
Perceptions of Islam and Muslims in Contemporary Japan

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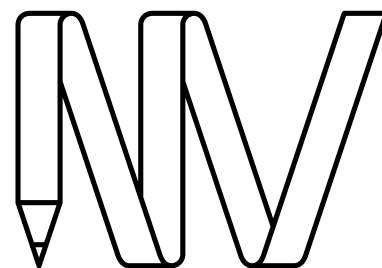
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ABSTRACT

In Japan, the population of Muslim residents is estimated to be only around 170,000; however, the number of Muslims visiting or living in Japan is expected to increase in the future. There have been some studies to date focusing on the development of Muslim communities in Japan, but there has only been limited discussion of perceptions of Islam and Muslims in Japan. In this article, I explore perceptions of Islam and Muslims by analysing incidences of official surveillance of Muslims in Japan, displays of anti-Islamic sentiment by ultra-conservative activists, and newspaper articles about Muslims in Japan. Following the recent influx of Muslim refugees into Europe, some European countries have experienced a rise in Islamophobia, while other countries have seen a rise in negative attitudes towards Muslims in the wake of terrorist incidents attributed to Islamic groups. Based on my analysis of media representations of Muslims in Japan, I consider how Islam and Muslims living in and coming to Japan are perceived, and explore the rationales behind these perceptions. In conclusion, I argue that Japan is showing a rising interest in Muslims as visitors or tourists, and that there is little evidence to indicate increasing negative attitudes towards them. In Japan's case, rather than inciting violence or hate speech, I contend that a recent rise of national pride in Japanese hospitality has encouraged Japanese people to be more welcoming to Muslims. I also provide an overview of the historical background and current situation of Muslims living in Japan to address the lack of English-language scholarship in this area.

KEYWORDS

contemporary; diaspora; history; human rights; Islam; Islamophobia; media; Muslims; national pride; *omotenashi*; perceptions; surveillance; xenophobia



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As a result of ongoing conflict or persecution worldwide, many parts of the world have experienced an influx of unprecedented numbers of people seeking asylum. In recent years, waves of asylum seekers have fled violence and persecution in largely Muslim nations such as Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, with many seeking refuge in Europe.¹ In 2015 and 2016, the number of first-time asylum applications recorded in the EU member states exceeded 1.2 million (Eurostat 2018b). Under these circumstances, a rise in Islamophobia has been observed in the region.² According to a survey conducted by Chatham House in 10 European states, an average of 55% of respondents, ranging from 71% in Poland to 41% in Spain, agreed that “all further immigration from mainly Muslim countries should be stopped” (Goodwin et al. 2017). In keeping with these attitudes, political parties which have xenophobic or anti-Islam tendencies have increased their influence in Europe (Bayrakli and Hafez 2018, 13–18).³

While perceptions of Islam and Muslims in Europe have been discussed by scholars amid the rise of Islamophobia, there has only been limited discussion of perceptions of Islam and Muslims in the East Asia region. In this article, I analyse media representations of Islam and Muslims in Japan. I also note incidences of police surveillance of Muslims in Japan and displays of anti-Islamic sentiment by ultra-conservative activists. Based on this, I explore how Islam and Muslims are perceived in Japan and the rationales behind these perceptions. There are no official statistics on the population of Muslims in Japan as the Japanese census does not include a question about religion. However, Tanada (2018b) estimates that around 170,000 Muslims were living in Japan as of the end of 2016. Given that the Japanese population was around 127 million as of February 2018 (Statistics Bureau 2018), we can estimate that Muslims constitute less than 0.2% of the Japanese population. It should be noted that even since the ongoing Syrian refugee crisis began in 2011, Japan’s borders have been effectively closed to refugees so it has not experienced the same influx of Muslim asylum seekers seen in European countries over this time.⁴

The population of Muslims in Japan is small, but it is important to understand perceptions of Islam and Muslims in Japan for three reasons. First, the presence of Muslims in Japan is on the increase. As I discuss below, the

1 There is no official data about the religion of asylum seekers registered in the EU member states. However, given that more than half of all asylum seekers registered during this period were from the nations mentioned above, it can be supposed that the majority of them are Muslims (Eurostat 2018a).

2 The term ‘Islamophobia’ started to be widely used in public and academic debates in the late 1990s, especially after the publication of a report titled *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All* by the Runnymede Trust in 1997 (Conway 1997), but the definition of the term varies. This article follows Bleich’s definition of Islamophobia as “indiscriminate negative attitudes or emotions directed at Islam or Muslims” (Bleich 2011, 1585).

3 In Austria, for example, the far-right Freedom Party entered government as a junior coalition partner with the People’s Party after the national election in October 2017 (Nasralla and Murphy 2017).

4 In Syria, protests against President Bashar al-Assad and violent responses by his government in 2011 developed into a civil war, which has caused more than 360,000 deaths to date. As of February 2019, 5.7 million Syrians had fled the country as refugees and 6.2 million people were internally displaced (BBC 2019). While the Japanese government announced a plan in 2016 to accept 150 Syrians as exchange students in response to the crisis (Mie 2016), the number of Syrian people recognised as refugees in Japan was only 12 as of the end of 2017 (Wilson 2018). Although Japan acceded to the UN Refugee Convention 1981, it has been reluctant to accept refugees. In 2017, only 20 people were recognised as refugees although there were 19,629 asylum applications that year. Between 1982 and 2017, only 708 people (from 60,675 applications) have been recognised as refugees (Ministry of Justice 2018). For further discussion, see Yamagata (2017).

population of Muslims in Japan has been increasing since the 1980s and, as a result, the number of mosques in Japan has also increased (Tanada 2015). In addition, the number of Muslim tourists visiting Japan is also on the increase (CrescentRating 2017, 9). Therefore, direct interaction between Muslims and non-Muslim Japanese is expected to increase. Given that the increase in the Muslim population has been associated with growing prejudice against them in Europe, it is of comparative interest to grasp how Muslims are perceived by Japanese people. Second, so-called ‘hate speech’ against non-Japanese in Japan has been identified as a serious social problem. Since around 2000, xenophobic discourses have emerged on the internet and, since the middle of the 2000s, ultra-conservative groups such as *Kōdō-suru Hoshu Undō* (行動する保守運動; ‘Action Conservative Movement’) have started to hold rallies verbally attacking foreign residents (Yamaguchi 2013). The targets of these movements are ethnic Korean or Chinese residents in most cases. Third, a rise in Islamophobia has been observed not only in Europe but also in East Asia. For example, Luqiu and Yang (2018) point out that negative stereotypes about Islam and Muslims are spreading among Chinese citizens. Furthermore, South Korea, whose Muslim population is only around 100,000 (Diaconu and Tacet 2017), has seen anti-Islamic discourses emerge with the arrival of Yemeni refugees to the island of Jeju in South Korea in 2018 (Park 2018). Taking these situations into account, understanding the perceptions of Islam and Muslims in Japan is an important first step toward identifying and addressing possible anti-Islam tensions in Japanese society.

