exclusively on foreign Muslims, with minimal attention given to Japanese Muslims (see Mori, 2018; Takahashi, 2021b, p. 171).

The phenomenon of Islamophobia in Japan can be elucidated through an examination of three principal domains. These encompass the religious and cultural background, the nexus between religion, ideology and terrorism, and the written and oral media. In our study, the issues pertaining to Islamophobia in Japan are evaluated within these domains.

2.1. Religious, Cultural Background

It can be argued that the negative perception of Muslims in Japan originated with the sustained recruitment of foreign workers in the 1970s, continued through the 1980s and 1990s, and reached a point of Islamophobia following the terrorist attacks in the US in 2001 and the kidnapping and murder of two Japanese nationals by ISIS in 2015. However, these events possess religious and social characteristics that serve to intensify their reflection in Japanese society. An explanation for these characteristics can be found in Japan's religious and cultural background. This background is analysed in detail in the following sections: ‘Japaneseness, Foreignness and Multiculturalism’ and ‘The Relationship Between Religion, Ideology and Terrorism’.

2.1.1. Japanese-ness, Foreignness and Multiculturalism

The term "nihon-teki" (Japanese) is employed to delineate the religious and cultural homogeneity of the Japanese people. This concept suggests that homogeneity represents the fundamental structure of a religion and/or culture. This perspective is also espoused by the Japanese with regard to other religions, cultures and their adherents. The concept of "gaijin," or "foreigner/other," is closely related to the concept of "nihonjinron," or "Japaneseness Theory." The concept of nihonjinron posits that the religious and cultural homogeneity of the Japanese people is based on the homogeneous race of the Japanese. Consequently, the emphasis on racial, religious and cultural homogeneity provides the foundation for an ideology in which those who do not conform to the Japanese identity are viewed with suspicion (Suzuki, 2005, pp. 74, 94, 163).

The Theory of Japaneseness examines the origins of the concept of the foreigner/other in Japan (Cornille, 1999, p. 239). This theory is defined by the concept of the Japanese as a historically continuous and homogeneous racial group, distinct from all other peoples. It asserts that their culture and traditions must be preserved and protected from external influences and corruption (Dale, 2012, pp. 1–2). In his analysis, Kosaku Yoshino characterises this phenomenon as ethnic nationalism. He posits that it represents a reaction to the process of internationalisation and the

concomitant loss of Japaneseness. Alternatively, it may be viewed as a compensatory phenomenon, emerging in response to the socio-economic identity that Japan acquired in the latter half of the 20th century (Yoshino, 1992, pp. 163–181).

It can therefore be posited that the negative perception of Islam and Muslims in Japan is more a consequence of the unidimensional conceptualisation of Japanese foreign relations than a reflection of Islamophobia. This also serves to reinforce an essentialist cultural approach, which suggests that Japanese people possess a homogeneous structure and, as a result, those who adopt other religions and cultures can be excluded. Conversely, members of other religions are defined by a single, overarching concept or profile. In Japan, this essentialist approach to culture posits the existence of discrete cultural groups with fixed cultural practices, and asserts the existence of a singular "Japanese culture" or "Islamic culture." Such an essentialist concept of culture frequently constrains cross-cultural understanding to the level of superficial multiculturalism (Y. Yamashita, 2022b, p. 332).

The results of official surveys conducted in Japan indicate that the majority of Japanese people self-identify as Mushūkyō, which can be translated as "religiously indifferent". In other words, they are not religious, do not adhere to any particular religion, do not generally trust religious organisations, and are not officially affiliated with any religious group. This can be viewed as a form of apatheism, characterised by indifference towards religion. Nevertheless, this circumstance precludes the possibility of classifying them as atheists, given that they acknowledge the significance of spirituality and engage in religious and traditional rituals, despite professing a lack of interest in religion. It is important to note, however, that rituals are maintained as a distinct entity from religion in Japanese thought. For example, the New Year Shrine Visit (初詣, Hatsumōde) and the Bon Festival (お盆, Obon) are regarded as traditional practices that are distinct from religious beliefs (Ama, 2004, pp. 3–5). The former refers to visits to Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples, while the latter is a Japanese Buddhist ritual honouring ancestral spirits at the end of summer. Furthermore, Christmas and other Buddhist and Shinto rituals in which many Japanese people participate are also regarded as traditional, rather than religious. Consequently, the Japanese perspective on the beliefs of others is shaped more by a shared tradition and culture than by religion and tradition. It can be argued that elements that are incongruent with this and/or that may potentially lead to incompatibility are perceived through the lens of the foreigner.

This perspective on Japanese society necessitates a critical historical and phenomenological examination of the generalised notion of Japan as a non-religious and religiously tolerant country. Yoko Yamashita posits that Islamophobia in Japan manifests as an "unregistered passive acceptance," which is predicated on three factors: religious apathy, religious phobia, and ignorance about Islam. This phenomenon is further shaped by the pervasive belief that Islam is defined by fundamentalism and extremism, and Muslims by terrorists (Y. Yamashita, 2022b, pp. 2, 102). The term is defined by Motoko Katakura as “a prejudice that develops with indifference” and by Naoko Kawada as “an indifference that is a far cry from tolerance” (Katakura, 2004, p. 20; Kawada, 2004, p. 225).

