

# Threat or Opportunity: Increasing of Muslim Worker in Japan Regarding Aging Population Issue

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## Abstract

This paper studies and analyses the discourse of the national policy of increasing number of Muslim worker in Japan. It considers various political perceptions whether it should be understood as a threat or opportunity. In this globalized era, it is uncommon that Islam is viewed and stigmatized as a religion of terror mainly by the western media. On the other hand, Japan is known as an exclusive country with such strong working culture, which inevitably need to solve the problem of the lack of the productive labours due to the growing of its aging population. The presence of workers who come from Muslim-majority countries then requires a separate attention as the number of them is consistently growing. With a very controversial prestige among the international communities, as well as the contrasting cultural differences between Japanese and Muslim cultures make a very interesting debate that, will increase in the number of Muslim workers in Japan becoming threat or opportunity to Japan.

**Keywords:** Aging Population, Muslim Workers, Threat, Opportunity, Social Distinguishment

## 1. Introduction

The new industrialization model after World War II making Japan got a title as the Miracle Economy of Asia for being the first Asian country to quickly restore its postwar economic downturn. It makes Japan becomes a symbol of the advancement of the economy in the Asian region which then match the countries in Europe and America and becoming the third largest economic in the world.

The consequence of this rapid economic growth is the Aging population. As Japan progresses, the demands of better lifestyle for the Japanese also increase, the competition in the career increasingly and rapidly changes the social order. Many of the Japanese people are too busy working and have no time to connect with the opposite gender. So many of them are still unmarried despite being elderly. Other than that, the heavy expenses that go into managing children makes many married couples to not want to have children, so the birth rate is increasingly declining. At the same time the number of previous generations that adopted healthy lifestyles made them able to survive longer. This is what makes the population with old age larger than the younger population.

Following the advance of Japanese economy after the war and this issue continues to increase and make Japan become the country with highest rate. Prediction number of people aged 26 and above rose to 40% of the total population in the year 2060 (Domínguez, 2015). On this matter, Japan's GDP has declined since 2012 (JMA, 2018) so it should be handled seriously. This is allegedly due to the decline in the number of productive workforces which then impact on the productivity of local Japanese companies. Although Japanese products are worldwide such as cars and motorcycles, it can be produced in many countries around the world, but because it implements considerable profit sharing, Japan does not profit too much (Aoki, 2013).

The cost of living is expensive too even for Japanese people-making many Japanese people to be active in making money to survive. It also enters into their budget calculation to have and raise a child. Surely time is running out for work, it will not be enough to have children while childcare services in Japan are very expensive (Peng, 2002). While because as a country that is not rich with natural resources, Japan is very dependent on its human resource. Education is therefore particularly preferred in Japan (Leonardsen, 2014). In addition, the military forces frozen permanently by the U.S participated in the role of making Japan depend on the industry in maintaining its existence in the international competition.

In general, aging population does not happen in Japan only but also in most of the industrialized countries. The most significant example is European Countries such as Belgium, Spain, Germany, Italy, U.K, and France (Van de Kaa, 1987). However, the various values and cultural factors such as political system, religions, and languages make it easier for them to invite the foreign workers (their ex-colonial countries) with no need for more capacity training (Brockman, 2001). As well as the European Union program that concerns Human Rights also make them also play an active role in handling refugees (Huysmans, 2000). This contributed a great deal to the countries as well as the supply of foreign workers. From this pattern, it can be seen that the European countries were first used to the mixing of race and ethnicity.

Related to religion, even though the majority of European countries are secular countries but still embracing Christianity as their identity. In history, there are episodes of some battles among European with Christian majority during Islam invasions as negative experiences for them (Armstrong, 2001). A little more of this experience will certainly provide a separate picture of Islam than other religions. This is then made worse by

several acts of terrorist attacks in some of Europe's important cities such as Paris, London, and Barcelona which further worsen the image of Islam in the western world (Nesser, 2014). This then makes the study of Islam and its influence a more special topic of discussion than some other religions that are not really controversial. This is evidenced by news searches by authors in various public media such as Google, Youtube, etc. are a lot of questions about Islam in their country. While other religions such as Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, almost none.

Both factors of experience of racial mixing and religious factors that occur in Europe are very different from Japan. Japan is known as a closed country with 99% of people living in Japan are Japanese, as well as different patterns of colonization between Japan and European countries to make Japan with a complete release from ties to the former colonies after the war. Regarding the religion, Japan is not a state bound to a particular religious system and only sees religion as a mere culture. In practice there can be seen when they were children, they often went to Shinto shrine and when they married they went to church (Seiza, 2016). That's why there is no spread of religion during the Japanese occupation of Asia. Likewise with the Language, there is no country of former Japanese colony which then uses the Japanese language. This makes foreign workers who want to work in Japan to must and should get language training prior to start working there.