Academic literature in this area includes some largely ethnographic studies of Muslims living in Japan which focus on Muslim lifestyles, businesses and religious activities (see Sakurai 2003; Higuchi et al. 2007; Tanada 2015). There is, however, room for more research on perceptions of Islam and Muslims in Japan. There are also some studies based on surveys which explore Japanese perceptions of Muslims (see Matsumoto 2006; Miura 2006; Tanada et al. 2014) and these studies are valuable, but they were conducted before the recent turmoil in the Middle East and the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011 which caused today’s world-wide refugee crisis.⁵ As such, it is possible that perceptions of Islam and Muslims in Japan might have changed since these studies were conducted.

While surveys are one way to understand the topic, there are other ways to grasp perceptions of Islam and Muslims in Japan, one of which is content analysis of media texts. As Turner (1997) states, “media texts offer especially rich opportunities to observe the cultural construction of meaning, [and are] locations where we can see the social production of ideas and values happening before our eyes” (326). In this study, I analyse articles from two Japanese newspapers: *Yomiuri Shimbun* and *Asahi Shimbun*. These are the largest newspapers in Japan by circulation, with more than eight million (*Yomiuri*) and six million subscribers (*Asahi*) to their respective morning editions (*Yomiuri Shimbun* 2018b; *Asahi Shimbun* 2018a). *Yomiuri Shimbun* is considered to be a conservative newspaper, while *Asahi Shimbun* is considered progressive (Akuto 1996, 319). I analyse articles from these

⁵ Tanada et al.’s 2014 report concerned a survey carried out by the authors in 2011. Tanada’s research team carried out surveys on perceptions of Islam and Muslims in Japan between 2009 and 2012, which was before stories about Muslim refugees and atrocities by the Islamic State started to be covered widely by the Japanese media.

two newspapers, including regional editions, that were published between 1 January 2014 and 30 June 2018. In 2014, asylum seekers arriving in Europe started to increase (Eurostat 2018b) and the so-called Islamic State declared the establishment of a caliphate, or state governed in accordance with Islamic law (BBC 2015). From around 2014, stories about Muslim refugees and atrocities committed by the Islamic State began to be covered by the Japanese media. I analyse the content of newspaper articles from this period and identify major themes in discussions about Islam and Muslims. While previous studies have mainly focused on the images Japanese people have of Islam and Muslims in general, I particularly focus my analysis on newspaper articles concerning Muslims living in or coming to Japan in order to see how recent stories of this nature have been covered, and to thereby gauge broader public sentiment.⁶

I start by looking at the historical background of Japan and Islam. There is little English-language scholarship on Muslims in Japan, so I consider it valuable to describe the historical background and the current situation of Muslims living in Japan first. I then review the aforementioned studies on Japanese perceptions of Islam and Muslims which are based on surveys. Next, I focus on the surveillance of Muslims by Japanese police and displays of anti-Islamic sentiment by ultra-conservative activists. I then analyse newspaper articles about Japan and Muslims in order to explore perceptions of Islam and Muslims in mainstream media, showing that Japan's interest in Muslims as visitors or tourists is on the increase. In the final section, I explore the rationales behind the perceptions of Islam and Muslims in contemporary Japan.

MUSLIMS IN JAPAN: HISTORY AND CURRENT SITUATION

Although some scholars point out that there has been interaction between Japan and the Muslim world from as far back as the eighth century (e.g., Komura 1988), it is from the end of the 19th century that communities of Muslims began to form in Japan. From the end of the 19th century, Indian merchants, most of whom were Muslims, started to reside in international port cities such as Yokohama and Kobe (Green 2013). From the 1920s, Tatar Muslims fleeing the Russian revolution migrated to Japan through Manchuria and Korea and formed communities in cities such as Tokyo, Nagoya, Kobe and Kumamoto (Matsunaga 2009, 3–9).⁷ Following the arrival of these Muslims, three mosques were established in Japan in the 1930s. In 1935, Kobe Mosque (Figure 1), which was the first mosque in Japan, was established, followed by Nagoya Mosque in 1936 and Tokyo Mosque in 1938 (Tanada 2015, 24).⁸

⁶ I searched for articles on the online databases of the two newspapers by combining the following keywords: ‘ムスリム’ (Muslim), ‘イスラム教徒’ (lit., ‘follower of Islam’) and ‘日本’ (Japan).

⁷ The Tatars are a Turkish ethnic group who settled in Russia. They were merchants who crossed between Russia and Manchuria, but it became difficult for them to continue their business in Russia after the Russian revolution. To avoid the turmoil after the revolution, they fled to Manchuria, Korea and Japan (Matsunaga 2009, 2–9).

⁸ Of these, only Kobe Mosque still exists as of 2018. Nagoya Mosque was destroyed by fire in the bombings of 1945 and Tokyo Mosque was demolished in 1986 due to deterioration. In 2000, the Turkish government established a new mosque, called Tokyo *Camii*, at the site of the former Tokyo Mosque (Tanada 2015, 24–25, 29). ‘*Camii*’ is a Turkish word which refers to a major mosque where people gather for Friday prayers. Tokyo *Camii* is one of the largest mosques in Japan (Nippon.com 2013).



Figure 1: Kobe Mosque, 2010.

Source: *Mosque in Japan* by Lmadcap, via Flickr (public domain).