It is not feasible to assess the prevalence and ramifications of Islamophobia in Japan in a manner analogous to that employed in Western nations. This is due to the fact that in Japan, the prejudice in question is developed through the definition of a distinct foreign culture. By way of

illustration, in contrast to the situation in Europe and the United States, Muslims in Japan are not typically subjected to overt discrimination on the grounds of their religion. Nevertheless, it would be inaccurate to describe Japanese attitudes towards Islam and Muslims as mere neutral indifference. It can be reasonably deduced that Islamophobic tendencies that develop on the basis of indifference towards religion (or Islam) and religious phobia may result in the evaluation of Islam and Muslims with fundamentalism and terrorism on the axis of shallow thoughts as well as ignorance. These evaluations, disseminated through periodicals and the media, engender a superficial perception of Islam and Muslims that fosters a sense of fear, which in turn gives rise to the formation of a phobia of Islam in Japanese society in general (Y. Yamashita, 2022b, p. 9).

Yamashita posits that while Islam is perceived as a foreign culture in Japan within the context of Tabunka Kyōsei (multicultural coexistence) and superficial multiculturalism, this perspective is ultimately neutral. Islam is frequently tolerated by the Japanese, which can be seen as a means of overcoming religious indifference, religious phobia, and prejudice against Islam (Y. Yamashita, 2022b, p. 2). The concept of multicultural coexistence and the related approach to multiculturalism, known as the "cosmetic approach", originated in 2005 with the establishment of the Japanese government's Research Group on Promoting Multicultural Coexistence. This group released a report in March 2006 (Sōmu-shō, 2006).

This report delineates the means of achieving multicultural coexistence, encompassing multicultural communication support, livelihood assistance, and social cohesion with recently arrived foreign nationals. It is achieved through collaboration with local communities and civil society organisations. Additionally, the term ‘Tabunka Kyōsei’ is defined as follows:

> The term 'multiculturalism' is defined as the coexistence of people of different nationalities or ethnic origins, etc., as constituent members of the local community, with the establishment of equal relations and recognition of each other's cultural differences. (Roberts, 2013, p. 209)

The concept of Tabunka Kyōsei, or the acceptance and definition of cultural diversity, gives rise to a multitude of interpretations within Japanese society. This definition is based on the presence of foreign nationals in Japan who adhere to their own religious and cultural traditions. As Yamashita notes, people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds are often perceived as conforming to Japanese cultural norms. In Japan, this conformity is seen as a sign of recognition of the foreigner's identity and the establishment of a relationship based on that identity (S. Yamashita, 2010, p. 331).

In Japan, Islam is frequently regarded as a monolithic cultural entity, and Muslims are often viewed as a monolithic community. This results in a number of issues when local governments implement social policies based on the Tabunka Kyōsei definition, rather than aligning with the Muslim community's desire to open mosques and provide halal food for tourists. For instance, Tanada observes that some local governments that have initiated communication with mosques have encountered challenges in implementing Tabunka Kyōsei measures to open mosques and events for Muslim residents. This is because they have discovered that mosques (and other Islamic organisations) represent a diverse population, comprising individuals with varying ethnic and religious backgrounds, as well as differing interpretations of Islamic beliefs and practices. It is challenging for them to reach a consensus on specific religious rules (Tanada, 2019, p. 231). However, Yamashita also notes that some Muslims decline to attend events with mixed-gender

attendance or use mixed-gender prayer rooms. Some refuse to accept food prepared in kitchens where alcohol or pork is present as halal, while others accept as halal food that does not contain pork (Y. Yamashita, 2022b, p. 10).

As evidenced by the preceding examples and determinations, the definition of Tabunka Kyōsei cannot be applied to disparate Islamic and Muslim communities from a homogeneous perspective. However, the homogeneous, culture-based approach to Tabunka Kyōsei, which is generally accepted and practised in Japan, is defined by Morris-Suzuki as "superficial multiculturalism". Moreover, he identifies contributing factors that perpetuate this superficial approach. He provides vivid examples of how this superficial approach manifests itself in practice. Such practices include defining cultures with a uniform understanding of aesthetics and art, thereby ignoring the diversity within them; highlighting a single musical genre in cultural events without including the various musical traditions within that culture; and emphasising the differences between Japanese Muslims and other Muslims, which serves to perpetuate a superficial multiculturalism. The Japanese reinforce the existing definitional approach to Tabunka Kyōsei, whereas the realisation of the antithetical issues serves to reinforce the notion of serious coexistence (Morris-Suzuki, 2013, pp. 183–185).

Furthermore, Yamashita posits that despite Islam being perceived as a foreign culture within the context of tabunka kyōsei (multicultural coexistence) and superficial multiculturalism, this perspective is, in fact, neutral. He asserts that Islam is, in fact, tolerated by the Japanese, and that this is a means of overcoming religious indifference, religious phobia and prejudice against Islam (Y. Yamashita, 2022b, p. 2). This is evidenced by the significant number of publications in Japan that emphasise the need for coexistence and tolerant attitudes towards foreign and Japanese Muslims (see Mori, 2018).

Manga constitutes a significant element within this context. To illustrate, the award-winning series Satoko to Nada (Satoko and Nada), published on a popular web-based manga platform, recounts the experiences of a Japanese schoolgirl residing in the United States who arrives at her college apartment and discovers that her roommate is a veiled Saudi Muslim. Despite initial reservations, Satoko comes to recognise that she and Nada share common interests. As their relationship develops, Satoko gains insight into the positive aspects of Islam (see Yupicheka, 2018). It is evident that the manga does not present an entirely objective portrayal of the other. To illustrate, the manga series focuses on violations of women's rights in Muslim countries, while conveniently ignoring patriarchal structures in Japan and the rest of the world. In conclusion, the series promotes mutual understanding by conveying the message that Muslims are individuals with shared humanity (see Yupicheka, 2018). While the majority of these publications focus exclusively on foreign Muslims, the experiences of Japanese Muslims are also worthy of attention. This suggests a growing awareness of the Japanese community (see Sato, 2015). Furthermore, the lack of discrimination based on religious affiliation in Japanese society indicates that, regardless of one's religious beliefs, adherence to the norms of society is a prerequisite for acceptance (Takahashi, 2021b, p. 176).