With the special culture and character of Japan, which also leads the Japan at the peak of success as a developed country in such a way, makes Japan's stance very complicated in relation to culture. Some famous positive aspects of the culture of this country are politeness, cleanliness, discipline, hard-working, and the lowest crime rate in the world (Leonardsen, 2014). These values also become the consideration of Japan to be very careful in opening the door of foreign migration to enter the country. So, therefore Japan is also very selective towards the existence of a new culture or group in which case foreign workers are likely to bring negative influences contrary to Japanese culture.

However, as careful as Japan is, it is undeniable that migration is the most sophisticated way of dealing with this issue. Just how the government fixes the regulation so that the bad possibilities can be minimized consequently. Recognizing this, it is now seen very clearly the number of foreign workers immigrating each year to Japan has increased.

However, the uniqueness was the increase number of foreign workers coming from the Islamic countries characterized by raise number of halal restaurants and mosques (Biygautane, 2016). Obviously such conditions effect a lot to Japan both socially and politically. This statement is based on the negative image of Islam in the world and is very different between Islamic culture and Japanese culture. This paper tries to analyze with the existing references either the booming of Muslim workers coming to Japan becomes a threat or the advantage to maintain the Japanese industry.

### **1.1 Research methodology**

The research in this paper used the library resources with qualitative analysis of data. The materials collected for the information were various books, journals and other resources related to the topic.

## **2. Islam and Japan**

In general, Islam is known as a religion introduced by Prophet Muhammad as the last prophet based on Islam believers. Since his death, the spread of Islam then continues to various regions of the Atlantic Ocean in the West as well as Central and East Asia (Chaudhuri, 1985). Soon after, various regions began to emerge Islamic kingdoms.

Islam was only able to enter Japan in the Meiji era, the period when Japan was just beginning to open up the country. With the interest of import-export merchants, few Arab, Turk and Indian Muslims had been living in Japan since 1865; some of them were. The first Japanese Muslim is said to be Abdul Halim Shotaro Noda (1868-1904) followed by the second Japanese Muslim, Torajiro Yamada who met Noda when he arrived at Istanbul on April 4, 1892 (Rydehed, 2013). It was the most famous story about Japan and Islam. The development of Islam was not big enough to be felt in Japan, with respect to Japan being busy with war preparation during that time.

There is no one knows the exact figures of the total Muslim population in the future. Meanwhile, by using various data related to population census, it will be possible to grasp figures close to the actual situation. According to the Waseda University research, the Muslim population in 1900 was 1999.4 million (12.3% of the world population), but in 1950 it was 315.7 million (13.6%) in a small proportion. The estimation of the Muslim population in 2000 was 1,276.3 million (21.1%) in 2007, 1.4 4956 million (21.7%) in 2007. The Muslim population of the world as of 2011 is 1.54897 million people, 22.2% of the world population, the size and proportion of which came in the 21st century It has steadily increased since then. In 1987 based on Crisis of Civilization, referring to a French researcher's paper estimated saying that the Muslim population ratio in 2025 will be 30.6% based on the fact of the Muslim population estimate in 2000 is 23.3% (S. Hirofumi & Hirofumi, 2010). Islam is foretold to be a religion whose followers will increase one of them because of it. Considering the population growth trend of the Islamic society so far, steadily increasing the absolute number of Muslim population in the world and, the rise in the percentage of the world population can be considered to continue.

Regarding the Muslim population, due to various indirect data such as ethnic composition, number of mosques etc., foreign population statistics, and the Muslim population of each country. There are only two possible reasons the numbers of Muslim are increasing. First, because of the high of birth rate of Muslim family. Second, non-Muslim choosing to convert to become Muslim.

The various sources provide diverse data on the number of Muslim populations in Japan. According to estimates published by the Pew Research Center in 2011, the Muslim population in Japan is 185,000 in 2010 (including the Japanese) (Seiza, 2016). While based on analysis of the "Register of Foreign Residents in Japan" and other materials, the Muslim population in Japan has been estimated at about 110 thousand. Japan's Muslim population is around 70,000 which includes less than 10,000 of them as Japanese and the rest being foreigners (Majority of them are nationals from SEA countries). That's a mere 0.055% of the population. Although Muslims in Japan is still classified as a minority, and only more than 0.055% of the total population, but the figure is expected to continue to experience the rapid increase (T. Hirofumi, 2013).

There is no clear statistic about religious information, so most institutions cannot determine the number of Muslims in the same voice. Most Muslims in Japan is made up of foreigners living in Japan. Therefore, to investigate the number of Muslims in Japan, generally by increasing the number of foreign citizenship made by citizenship with the proportion of Muslims in the country. From the results of this study, it can be understood that Japanese Muslims make up about 0.1% of the Japanese population. (Alhabshi, 2016).