While the establishment of Kobe Mosque and Nagoya Mosque was initiated by Muslims, Tokyo Mosque was established in a different context: it was a part of the *'Kaikyō Seisaku'* (回教政策; Islamic policy) of the Japanese government of the time (Tanada 2015, 24; Fukuda 2010), and was established with support not only from Japanese politicians but also from military officials (Esenbel 2004, 1157–67; Biygautane 2016, 121). The Japanese government, particularly after the invasion of Manchuria in 1931, had begun to seek cooperation with Muslims in its foreign policy with a view to making use of local Muslims in its advancement into North China and South East Asia, both of which had large Muslim populations at the time (Esenbel 2007, 263–64). To promote interaction between Japan and Muslims, some Islamic research institutes were also founded by the government under its Islamic policy (Tanada 2008, 216). One of these institutes, *Dai-Nippon Kaikyō Kyōkai* (大日本回教協会; the Greater Japan Muslim League), implemented measures to raise awareness of Islam in Japan, such as publishing periodicals and holding exhibitions about Islam (Tanada 2013). There are no official statistics about the Muslim population in pre-1945 Japan, but Tanada posits that it did not exceed 1,000 between 1931 and 1945 even by the most generous estimation (Tanada 2015, 10).

After the end of World War II, the Islamic research institutes were dissolved or banned by the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers during the Allied occupation of Japan, as those institutes were regarded as part of Japan's military campaigns (Fathil and Fathil 2011, 132–33). In addition, most of the Tatar Muslims, who had been the largest group among the Muslim population of Japan, migrated to the US or Turkey as they were granted Turkish citizenship in 1953 (Tanada 2015, 10; Numata 2012, 132–34).⁹ As a result, the Muslim population in Japan in the 1950s is estimated to have dropped to only a few hundred (Tanada 2015, 10–11).

The number of Muslims in Japan remained quite small in the decades after the war, but has grown since the late 1980s. From the late 1980s to the beginning of the 1990s, Japan experienced a rapid increase in immigrant workers from countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh and Iran, where the majority of the population is Muslim. At that time, the Japanese economy was in its bubble phase and the yen was strong, so immigrant workers came to Japan to earn income for remittance back to their home countries. They were employed in factories or construction sites which were experiencing labour shortages (Sakurai 2003, 26). In the 1980s, Japan had Visa Waiver Agreements for tourists from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Iran. It was illegal for those on short-term residency to work in Japan, but there were many people working without a valid visa or overstaying after their resident status had expired (Sakurai 2003, 26–29). Under these circumstances, at the beginning of the 1990s, it is estimated that the number of non-Japanese Muslims in Japan reached more than 100,000 (Tanada 2015, 14). However, as the number of undocumented foreign workers increased rapidly, the Japanese government suspended the Visa Waiver Agreements with Pakistan and Bangladesh in 1989 and with Iran in 1992. After this, the entry of people from those countries into Japan decreased rapidly and, as the Japanese government tightened control over undocumented immigrants, most of them went back to their countries of origin (Sakurai 2003, 40–42).

While the majority of Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Iranian people who came to Japan between the late 1980s and early 1990s left Japan, some obtained long-term resident status through marriage and remained (Higuchi 2007b, 16–19). Most of the Muslims who had come to Japan from those three countries were males in their 20s or 30s, and marriages between Muslim men and Japanese women increased around this time (Sakurai 2003, 28). According to Kojima (2006), among married men from these countries residing in Japan, around 80% of Pakistanis and Iranians and about 50% of Bangladeshis were married to Japanese women as of 2000 (124–26). Some of these men, especially Pakistanis, owned successful businesses in areas such as used car export and the food industry, and lived stable lives in Japan both legally and financially (Higuchi 2007a; Fukuda 2007).

⁹ As one of the reasons behind this, Matsunaga (2009) points to the interaction between Tatar Muslims and Turkish soldiers around the time of the Korean War. Turkey sent troops to the Korean War from 1950. Some injured Turkish soldiers were treated at hospitals in Japan, where they met Tatars living in Japan. As the Tatars shared the same ethnic background, Turkish soldiers felt sympathy for the Tatars, who were stateless refugees at that time. After returning to Turkey, they called on the Turkish government to grant citizenship to the Tatars (Matsunaga 2009, 57–61).

After the influx of Muslims from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Iran had ended, Muslims from Indonesia started to come to Japan from the 1990s as technical intern trainees or students. Numbers of Indonesian nurses and caregivers also increased from 2007, following Japan's signing of an Economic Partnership Agreement with Indonesia.¹⁰ Furthermore, as the Japanese government has been promoting a policy of increasing its international student intake, the number of Muslim students coming to Japan has also grown (Tanada 2015, 23).¹¹ As a result of these initiatives, the number of non-Japanese Muslim residents in Japan has gradually increased over the past decade. Based on foreign resident statistics, Tanada estimates that the number of non-Japanese Muslims was around 100,000 in 2010 and that it had reached around 130,000 as of 2016. Of the 2016 total, Indonesian nationals comprised the largest group at around 33,000, followed by Pakistanis and Bangladeshis (Tanada 2018b, 111–13).

In addition to the growing number of non-Japanese Muslim residents in Japan, the number of Japanese Muslims is also growing due to intermarriage between non-Japanese Muslims and Japanese, and the children born to these families.¹² Tanada estimates that there were around 40,000 Japanese Muslims living in Japan, in addition to Muslim foreign residents, as of 2016 (Tanada 2018b). Assuming this is correct, there were around 170,000 Muslims in total living in Japan at that time. Moreover, the increase in foreign tourism to Japan in recent years has seen a rapid increase in Muslim tourists.¹³ This has mainly been due to the introduction of visa-free tourist travel for Indonesians and Malaysians, the depreciation of the Japanese yen and the growth of low-cost air travel (CrescentRating 2017, 9). According to the *Japan Muslim Travel Index* compiled by CrescentRating in 2017, the number of Muslim tourists arriving in Japan was around 150,000 in 2004 but reached 700,000 in 2016, with 27% from Indonesia, 23% from Malaysia and 5% from Singapore.¹⁴ At the time of writing, more than one million Muslim tourists were expected to visit Japan in 2018 (CrescentRating 2017, 7–10).