For instance, in the wake of the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami in north-eastern Japan, Muslim organisations were involved in charitable activities, including the distribution of food. Such activities were disseminated through the media, thereby countering the propagation of hate

speech against Muslims and creating a positive image (see J-Cast, 2016). Furthermore, additional developments have occurred that have had a favourable impact on the image of Islam and Muslims. To illustrate, the prolonged economic downturn in Japan has compelled Japanese businesses to recognise foreign visitors as a vital source of revenue. In response, the government has implemented initiatives with the objective of revitalising the tourism sector, thereby facilitating an exit from the country's economic downturn. This has resulted in a notable surge in the number of Muslim tourists, a phenomenon frequently referred to as the 'halal boom'. Consequently, restaurants, large grocery chains and other outlets in major cities and tourist destinations in Japan have made efforts in recent years to promote their products as halal, and many of them display the halal certification of one of the various certification associations. A substantial body of literature exists on this topic. Some local governments even provide financial support to businesses seeking Halal certification (see Taito-ku, 2019). Although this growth can be attributed to financial considerations and policies rather than religious and cultural factors, it can also be argued that it has the potential to foster a deeper understanding and greater acceptance of Muslims in Japan. This is evidenced by the positive impact it has had on increasing awareness of Islamic practices (Takahashi, 2021b, p. 176).

2.1.2. The Relationship Between Religion, Ideology and Terrorism

The notion of Japan as a nation devoid of religious affiliation and characterised by religious tolerance is a simplistic and inaccurate representation of the historical reality. Throughout its history, Japan has employed a multifaceted approach to the regulation of religious beliefs and practices. Such instances have included the suppression and persecution of religious minorities on the grounds of their beliefs and actions being deemed ‘heretical’ and a threat to the authority of the state, Japanese rule, and the dominant Shinto tradition. During the 16th and 17th centuries, the government implemented a policy of repression against religious minorities who espoused beliefs in a deity, a transcendent entity, or a reality that superseded the authority of the state. Moreover, these individuals repudiated the state's claim to absolute political authority. Christianity was prohibited for a period exceeding two and a half centuries, from 1614 to 1873. The Nichiren-shū Fuju-fuse-ha (a sect of Nichiren Buddhism) was subjected to severe suppression for a period exceeding two centuries, until 1876. During this period, as part of the Tokugawa Shogunate's attempt to suppress Christianity, the registration of temples became mandatory, and Buddhist rituals and activities other than funerals and memorial services became less and less a part of people's daily lives (Y. Yamashita, 2022b, pp. 5–6).

As a consequence of these developments, the Meiji government's endeavour to expunge Japanese Shinto of non-Japanese Buddhist influences and establish Shinto as a national religion in the 1870s was largely unsuccessful. This was due to a dearth of official religious doctrine and missionaries. Subsequently, the government merged Shrine Shinto with Imperial Dynasty Shinto, establishing Kokka Shinto (State Shinto), which designated Shinto as the state religion and the basis for public morality. Jun'ichi Isomae has observed that as part of the process of modernisation and westernisation in Japan, the administration of the time constructed a national identity centred on the institution of empire through State Shinto. Isomae characterises this as an "invented tradition" rather than a modernisation of old traditions (İsomae, 2014, p. xxii). Furthermore, the government granted official recognition to select Buddhist and Shinto sects under the designation of Kyōha Shinto (Shinto Sects), while simultaneously suppressing other religious minorities,

particularly those that posed a challenge to imperial authority and national governance. Religious movements, also known as "pseudo-religions" or "satanic cults" (e.g. Ōmoto), were subject to regulation not only in Japan but also in its overseas colonies and occupied territories by the 1939 'Religious Organisations Law' (Inagaki, 1996, pp. 178–179).

State Shinto may be regarded as an exemplar of state-sponsored religious comprehension within the public domain. Nevertheless, it is argued that religion, shaped by the Western/Christian concept of the separation of religion and state embraced by the Meiji administration, was perceived as a bureaucratic tradition that transcended the private sphere, occupying a position above and beyond religion (İsomae, 2014, p. xxii). This approach is particularly pertinent to the Meiji Constitution of 1889, which emphasised the possibility of practising religion "within limits that are not detrimental to peace and order and inconsistent with their duties as a people" (Y. Yamashita, 2022b, p. 6). It is argued that the Japanese imperial government sought to legitimate Shinto shrine visits and emperor worship by emphasising the non-religious nature of State Shinto. This was done in order to circumvent accusations of violating the constitutional right of citizens to freedom of religion, and these practices continued until the end of the Second World War. In 1940, however, the then government established a body called the Shinto Rituals Board, which defined its mission as "to officially elevate the authority of State Shinto above all other religions." (Garon, 1986, p. 274).