As the Muslim population in Japan has grown, the number of mosques in Japan has also increased. Until the late 1980s, there were only four mosques in Japan (Tanada 2015, 25). However, this number started to rise rapidly from the 1990s. According to Okai (2007), Muslim immigrant workers who came to Japan in the 1980s were working in industrial areas on the outskirts of big cities, so the demand for new mosques in those areas increased. In 1991, a group of local Muslims raised funds through donations and succeeded in founding a new mosque in Saitama prefecture by purchasing an existing building and renovating it (Okai 2007, 184–88). Since then, new mosques

10 Since 1997, Indonesians have made up the largest group among the non-Japanese Muslim population in Japan (Tanada 2015, 14).

11 In 1983, the Japanese government revealed a plan to increase international student numbers, with a goal of accepting 100,000 students. This goal was achieved in 2003. In 2008, it unveiled a new plan to accept 300,000 international students by 2020 (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology 2012).

12 Tanada (2018b) defines Japanese Muslims as Muslims who have Japanese nationality. Specifically, they include Japanese who have converted to Islam, children born to Muslims where at least one parent is Japanese, and foreign-born Muslims who came to Japan and naturalised as Japanese. In this article, I follow Tanada's definition.

13 The number of foreign tourists to Japan was around 10 million in 2013, but surpassed 30 million in 2018 (The Japan Times 2018).

14 CrescentRating is a Singapore-based organisation that is self-described as "the world's leading authority on halal-friendly travel" (CrescentRating 2018). *The Japan Muslim Travel Index* is one in a series of Muslim Travel Index reports produced by CrescentRating based on market research into halal tourism.

have been established in many parts of Japan. Tanada (2015) identifies the increase in Muslims who own successful businesses and have settled in Japan as the main factor behind this (26–28). Tanada also notes that this spread was helped by the sharing of knowledge about founding mosques, which helped Muslim residents of Japan collect funds in a variety of ways from Muslims both in Japan and abroad (2015, 26–28). As of October 2017, the number of mosques in Japan had reached 102 (Tanada 2018a).

As noted above, direct interaction between non-Japanese Muslims and the Japanese started less than 150 years ago. Except for the short period in which Japan sought cooperation with Muslims for the purposes of imperial expansion, interaction with Muslims has historically been limited, although this is likely to change as the number of Muslims in Japan continues to grow. With this in mind, in the following section I explore contemporary perceptions of Islam and Muslims among Japanese people.

HOW ARE ISLAM AND MUSLIMS PERCEIVED IN JAPAN?

Previous Studies on Japanese Perceptions of Islam and Muslims

As the Muslim population has historically been small in Japan and direct interaction between Japanese people and Muslims has been relatively limited, perceptions of Islam and Muslims in Japan have received only limited scholarly attention to date. Even so, several studies on this topic have been conducted since the 2000s. Matsumoto (2006) carried out a survey on perceptions of Islam among high school students in 2003 and Miura (2006) carried out the same survey among university students in 2005. In one question, students were asked to choose words they associated with three religions: Islam, Christianity and Buddhism. Both the high school and university students associated more negative words with Islam than with Christianity and Buddhism, choosing such descriptors as “backward”, “intolerant”, “strange”, “unfree” and “aggressive” to reflect their images of the religion (Miura 2006, 179–83). Both Matsumoto and Miura point out that the results were influenced by the Japanese mass media, which often covered Islam in the context of news about conflicts (Matsumoto 2006, 201–02; Miura 2006, 187–89).

Following these studies, between 2009 and 2012 the Institute for Multi-ethnic and Multi-generational Societies (IMEMGS) at Waseda University conducted surveys on residents living in areas near a mosque in three cities: Gifu City, Imizu City (in Toyama Prefecture) and Fukuoka City (Tanada et al. 2013; Tanada et al. 2014; Tanada and Okai 2011). An overview of the results shows that the respondents had negative images about Islam and Muslims in all three cities. While less than a quarter of residents agreed with positive opinions about Islam such as “advanced”, “tolerant” and “peaceful”, more than 60% of the respondents agreed with negative opinions such as “Islam is a radical religion” (Tanada et al. 2013, 78–88; Tanada et al. 2014, 69–78; Tanada and Okai 2011, 72–84). Reflecting this trend, the respondents were more reluctant to express approval about the admission of Muslims into

Japan compared with the admission of foreigners in general. While around 30% of surveyed residents agreed with the admission of foreigners to Japan, less than 5% agreed with the admission of Muslims in each of the three cities (Tanada et al. 2013, 54, 71; Tanada et al. 2014, 48, 63; Tanada and Okai 2011, 58, 87).

Regarding the rationales behind the negative images, Tanada again points to the influence of mass media, where Islam is often associated with terrorism (Tanada 2015, 84–85). In the surveys, more than half of the respondents indicated that the topics they most frequently heard about in connection with Islam were “conflicts and incidents” (Tanada et al. 2013, 75; Tanada et al. 2014, 66–67; Tanada and Okai 2011, 89). Furthermore, while the surveys were conducted in areas near mosques, around 90% of the respondents reported that they did not have any Muslim acquaintances (Tanada et al. 2013, 68; Tanada et al. 2014, 61; Tanada and Okai 2011, 84). Tanada (2015) argues that the respondents tended to have formed images about Islam and Muslims without actually interacting with Muslims, thereby indicating mass media influence as the most likely foundation underpinning these images (85).

In summary, these studies indicate that negative images about Islam and Muslims are shared by Japanese people (both student and non-student populations), and that these images appear to be fuelled by the mass media. These studies are valuable in that they investigated the perceptions of Islam among large numbers of Japanese people. However, the environment surrounding Japan and Muslims has been changing rapidly since these surveys were conducted, and the presence of Muslims in Japan—particularly as tourists—is on the increase. As a result, while Japanese media coverage of Islam may have focussed on news about conflicts at the time that these surveys were conducted, the focus of recent coverage has started to shift to Muslims living in or coming to Japan, as I discuss below.

Surveillance of Muslims in Japan

In this section I discuss the attitudes of the Japanese government, and particularly the Japanese police, toward Muslims living in Japan. Although there have been no terrorist attacks by Muslim extremists in Japan, Muslims living in Japan have been under official surveillance in the name of national security. In 2010, leakage of confidential documents on the internet from the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department revealed that police had profiled around 72,000 Muslims from countries of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) living in Japan, including children, and had carried out surveillance of places where Muslims gather, such as mosques, shops and businesses (Attorney Team for Victims of Illegal Investigation against Muslims 2014).¹⁵ Seventeen of the Muslims whose personal information was included in the leaked documents filed a lawsuit against the national government and the Tokyo metropolitan government claiming that the surveillance was illegal and violated their “rights to privacy, equality and freedom of religion” (Blakkarly 2016). While the Tokyo District Court

¹⁵ The OIC is an inter-governmental organisation with 57 member states which represents the Muslim world (OIC 2019).

ordered compensation of 90 million yen for violating the complainants' right to privacy, it judged the surveillance operations to be "necessary and inevitable measures" (Blakkarly 2016). The plaintiffs appealed to higher Courts, but the Tokyo High Court upheld the ruling and, on 31 May 2016, the Supreme Court dismissed their final appeal, judging that the surveillance was not unconstitutional (Asia-Pacific Journal Report 2016).¹⁶

The same view was expressed by delegates of the Japanese government at a hearing of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in the United Nations in 2014. Asked about the systematic surveillance of Muslims in Japan, a delegate stated that police were carrying out the surveillance not because of their religion but to uphold public security. Another delegate from the National Police Agency stated that the police were investigating in a lawful way (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights 2014). In short, both the courts and the Japanese government approved of the surveillance of Muslims living in Japan, insisting that it was necessary as a counter-terrorism measure and that it was not based on religious discrimination, but rather on public security policy.

However, the leaked documents indicate otherwise: they reveal that police collected the personal information of 72,000 people for the sole reason that they were from OIC countries, and therefore likely to be Muslim. In addition, the police encouraged their officers to gather information about Muslims from non-OIC countries, again including children, regardless of whether they had any record of wrongdoing (Attorney Team for Victims of Illegal Investigation against Muslims 2014). Given these facts, it can be considered that the Japanese government sees Muslims as potential terrorism suspects. While the concerns shared by people in authority are not necessarily representative of mainstream Japanese society, media reports of such surveillance may reinforce in the public mind an association between Islam and terrorism, even though there have been no terrorist incidents perpetrated by Muslims in Japan.

Displays of Anti-Islamic Sentiment in Xenophobic Movements in Japan

Islamophobia has not been explicit in Japan, but the rise of xenophobic movements by ultra-conservative groups in Japan since the 2000s has been identified in academic literature (Yamaguchi 2013; Shibuichi 2015). While these movements mainly target ethnic Koreans or Chinese, one group named *Han Gurōbarizumu Kokusai Hoshu Rengō*, or Anti-Globalism International Conservative Alliance (反グローバリズム国際保守連合; hereafter, AICA), started to target Muslims from around 2014. According to its website, the AICA is an anti-globalism organisation for which "anti-globalism" means "anti-European Union" (Han Gurōbarizumu n.d.). This does not mean that the AICA is anti-EU member states, but rather that it objects to the policies implemented in the EU, especially those which allow freedom of movement across state borders. The AICA website says, "the ugly situation in the EU

¹⁶ For a discussion of this incident within the context of the Japanese government's response to the Syrian refugee crisis, see Yamagata (2017).

caused by the Schengen Agreement and the monetary union should not happen in East Asia including Japan.”¹⁷ The protection of Japan’s borders might be a common argument for conservative groups, but what is different about this group is that it is specifically against the admission of Muslims to Japan and regularly holds rallies in Tokyo verbally attacking Muslims.

The AICA has articles on its website and uploads videos of its rallies on the popular Japanese video-sharing website Nico Nico (ニコニコ動画), so we can understand its members’ sentiments from these sources. The sources show that the AICA considers that there are two groups of Muslims: secular (世俗派) and fundamentalist (厳格派). According to the AICA, most Muslims living in Japan in the past were secular Muslims who adapted to Japanese culture; however, its members’ perceive fundamentalist Muslims to have increased in Japan over the last decade. Further, they believe that fundamentalist Muslims enforce Islamic (Sharia) Law wherever they live, and that this causes conflict in host societies. That is what is already happening in Europe, they argue. To prevent conflict or terrorism in Japan, they strongly object to the acceptance of Muslims (Endoshuichi 2015a, 2015b; Han Gurōbarizumu 2018).

The main targets of xenophobic movements in Japan are still Korean and Chinese residents, but it is notable that a group which also attacks Muslims has emerged. Considering that groups like the AICA often cite problems allegedly caused by Muslims in Europe, it can be argued that these groups see the influx of refugees to Europe and terrorist attacks in European cities as a threat to Japan.

The Toshiko Hasumi Manga Incident

In the middle of 2015, a controversial event occurred in Japan which, while not directly targeted at Muslims, can be seen as related to perceptions of Muslims through its link to the Syrian refugee crisis.¹⁸ On 9 September 2015, Japanese cartoonist Toshiko Hasumi posted an illustration of a girl to her official Facebook page (Hasumi 2015b).¹⁹ The illustration closely resembled a photograph of a Syrian girl at a refugee camp in Lebanon which was taken by Canadian photographer Jonathan Hyams (Osaki 2015b). In the illustration, the girl has a wry smile and a caption in the background says,

I want to live a safe and clean life, have a gourmet meal, go out freely, wear pretty things and luxuriate. I want to live my life the way I want without a care in the world—all at the expense of someone else. I have an idea. Why don’t I become a refugee [*Sōda nanmin shiyō*]?²⁰

(Hasumi 2015b)

17 「シェンゲン協定や通貨統合によるEUの酷い現状を、日本を含むアジア地域に再現してはならない。」

The Schengen Agreement is the basis for the Schengen Area, which allows people in the EU to cross state borders without being subjected to border checks. It has been implemented since 1995 and now encompasses most EU states (European Commission 2018).

18 For a discussion of this incident in the context of Japan’s response to the Syrian refugee crisis, see Yamagata (2017).

19 Although Hasumi’s original post on Facebook has been removed, the illustration can be viewed online via the Wayback Machine digital archive. See the references list for details. The original photograph by Jonathan Hyams can be viewed in a Twitter post by Save the Children NZ (Hyams 2014).