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the Shinto Directive, which was issued by the occupying authorities in 1945, resulted in the abolition of state Shinto. The current constitution, which came into force in 1946, established freedom of religion and the separation of church and state (Y. Yamashita, 2022b, p. 7). Notwithstanding the constitutional prohibition on state financial support for religious institutions, conservative politicians have sought to re-establish a connection between Shinto and the state. This has led to the perception of Shinto as a tradition that transcends the religious domain and as a state ideology that serves militaristic and nationalistic objectives (Garon, 1997, p. 210).

To illustrate, between 1969 and 1974, the conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) proposed legislation to renationalise the Shinto Yasukuni Shrine, which commemorates Japan's war dead. The bills were rejected due to opposition from political parties and religious movements. However, since 1976, prime ministers have visited the shrine. Those in favour of the reunification of Shinto and the state have advanced the argument that the shrine should not be regarded as a religious institution, but rather as a site for public rituals designed to foster a sense of belonging to the nation-state (Garon, 1997, p. 210).

The politicisation of religion and the concomitant reinforcement of the negative perception of religious movements occurred in 1995, coinciding with the increased visibility of religious structures and institutions. It can be argued that the 1995 sarin attack on the Tokyo subway by members of Aum Shinrikyō served to reinforce the Japanese public's pre-existing distrust of religious movements, while simultaneously enabling the administration to gain greater control over such organisations (Hardacre, 2007, p. 171). The paradoxical support for the idea that Japan is a non-religious and religiously tolerant country, despite post-war attempts to reunite Shinto and the state, can be attributed to the prevalence of religious apathy, phobia and prejudice against formal

affiliation to a particular religious group among the general Japanese population (Y. Yamashita, 2022b, p. 7).

In the view of Helen Hardacre, the Japanese media's unrelenting focus on the Aum Shinrikyo incident and the subsequent police investigation had the effect of manipulating religious trends and *"painting all religions with the same brush, implying that all religions should be subjected to greater scrutiny in order to prevent them from following Aum's example"*. As Sheldon Garon notes, the Aum Shinrikyo incident *"brought to the surface the Japanese public's deep anxieties about new religions" and "greatly contributed to the relaxation of postwar Japanese society's reservations about the use of state power to regulate religious organisations"* (Garon, 1997, pp. 211–212). This resulted in the amendment of the Religious Institutions Act of 1951. Notwithstanding the opposition of numerous religious organisations, particularly religious movements, the revision was enacted with the support of the conservative LDP, the Socialist Party, and the Communist Party, the Sōka Gakkai religious movement and its political party, Kōmeitō, which sought to diminish their political influence, and ultimately granted the government greater control and oversight over religious organisations (Y. Yamashita, 2022b, p. 7).

The public discourse on religious groups in Japan is generally characterised by a notable absence of violent and overt racism, in stark contrast to the prevalence of such attitudes in many Western countries. However, Islamophobic narratives prevail in the discourse on national security issues. Consequently, terrorism, particularly international terrorism, is predominantly associated with Islamic groups in the official discourse in Japan. Documents published by the country's security forces frequently cite the potential for 'guerrilla/terrorist' activities by far-left groups (See Keisatsucho, 2018). However, it would appear that the term 'terrorist organisations' is employed solely in reference to 'radical Islamic groups'. A government document dated December 2017 serves to illustrate this point. The document is entitled "Counter-Terrorism Measures Ahead of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games." However, the document's entirety is dedicated to the purported threat posed by "radical Islamic organizations." In consequence, the document enumerates known attacks in the United States and European countries and asserts that Daesh, in its capacity as an Islamic organization, constitutes a significant threat to Japan (see Keishicho, 2017). Similarly, other official statements concentrate on the security situation in West Asia and highlight the danger posed by "radical Islamic groups" (See Keisatsucho, 2015; Takahashi, 2021b, p. 171). This concept of a potential threat is a reflection of the Japanese perspective on matters. For example, in a case before a Japanese court, an individual alleged to be a member of the terrorist organisation al-Qa'ida was reported to have entered the country in 2004 by falsifying documents. The report on this individual also indicated that he was "a devout Muslim" and that he "never failed to pray five times a day and frequently visited mosques." These statements were subsequently disseminated in the print media (*Tokyo Chiho Saibansho*, 2014). One might posit that these expressions result in all Muslims being perceived as potential terrorists. This perspective tends to view sects and groups expressing Islamic character as a monolithic entity (*Tokyo Chiho Saibansho*, 2014; Takahashi, 2021b, p. 172).

2.2. Global-local Issues and the Impact of Policy

Additionally, the negative trends towards Islam in Japan can be examined in the context of the influence of global events on Japanese society and politics. These include the formation of a

negative image of Muslims as a consequence of global politics in the wake of the 9/11 attacks in the United States and Japan's military alliance in the context of the United States' invasion of Iraq in 2003. Furthermore, the dissemination of confidential official documents in 2014, the assassination of two Japanese nationals by ISIS members in 2015, the monitoring of Muslims by security forces in 2016, and recent occurrences have contributed to this unfavourable perception.

Scholars have identified the reappropriation and repurposing of the colonialist discourse of the nineteenth century, which characterised Islam as an inherently backward and violent religion that does not value women, in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. This phenomenon has been particularly evident in the context of the US government's efforts to justify its military actions in Afghanistan and Iraq on moral grounds. In Europe, a number of countries have implemented limitations on the display of the Islamic headscarf in both public and private domains. These constraints have witnessed a notable intensification in the wake of the 11 September 2001 attacks (Y. Yamashita, 2022b, p. 1). In Japan, he stated, the number of Japanese Muslims attending mosques declined in the days following 9/11 due to concerns about being associated with non-Japanese Muslims and the association of Muslims with terrorism (Siddiqi, 2003, p. 165).

In Japan, Da'esh and al-Qa'ida affiliates have identified the country as a target due to its military alliance with the United States in the 2003 invasion of Iraq (Keishicho, 2017, p. 1). It has been argued that the Japanese government's politically and militarily active relations with Israel, as well as the United States, which continue to this day, have shaped Japanese politics in accordance with the view of Islam held by these countries. This is identified as one of the principal reasons for the social reaction against Islam that is currently observed. (See Nishi Nihon Shimbun, 2015; See BDS Japan, 2018; See Mainichi Shimbun, 2019b; Takahashi, 2021b, p. 174). It was emphasised that this created an atmosphere of a potential terrorist threat in the country. The government characterised terrorism by the existence and activities of "radical Islamic groups", thereby reinforcing the idea that Islam and individual Muslims are potential terrorist threats (Takahashi, 2021b, p. 172).

As a consequence of the aforementioned tendency towards such an image, it was revealed that in the period preceding the Hokkaido Tōyako G8 Summit in July 2008, the Japanese police force had engaged in the systematic monitoring of Muslims in Japan and the collection of personal information, including bank account and passport details, from 72,000 individuals identified as terror suspects. Furthermore, it has been documented that, in the course of monitoring the activities of Muslims, properties situated in proximity to mosques have been leased and police officers have been deployed to these locations on a 24-hour basis. Their objective has been to record and track individuals entering the mosque, and to collect data pertaining to their residential and occupational addresses, contacts, immigration history, and other relevant information (Keishicho, 2007, p. 1; Takahashi, 2021b, p. 171). These developments are predicated on the assumption that all Muslims are inherently susceptible to posing a security risk, irrespective of their individual beliefs. In consequence, the Japanese authorities have treated religious affiliation as an indicator of a high propensity to engage in terrorism. Among those who prayed five times a day was a Muslim who was said to have aroused suspicion because he 'started praying diligently after his daughter was born' (Keishicho, 2008, p. 1). Additionally, he expressed views on controversial political issues, such as criticising the participation of the US, Israel and Japan in the invasion of Iraq (Keishicho, 2005, p. 1).

For example, it has been reported that the Japanese police were made aware of a Pakistani national who expressed negative sentiments towards the United States and advocated for their withdrawal from Iraq (Aoki, 2011, p. 50). There are numerous additional examples that could be cited for consideration. For example, the entire staff of the Iranian embassy in Tokyo was reportedly placed under special surveillance (including personal bank accounts) for no other reason than "the US designation of Iran as a state sponsor of terrorism" (See Keishicho, 2005). Following appeals against these practices, the Tokyo High Court upheld the Tokyo District Court's January 2014 ruling that police information-gathering activities were "necessary and unavoidable measures for the prevention of international terrorism" and that police surveillance of Muslims in mosques and other Islamic facilities did not violate the constitutionally guaranteed rights to privacy, equality and freedom of religion (Takahashi, 2018b, pp. 204–206). As reported by The Japan Times, the court ruling provides the police with the authority to continue monitoring the activities of Muslims in Japan. As of 2016, police surveillance of Muslims was still ongoing, with their children identified as 'suspects' and treated as 'potential homegrown terrorists' (See Blakkarly, 2016). In May 2016, the Supreme Court of Japan upheld the decision of the Tokyo High Court, which had awarded a total of 90 million yen in damages to 17 plaintiffs belonging to the Muslim community. This was on the grounds of invasion of privacy. In October 2010, the Japanese security forces released over 100 documents, some of which had previously been referenced (The United States Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 2016, p. 5).

It is an inevitable consequence that Japanese society will be affected by such news and developments. In an academic study of Japanese society, a series of surveys conducted between 2009 and 2012 in various regions where mosque construction was planned revealed a negative attitude towards Islam and Muslims. The 2012 survey conducted in Fukuoka, Japan, revealed that 63% of respondents perceived Islam as an "extremist" religion, while 49% regarded it as "scary". Only 22% of respondents identified Islam as a "religion of peace" (Tanada & Okai, 2011, p. 9).

In February 2015, an ISIS-affiliated extremist group, the Islamic State (IS), perpetrated the killing of two Japanese citizens within Japan, inciting a significant public outcry. In the aftermath of this incident, the US State Department revealed that a number of Muslim organisations and mosques in Japan had been the target of a series of threatening telephone calls, prompting the police to implement enhanced security measures around Islamic institutions. (The United States Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 2016, p. 1). In the aftermath of this terrorist incident, the tendency to view Muslims as a homogeneous group has been superseded by reactions and publications characterised by violent rhetoric. For example, Akari Iiyama, a best-selling author, has made a number of statements that are incendiary in nature. These include the assertion that "the Koran requires Muslims to kill all non-believers, including Japanese," as well as the claim that "peace in Islam means submission to Muslim rule." Additionally, he has stated that "Japanese who believe that Islam is a religion of peace are only reflecting their own feelings," and that "Islam is fundamentally incompatible with democracy." These claims have received considerable media attention. (İiyama, 2018, 2019, p. 7; İkeda, 2018; Takahashi, 2021c, pp. 5, 174).