20 「安全に暮らしたい 清潔な暮らしを送りたい 美味しいものが食べたい 自由に遊びに行きたい おしゃれがしたい 贅沢がしたい 何の苦労もなく 生きたいようにいきいきしたい 他人の金で。 そうだ難民しよう！」 English translation by Osaki (2015c).

Asked about the illustration by *The Japan Times*, Hasumi said it was her “understanding” that most of the people fleeing Syria this time were “bogus” asylum seekers or “illegal migrants” (Osaki 2015c). Some people outraged by this launched an online petition calling for Facebook Japan to recognise the illustration as an example of racism, but Facebook Japan responded that the illustration did not breach its guidelines, declining to delete it (Osaki 2015c). In the end, however, Hasumi removed the illustration herself. She stated that it was true that her illustration had caused trouble to the Canadian photographer who took the original photo while denying the claim that her illustration was racist (Osaki 2015b). A few months after this incident, Hasumi announced that she would publish a new book titled with the words from the illustration: *Sōda nanmin shiyō—Hasumi Toshiko no sekai* [そうだ難民しよう! はすみとしこの世界; ‘Why Don’t I Become a Refugee?—The World of Hasumi Toshiko’] (Hasumi 2015a). The work consists of her illustrations of Koreans, refugees and progressive politicians or activists. Anti-racist campaigners criticised the publication, saying that her illustrations were racist cartoons (Osaki 2015a). On the cover of the book, the controversial illustration of the Syrian girl was displayed, with her appearance changed from the original so that she no longer bore a close resemblance to the girl in Hyams’ photo.

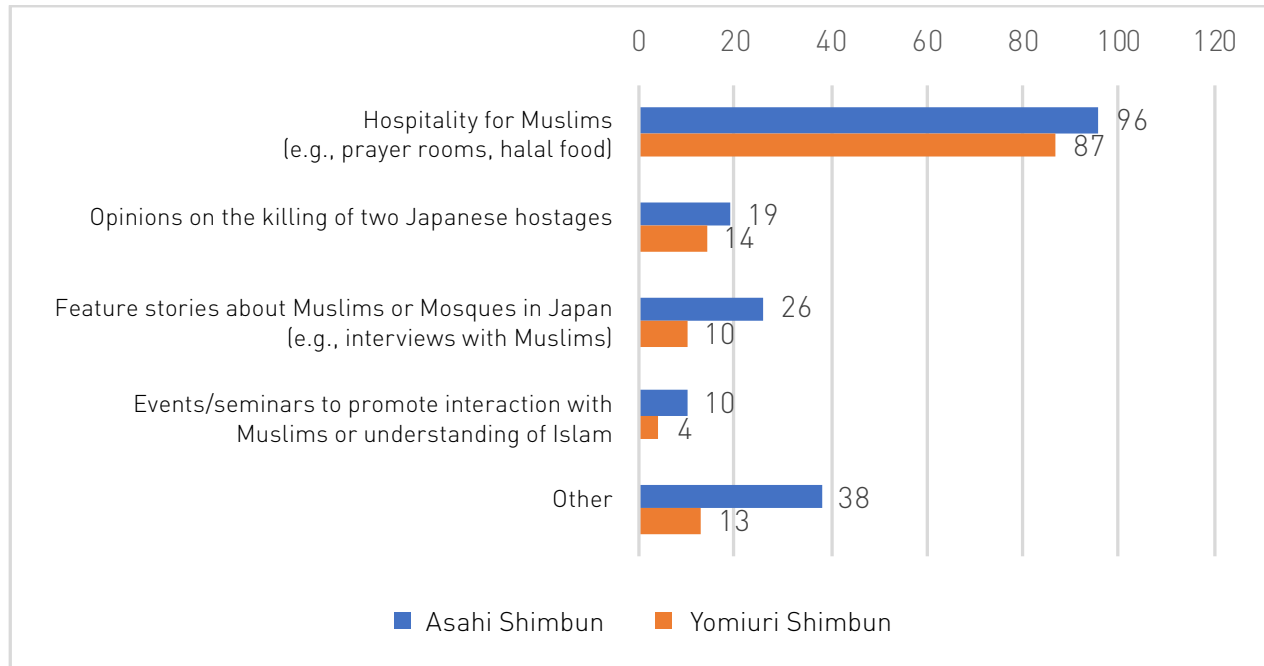
It should be noted that in Hasumi’s book, anti-refugee sentiment is portrayed in the same context as anti-Korean sentiment. The title of the book may be *Sōda nanmin shiyō* (‘Why don’t I become a refugee?’), but approximately half of the illustrations in her book target Koreans. Similarly, the AICA—the Japanese ultra-conservative group which recently began targeting Muslims—has also attacked Koreans in its rallies. What we can see from these cases is that xenophobic movements which have attacked Koreans over the past decades have now begun to display anti-refugee or anti-Muslim sentiments in the wake of the refugee crisis and terrorist attacks in Europe. Despite there being no record of terrorist incidents committed by Muslims in Japan, what is happening in Europe seems to be felt as a threat to Japan by some groups. The trajectories of ultra-conservative activists such as Hasumi and the AICA can be viewed as providing potential ground for new xenophobic movements in Japan in the future.

Perceptions of Islam and Muslims in Japanese Newspapers

In this section I explore perceptions of Islam and Muslims in mainstream Japanese society by focusing on articles from two Japanese newspapers, *Yomiuri Shimbun* and *Asahi Shimbun*. I found 128 articles in *Yomiuri Shimbun* and 189 articles in *Asahi Shimbun*, including op-eds, feature articles and readers’ letters, related to Muslims living in or coming to Japan which were published between January 2014 and June 2018. During this period, by far the most covered topic about Muslims in Japan was the need to provide better hospitality for Muslims through the establishment of prayer rooms and the provision of halal food, among other measures. Halal is an Arabic word meaning ‘lawful’ or ‘permitted’; halal food is food which fits the dietary standards prescribed in the Quran, avoiding ingredients such as alcohol or pork that Muslims are forbidden to consume (Islamic Council of Victoria

n.d.). Upon analysis, 87 articles in *Yomiuri Shimbun* (68% of the *Yomiuri* total) and 96 articles in *Asahi Shimbun* (51% of the *Asahi* total) addressed this topic (for a breakdown of coverage by topic and masthead, see Graph 1).²¹ These articles represent a total of 58% of the combined coverage studied.