2.3. Written and Visual Media

The advent of anti-Islamic and anti-Muslim sentiments in Japan has resulted in the propagation of information pertaining to these attitudes through a multitude of media outlets,

including print and oral communication. The initial significant turning point was the formation of a negative image in the wake of the September 11 attacks. It can be argued that the mainstream international and Japanese national media have played an important role in the popularisation of Islamophobia. As demonstrated by Keiko Sakai's 2010 research, there has been a discernible surge in the number of newspaper articles concerning Islam since the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. The majority of these articles demonstrate a tendency to associate Islam with terrorism. He observes that the dominant narrative surrounding Islam in the Japanese media is shaped by the Iranian Revolution, with the religion being portrayed as fanatical, violent, and backward. Moreover, he suggests that the media tends to uncritically reproduce Western perceptions of Islam, which are often shaped by Western media. The Muslim community is perceived as an 'other' that may precipitate a 'clash of civilisations' with the West, and this perspective aligns with the prevailing stance in the international media (Sakai, 2010, pp. 125, 135).

This negative representation of Islam in the media is indicative of a lack of depth of understanding rather than a reflection of objective knowledge about the religion. This viewpoint is closely aligned with the dominant attitudes towards Islam in the West. For example, the Charlie Hebdo attack in France in January 2015 and the subsequent publication of Charlie Hebdo's cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad by the Tokyo Shimbun prompted a backlash among Muslims in Japan. Muslim groups, predominantly Pakistani Muslims, organised demonstrations outside the Chunichi Shimbun building in Tokyo. In response, the newspaper issued an apology for having inadvertently offended Muslims. Subsequent to this incident, in February 2015, two Japanese citizens were kidnapped and murdered by a radical group of ISIS members, further reinforcing the negative public image of Islam (Y. Yamashita, 2022b, pp. 7–8).

Moreover, the aforementioned negative image has been reflected in the media in a similarly negative manner. In particular, media coverage of the alleged surveillance and monitoring of Muslims in Japan by security forces is significant in reflecting such an ethno-religious perspective (see Takahashi, 2018c). Consequently, the media have censured the dissemination of the surveillance data to the general public, rather than the infringement of the individual's personal space (Asahi Shimbun, 2010). It has been documented that the majority of media outlets in Japan characterised the incident, which subsequently became a legal case, as a "case of leaking counter-terrorism documents" (Takahashi, 2021b, p. 172).

A significant proportion of articles on Islam published in the Asahi Shimbun between 1 January and 31 October 2019 were found to be associated with terrorism, armed conflict or social fundamentalism. In numerous instances, Middle Eastern countries were referenced as case studies (see Asahi Shimbun, 2019). A survey conducted in Japan on the subject of "Muslims living in Japan" revealed that 27% of respondents held the view that Muslims should not be permitted to reside in the country, while 65% of respondents indicated that they were unsure. The majority of respondents (44%) expressed support for the admission of foreign nationals to Japan, while a minority (14%) opposed this position (Tanada & Okai, 2011, p. 8). Other studies have demonstrated that participants receive the majority of their information about Islam from written and visual media, which has a significant impact on shaping their views of Islam (Tanada et al., 2012; see Tanada & Okai, 2011). Notwithstanding the aforementioned negative portrayal, instances of violence perpetrated against Muslims are exceedingly uncommon. Moreover, the Japanese are not

a violent society in general (Takahashi, 2021b, p. 175). Consequently, Japanese society both emphasises coexistence and tends to have a negative image of Islam. This expresses a contradictory tendency within Japanese society. Once the Japanese become aware of this inconsistency and perceive the reflection of Islam in the Muslim Japanese, a significant positive awareness of Islam is created (Takahashi, 2021b, p. 177).

Conclusion

This study examines Islamophobia in Japan within the framework of 'possibilities and debates', with the aim of elucidating the ways in which attitudes towards Islam and Muslims have been shaped in historical and social contexts. In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, the global Islamophobic discourse was reflected in the Japanese media, facilitating the spread of negative perceptions of Islam in Japan. In this context, it can be argued that the international mainstream media and the Japanese national media have played a crucial role in shaping a negative image of Islam. Notwithstanding the fact that Japanese society is generally tolerant and supportive of multiculturalism, as evidenced by the principle of "Tabunka Kyōsei" (Multicultural Coexistence), the persistence of a negative view of Islam is noteworthy. This has led to an inconsistent perception of Islam within society, as evidenced by the contradiction between the tolerant and supportive attitude of Japanese society as a whole and the negative view of Islam.

Moreover, the identification of Islam with foreign Muslims and the limited knowledge of Japanese Muslims create hesitation about the presence of Islam in the social sphere. The portrayal of Islam as a 'foreign' and 'incomprehensible' religion in the media and public discourse has led to this perception of Islam among a significant proportion of the Japanese public. However, there has been a noticeable shift in social behaviour as some Japanese individuals have developed a positive awareness of Islam through observing its impact on Japanese Muslims. Such awareness has the potential to challenge existing prejudices against Islam and promote understanding of multicultural coexistence.

In conclusion, the social impact of Islam in Japan remains uncertain. Nevertheless, there is potential for the development of a more impartial and accommodating attitude towards Islam within society, in line with the principle of Tabunka Kyōsei. To realise this potential, it is imperative that public discourse and media content refrain from portraying Islam as an alien phenomenon and instead prioritise the visibility of the experiences and contributions of Japanese Muslims. As such, it is expected that perceptions of Islam and Muslims in Japan will continue to evolve in the context of social cohesion and cultural awareness.

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Japonya'da İslamofobi: İmkân ve Tartışmalar

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Genişletilmiş Özet

Giriş

Dünyada sosyo-siyasî gelişmelerin etkisiyle, erken modern dönemde başlayan yazılı ve görsel yayınların, dinlere ve kültürlere yönelik karşı-teolojik bakış açısının etkinliğinde bir artış gözlemlenmektedir. Tarihî ve dinî olarak ciddi bir etkileşimin bulunmadığı bölgelerde dahi belirli bir dine yönelik farklı dinî geleneklerin bakış açılarının etki ve izleri görülebilmektedir. Bu bağlamda, Japonya'da İslâm'a yönelik teolojik veya dinî nitelikteki negatif yaklaşımlar, Batı'da modern dönemle birlikte ortaya çıkan ve kökleri Hristiyan dinî geleneklerine dayanan bir etki çerçevesinde değerlendirilebilir. Öte yandan İslâm'ın Japonya'daki dinî tarihi dikkate alındığında, ülkenin çok kültürlü ve dinî çoğulcu yapısı, herhangi bir dinin varlığının kolektif anlamda olumsuz bir imaja sahip olmasını mümkün kılmamaktadır. Bununla birlikte tarihi süreçte Batı tipi modernleşme, beraberinde Batı kültürünün diğer dinlere yönelik olumsuz-kültürel bakışını da beraberinde getirmiştir. Ancak İslâm, toplumsal dinî zeminde faaliyet alanı bulmuş ve Japon toplumu açısından farklı-olumlu dinî bir değer olarak görülmüştür. Bu anlamda günümüzde Japonya'da İslamofobi'nin imkânı ve etrafındaki tartışmaların zemininin bu bağlamda sürdüğü söylenebilmektedir.

Çalışmamızda Japonya'da İslamofobi'nin var olma imkânı ve tartışmaları dini-tarihi bağlam ve günümüz olayları üzerinden incelenmeye çalışılmıştır. Buna göre çalışmamızda ilk bölümde, tarihi süreçte dini eksende İslamofobi'nin imkânı üzerinde durmuş, Japonya'da İslam'ın imajı irdelenmeye çalışılmıştır. Bu bölümde konu, 1890-1947, 1947-2001 ve 2001-günümüz olarak üç tarihi döneme ayrılarak incelenmiştir. İkinci bölümde ise günümüzde İslamofobi, dinî-kültürel kökenleri, etkenleri, örnekleri üzerinden incelenmiştir. Bu bölümde dini-kültürel zemin, küresel ve yerel siyasi gelişmeler ve yazılı-görsel medya başlıklarında irdelenmeye çalışılmıştır.

Japonya'da Müslüman-Japon İlişkileri

1850'lerden 1950'li yıllara kadar yapılan çeviri ve telif eserlerin etkisiyle, İslam'ın 1890'lara kadar tarafsız bir perspektiften değerlendirildiği görülmüştür. Ancak, 1890-1950 yılları arasında İslam, siyasi ve toplumsal açıdan konjonktürel ve yapay bir din olarak nitelendirilmiştir. Bu dönemde,

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İslam'a yönelik değerlendirmelerin tarafsızlıktan olumsuza doğru eğilim gösterdiği gözlemlenmektedir. Bu bağlamda, Japonya'da İslam'a dair islamofobik düşüncenin temellerinin bu dönemde atıldığı tespit edilmiştir. İslâm, Japon toplumu ve dini anlayışı açısından yabancı bir din olarak görülmeye devam etmiştir. Japonların batı-kültürü üzerinden Hristiyan perspektifli bir din olarak tanımladığı İslam, zamanla müstakil bir din olarak da kabul edilmeye başlanmıştır. Bir önceki dönemden nötrden olumsuza evrilen İslam imajı, bu dönemde Müslüman nüfusun artışıyla olumsuzdan kültürel nötr ve olumlu nötr'e bir ikili imaja doğru evrilmiştir. 2001'e kadar Japonya'da İslam, kültürel-yabancı bir din olarak görülmekle birlikte, ülke çapında dikkat çeken bir din olarak değerlendirilmemiştir. Nitekim İslâm'ın olumsuz imajı daha çok bilgi eksikliği ve kültürel farklılıklar nedeniyle ortaya çıktığı tespit edilmiştir. Günümüzde Japonya'da Müslümanlara yönelik imaja dair olumsuz eğilimin, 1970'lerden itibaren halen süren yabancı işçi alımlarıyla başladığı, 1980'li ve 1990'lı yıllarda da devam ettiği; 2001'te ABD'deki terör saldırısı ve 2015'te Japonya'da iki Japon'un İŞİD tarafından kaçırılıp öldürülmesi olaylarıyla da İslamofobi'ye dönüştüğü anlaşılmıştır. Bu olaylara dair haberler yazılı ve sözlü medyada yer almaya başlamıştır. Bunun ilk ciddi kırılma noktası 11 Eylül Saldırısı sonrası gelişen olumsuz imajdır. Buna göre ana akım uluslararası ve Japon ulusal medyası İslamofobi'nin yaygın hale getirilmesinde önemli bir role sahiptir.