Graph 1: Articles by Topic



Sources: *Asahi Shimbun* and *Yomiuri Shimbun* between 1 January 2014 and 30 June 2018.

Note: Articles which mention several topics about Muslims in Japan are classified based on the most prominent topic in each article.

In particular, the provision of halal food for Muslim tourists or students by Japanese businesses or universities was discussed in many articles (e.g., *Asahi Shimbun* 2014b, 2016a; *Yomiuri Shimbun* 2016c). A limited market for halal food has historically existed in Japan to serve the small number of Muslims living there. However, as the number of Muslim tourists has increased, interest in halal food has grown in Japan, particularly within the tourism industry (Tanada 2015, 94–96). To prove to their Muslim customers that their products are halal, more and more Japanese businesses have been seeking halal certification and Japanese organisations which issue halal certification have recently emerged (Henderson 2016). Several *Yomiuri Shimbun* and *Asahi Shimbun* articles reported on Japanese businesses that had obtained halal certification to attract more Muslim tourists (e.g., *Asahi Shimbun* 2016c, 2018b; *Yomiuri Shimbun* 2018a).

Efforts to attract Muslim tourists are not limited to the private sector. In May 2018, the ‘Action Plan for Muslim Tourists in Japan’ [訪日ムスリム旅行者対応のためのアクション・プラン] was formulated at the 20th Tourism Strategy Promotion Task Force meeting held by relevant ministries and agencies (Tourism Strategy Promotion Task Force 2018; Japan Tourism Agency 2018). The Action Plan stipulates specific measures to attract more Muslim tourists,

²¹ Over the period studied, Muslim-related or Islam-related coverage in the *Yomiuri* and *Asahi* included articles about Japanese companies looking for business opportunities in Muslim-majority countries. These articles are not included in the figures above as they are beyond the scope of my analysis, which focuses on Muslims living in or coming to Japan.

such as the provision of halal food, the establishment of prayer rooms, and promotional activities in Muslim majority countries (Tourism Strategy Promotion Task Force 2018). The Japan Tourism Agency (under the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism) also publishes guidebooks teaching Japanese people how to extend culturally appropriate hospitality to Muslims (Japan Tourism Agency 2018). At the municipal level, Kyoto City, cooperating with Kyoto Convention and Visitors Bureau, launched a website for Muslims named “Muslim Friendly Kyoto” in 2014 (Asahi Shimbun 2014a). The website provides information about prayer rooms, restaurants serving halal food and Muslim-friendly accommodation in Kyoto (Kyoto Convention and Visitors Bureau n.d.). Following the increase in Muslims visiting Japan, Japan’s interest in Muslims as potential visitors or tourists also seems to be rising.

While hospitality for Muslims was the most commonly featured topic about Muslims in Japan during the period of my analysis, there were two incidents during that period which could conceivably have affected attitudes toward Muslims in Japan in a negative way. The first occurred in January 2015, when two Japanese citizens were taken hostage and later killed by the so-called Islamic State in the Middle East (Nordland 2015). This incident was widely covered in the Japanese media and was received with deep sorrow in Japan (Miura 2015). At the time, there was concern among Muslims in Japan about the possible rise of anti-Muslim sentiment (Asahi Shimbun 2015a). However, most articles which connected this incident with Muslims in Japan were about strong criticism of Islamic State from Muslims rather than reports about hatred against Muslims. From the time of the incident until the end of the following month, 14 articles in *Yomiuri Shimbun* and 19 articles in *Asahi Shimbun* reported the voices of Muslims in Japan criticising the actions of the Islamic State (e.g., Asahi Shimbun 2015c; Yomiuri Shimbun 2015). An article in *Asahi Shimbun*, published just after the Islamic State announced that they had taken the two Japanese hostages, reported that a sermon about the dignity of life had been delivered in the Tokyo *Camii* and that Muslims had prayed for the safety of the two Japanese hostages (Asahi Shimbun 2015d).

The second incident occurred in July 2016, when seven Japanese citizens were killed in Bangladesh, with responsibility claimed by Islamic State (BBC 2016). After this incident, one *Yomiuri Shimbun* article reported that a mosque in Shizuoka prefecture had received four threatening letters saying “both the Islamic State and you are Islam” and “I will hit you with a bat from behind” (Yomiuri Shimbun 2016b).²² The influence of these incidents, however, seems to have been limited. According to a book by Ken’ei Satō (2015), Muslims in Japan reported that they had not felt any change in Japanese people’s attitudes toward them following the incident of the Japanese hostages. Further, the number of non-Muslim Japanese visiting the Tokyo *Camii* reportedly increased after the incident, which appeared to motivate Japanese people to learn about Islam (Asahi Shimbun 2015b; Satō 2015, 225).²³ Efforts by Muslims to interact with Japanese society were also highlighted in media coverage from around this time. Both newspapers reported that a mosque in

²² 「イスラム国もおまえたちもおなじイスラム教」 and 「うしろからバットでなぐるからな」 respectively.

²³ According to a report in *Asahi Shimbun*, there were many school teachers among the visitors and some of them were accompanied by their students (Asahi Shimbun 2015b).

Chiba had established an anti-crime patrol team in cooperation with local residents and police (Yomiuri Shimbun 2016a; Asahi Shimbun 2016b).

In short, in mainstream news coverage in Japan from 2014 to the first half of 2018, Muslims were predominantly represented as potential visitors or tourists in a hospitality context. Although there were tragic incidents perpetrated by Islamic extremists which affected Japanese nationals during this time, the two Japanese newspapers studied highlighted the voices of Muslims criticising the atrocities, and there was little reporting of a rise in Islamophobia.

RATIONALES BEHIND THE PERCEPTIONS OF ISLAM AND MUSLIMS IN CONTEMPORARY JAPAN

In this section I explore the rationales behind the perceptions of Islam and Muslims in contemporary Japan. Previous studies based on surveys (discussed above) have revealed negative images of Islam and Muslims among some Japanese people, and have attributed this to media coverage of conflict or terrorism involving Islam and Muslims. However, my analysis of mainstream Japanese newspaper articles found that Muslims have been most frequently positioned as potential visitors or tourists in recent local coverage. Recent measures by national and municipal governments to attract Muslim tourists reflect this trend.

While the main reason behind the rise of interest in Muslims as visitors appears to be the rapid increase in Muslim tourists over recent years, I consider that this has been further fuelled by the so-called *omotenashi* (おもてなし; ‘hospitality’) boom which emerged after Tokyo won its bid to host the 2020 Olympic Games. At the 125th Session of the International Olympic Committee in Buenos Aires in September 2013, Japanese TV announcer Christel Takigawa made a speech in which she introduced *omotenashi* as “a spirit of selfless hospitality” (Takigawa 2013, 26’00”). Since then, the word *omotenashi* started to be used widely in Japan and has been framed by the media as a source of national pride (Brasor 2015). Among the articles collected for this study, the term ‘*omotenashi*’ was used in 31 *Asahi Shimbun* articles and 13 *Yomiuri Shimbun* articles. In addition, the title of a guidebook published by the Japan Tourism Agency aimed at stakeholders in the domestic tourism industry is *Musurimu omotenashi gaido bukku* [ムスリムおもてなしガイドブック; ‘Hospitality Guidebook for Muslims’] (Japan Tourism Agency 2018 [2015]). The fact that this government agency has used the word ‘*omotenashi*’ in an official publication indicates how much the usage of this word has spread in Japan. I contend that this *omotenashi* boom has stimulated Japanese people’s national pride in their hospitality, which has further accelerated the provision of halal food and the establishment of prayer rooms for Muslims. In other words, in Japan’s case, rather than inciting violence or hate speech, the rise of discourses of *omotenashi* as a perceived national value has encouraged Japanese people to be more welcoming as more Muslims arrive as tourists.

While this can be interpreted as a positive trend, it should be noted that this welcoming attitude promoted by the rise of national pride is largely directed at Muslims staying temporarily in Japan. The image of *omotenashi* is one of hosts receiving guests warmly; to this end, *omotenashi* toward Muslims means welcoming Muslims as guests—namely, as visitors or tourists. Given that the numbers of long-term Muslim residents and Japanese Muslims are growing, the Japanese interest in Muslims as tourists or visitors could have a potentially negative aspect to it. Recognising Muslims as visitors or tourists may reinforce the idea that Muslims are from outside of Japanese society, and lead to neglect of the existence of Muslim residents within Japanese society.

Lastly, I would like to consider why anti-Muslim discourse has not appeared in mainstream Japanese newspapers, even following occasions of atrocities committed by Islamic extremists. I consider that one of the main reasons is because the growing presence of Muslims in Japan has made it easier for Muslims to organise and communicate with Japanese society as a community. When incidents were perpetrated against Japanese nationals by Islamic State, newspaper sections devoted to local news introduced voices from local mosques (e.g., Yomiuri Shimbun 2015). Mosques have been established in many parts of Japan, providing platforms for Muslims to lend their voices to Japanese media and society. Muslims can also interact with non-Muslim Japanese residents through their mosques, as we can see from the abovementioned anti-crime patrol team in Chiba prefecture. As a result of these intertwining forces, the increase in Muslim tourists in Japan and the growing presence of Muslim residents in Japan can be said to have had a positive influence on perceptions of Islam and Muslims in Japan.

CONCLUSION

In this article, I have explored how Japanese people have perceived Islam or Muslims in recent years. Unlike previous studies, which have described negative images about Islam and Muslims held by Japanese people, my content analysis of recent coverage from mainstream Japanese newspapers indicates that interest in Muslims as potential visitors or tourists is rising in line with the recent increase in Muslim tourists to Japan. Furthermore, even when Japanese citizens have been victimised in atrocities committed by Islamic extremists, voices of Muslims criticising these incidents have been highlighted in Japanese newspapers in related media coverage. My analysis in this article shows that the increase in Muslim tourists has influenced perceptions of Islam and Muslims in contemporary Japan in a positive way.

As we have seen, however, the large numbers of Muslim refugees entering Europe have been perceived as a threat to Japan by some ultra-conservative activists, which has caused some anti-Muslim discourse. While anti-Muslim sentiment is relatively uncommon among Japanese people at the time of writing, this could change if an incident were to happen in Japan that was interpreted as a threat from Muslims. Furthermore, as noted above, the rising interest in Muslims as visitors or tourists may distract non-Muslim Japanese from paying attention to Muslim residents within Japanese

society. Given that the presence of Muslims is increasing in Japan, further study of Muslims (including Japanese Muslims) and how they are perceived by non-Muslim Japanese is needed.

GLOSSARY

AICA

Anti-Globalism International Conservative Alliance, or *Han Gurōbarizumu Kokusai Hoshu Rengō* (反グローバリズム国際保守連合); a Japanese ultra-conservative group which started targeting Muslims from around 2014. They object to policies implemented in the EU, especially those which allow freedom of movement across state borders.

Kaikyō (回教)

An archaic term formerly used in Japan to mean Islam

Kaikyō Seisaku (回教政策)

Islamic policy; a policy enacted by the Japanese government, particularly after the invasion of Manchuria in 1931, which promoted cooperation with Muslims with a view to furthering Japan's expansionist agenda at the time.

Halal

An Arabic word meaning 'lawful' or 'permitted'. Halal food is food which fits the dietary standards prescribed in the Quran, avoiding ingredients such as alcohol and pork that Muslims are forbidden to consume.

Islamic State

An Islamic extremist group based in parts of Iraq and Syria. Islamic State drew international attention when it seized large territories in Iraq and Syria in 2014 and declared the establishment of a state governed in accordance with Islamic law.

Kōdō-suru Hoshu Undō (行動する保守運動)

'Action Conservative Movement'; a movement of ultra-conservative groups which hold rallies verbally attacking foreign residents, especially ethnic Korean or Chinese residents of Japan. The movement emerged in the middle of the 2000s.

Omotenashi (おもてなし)

'Hospitality'; this term began to be widely used in Japan following the success of Japan's bid to host the 2020 Olympic Games.

Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)

Formerly 'Organisation of the Islamic Conference'; an inter-governmental organisation with 57 member states which represents the Muslim world. Member states are spread over four continents and include Indonesia, Pakistan and Bangladesh, which are the top three countries of origin among non-Japanese Muslims living in Japan.

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