Japonya'da İslamofobi Üzerine Meseleler

Modern Japonya seküler-dindar bir toplumdur. Japonların çoğu dine şüpheyle yaklaşmaktadır. Dine kuşkuyla baksalar dahi dinî törenlere katılmaktadırlar. Onlar, bu uygulamaları inançlarının yansıması olmasının aksine genellikle toplumsal ritüeller olarak görmektedirler. Japonların düzenli olarak yaz festivali sezonunda Şinto ritüellerine katılmak, bir Hristiyan kilisesinde evlenmek ve Budist cenazesine katılmakla ilgili uygulamaları da bulunmaktadır. Bu nedenle Japonların çoğu için din kimliklerinin temel bir parçası değildir. Ancak belirli bir dine bağlı Japonlar olsa da din, büyük ölçüde kamusal alanın dışında tutulmaktadır. Japon toplumunun bu bakış açısı, Japonya'nın dindar olmayan ve dinî açıdan hoşgörülü bir ülke olduğuna dair genelleştirilmiş fikrin tarihî ve fenomenolojik açıdan eleştirel olarak dikkatle irdelenmesini gerekmektedir. Japonya'da İslamofobi veya İslâm'a karşı önyargının, dinî ilgisizlik ve din fobisi ile İslâm'a dair bilgisizlik temelinde, İslâm'ın köktencilik/aşırılıkla ve Müslümanların ise teröristlerle tanımlandığı yüzeysel kanaatler olarak tezahür ettiğini görülmüştür.

Japonya'da İslam'a ve Müslümanlara olumsuz bakış açısının, İslamofobi'den ziyade Japon-Yabancı ilişkilerinin tek taraflı tanımlanmasından kaynaklandığı söylenebilmektedir. Bu aynı zamanda Japonların homojen bir yapıya sahip olduğunu, bu nedenle diğer din ve kültürleri benimseyenlerin dışlanabildiği anlamına gelmektedir. Diğer taraftan öteki din mensuplarının tek bir düşünce ve profil üzerinden tanımlanmalarına yol açan bir özcü kültür yaklaşımını da güçlendirmektedir. Japonya'da bu özcü kültür yaklaşımı, sabit kültürel pratiklere sahip farklı kültürel grupları varsaymakta ve tek bir 'Japon Kültürü' veya tek bir 'İslam kültürü' olduğunu iddia etmektedir. Bu tür bir özcü kültür kavramı, kültürler arası anlayışı genellikle yüzeysel çok kültürlülükle sınırlandırmaktadır.

Japonya'da günümüzde siyasî açıdan işlevsel yönüyle değerlendirilen din ve dinî yapılar, 1995'e gelindiğinde bu görüşü güçlendirerek diğer din ve dini hareketlere olumsuz bakışını arttırmıştır. Buna göre Aum Shinrikyō üyeleri tarafından 1995'teki Tokyo metrosu saldırısının Japon halkı arasında dinî hareketlere karşı savaş öncesi dönemdeki güvensizliği pekiştirdiği ve yönetimin

bu tür örgütler üzerinde daha fazla kontrol sahibi olmasını sağladığı söylenebilmektedir. Genel Japon nüfusu arasında dine ilgisizlik, din fobisi ve belirli bir dinî gruba resmî olarak bağlı kişilere karşı önyargı, savaş sonrası Şinto ve devleti yeniden birleştirme girişimlerine rağmen Japonya'nın dindar olmayan ve dinî açıdan hoşgörülü bir ülke olduğu fikrini güçlendirdiği tespit edilmiştir. Ayrıca Japonya'da dinî gruplara yönelik kamusal söylem, genel olarak pek çok Batı ülkesinde olduğu gibi şiddetli ve açık ırkçılıktan uzaktır. Ancak ulusal güvenlikle ilgili konulardaki söylemlerde İslamofobik anlatılar yoğunluktadır.

Sonuç

Japonya'da İslâm'a ve Müslümanlara dair olumsuz eğilimlerin ortaya çıkışıyla birlikte bu eğilime dair haberler yazılı ve sözlü medyada yer almaya başlamıştır. Bunun ilk ciddi kırılma noktası 11 Eylül Saldırısı sonrası gelişen olumsuz imajdır. Buna göre ana akım uluslararası ve Japon ulusal medyası İslamofobi'nin yaygın hale getirilmesinde önemli bir role sahiptir. Bu nedenle Japon toplumumda hem bir arada yaşama vurgulanmakta hem de İslam'a yönelik olumsuz imaja eğilim bulunmaktadır. Bu ise Japon toplumunda tutarsız bir eğilimi ifade etmektedir. Bu tutarsızlığın farkına varan Japonlar ise İslam'ın Müslüman Japonlardaki yansımasını gördüklerinden İslam'a yönelik olumlu anlamda ciddi bir farkındalık da oluşmaktadır. Özellikle Tabunka Kyōsei "Çokkültürlü Bir Arada Yaşama" kavramı Japonların bakış açısının temelde nötr bir bakış olduğu, İslâm'ın Japonlar tarafından hoş görülme eğiliminde olduğu ve bunun İslâm'a karşı dinî ilgisizliği, din fobisini ve önyargıyı aşmak için bir araç olduğu ifade edilmektedir. Ayrıca gelişim süreci ve potansiyeli olmasına rağmen Japonya'da İslam, toplumsal etkisi bakımından belirsizliğini koruduğu iddia edilmektedir. Bunun temel nedeninin kamusal söylemde İslam ezici bir çoğunlukla anlaşılmaz ve yabancı olarak sunulması ve halkın büyük çoğunluğu tarafından da bu şekilde anlaşılması olduğu söylenebilmektedir. Japonya'da yaşayan Müslümanlarla ilgili kitap ve medya makalelerinin ciddi bir kısmı yalnızca yabancı Müslümanlara odaklandıklarından ve Japon Müslümanları dikkate almadıklarından söz edilmektedir.

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