Japan's low natural resources rely heavily on foreign oil imports, 30% of its energy supply from Middle Eastern countries. This dependence also makes the Japanese cannot move when faced any various issues regarding the Arab countries as oil-producer. This is evident when the first oil crisis hitting the world in 1973 as the result of the six Persian Gulf, touched off by the breakout of the Yom Kippur War. OAPEC, cutting America, Europe, and Japan supplies by 25%. To avoid the oil crisis in Japan, in the conflict Japan decided to support the Arabs by providing assistance in the form of economic and technical aid and not give their support to Israel (Kimura, 1985).

There are some issues in eastern countries such as Arab spring phenomenon that threatens the stability of its people, then nuclear plant in Iran, not to mention the emergence of ISIS issues in Syria that threaten regional stability. These unstable political regional ties make Japan uneasy threatened the Japanese energy without able to intervene by its military. Then to strengthen the relationship between Japan and Arab countries, Japan does it with improving its soft diplomacy through cultural and science exchanges (Kimura, 1985).

Regard to the issue of terrorism, 9/11 is considered as the starting point from when the negative image associated with Islam began to emerge. Until the development, with many negative stereotypes about Islam from western countries especially the U.S as a Japanese ally will slightly affect the Japanese perspective on Islam as a country that has never experienced the Islamic Culture. After the tragedy, Japan emphasized to make extra security by monitoring the movement of Muslim communities living in Japan. In response, Japan established a unit of the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department's Public Security Bureau to monitor and track the movement of terrorists that once lived in Japan from the Muslim community in Japan (Nouh, 2012).

## 2.1 Potential of Threat

From various negative views about Islam, there are three common perceptions categorized as the threats for the Japanese by the raising number of Muslim workers. Some of those images can be explained as followed.

Firstly, the perception of Muslims as the supporter of Terrorism. Although Islam was born long before the issue of Islam as a religion of fear spreader (terrorism), still the world society since the 20th century is now finding it very difficult to separate Islam and terrorists. The shock begins with the terrorist attack named as 9/11 tragedy in US by Al Qaeda led by Osama bin Laden. Although only a week later after that incident similar incident happened in Mumbai, India on 26/11 but it was not really recognized as a big tragedy (Puniyani & Hashmi, 2010). Think of it when the laity claims Islam, their minds direct to Arab or terrorism. The layman in question is certainly the people who judge something practically by looking at what Muslims do, not from their values and teachings. So even though the teachings of Islam are so far away from violence, people do not think of it.

It does not stop there, the issue of terrorist linking to Islam continued to flourish in the world in 2002, Bali Bombing twice by Jemaah Islamiyah (Barton & Barton, 2005). Some other famous Islamic radical groups are Taliban movement in Afghanistan and Pakistan, Boko Haram in Nigeria, Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Palestine, Abu Sayyaf in Philippines, ISIS radical movement in Syria and move to some MENA countries and many more. As the holding points of those actions were centralized to 'Jihad' (the defense of religion in the apostolic period which is currently the jihad theory instead of being mistaken for killing non-Islam believer).

The terror attackers usually attack big cities in the world (Richter & Waugh, 1986), and Tokyo is one of the biggest city in the world. Besides that, Japan is the lowest crime country in the world. So, of course, it is not a good idea to enter the risk of the situation that is good already.

Second, the branding of Muslims as the fanatic group. In some people's opinion, they see Islam as an

intolerant religion, by not marrying different religion, praying, prohibiting to giving celebration to other religions, prohibiting to touching the opposite gender, etc. They also argue that Islam is disrespectful of human rights, by requiring women to wear hijab, anti-LGBT, having rules that are too harsh, must eat halal food by not drinking alcohol or eating pork, hating dogs, having to pray five times, and fasting a full month in the summer. Compared to another religion Muslims are too sensitive follower and they can't take a joke about their religion. This contrasting culture and values of contrast will certainly affect the social life and relations of local and Muslim citizens.

In fact, in Japan alone the increasing number of Muslim families support the Muslim to build mosques and Islamic Schools and reviving Islamic events throughout the year. The number of mosques in Japan has grown rapidly every year. The Muslim community supports the building of mosques with the help of Islamic organizations outside Japan as well as people who give donations for the building of mosques.

Third, the increasing of Muslims in Japan has shift the values and local culture of the Japanese (Mchitarjan & Reisenzein, 2015). As result of the many things that Muslims must obey in point number 2 is when Muslims abroad must form their own group away from local social lifestyle. This is evident in any Muslim country in the world, including Japan. Of course, in this view there are also pros and cons, in which they have the right to maintain their values and culture, how to judge people. But the problem is that as the number increases automatically the request for a more certain right will arise to accommodate that capacity. The application of rights in the form of places of worship, facilities etc. that increasingly open them to the outside culture. It is also feared that it will become a threat to the local culture that is believed to be good in Japan.

These judgments are formed from the perceptions that develop in society. Rather it is illustrated only through opinion in mass media, most of which can be perceptions that cannot be verified. With no specific figures to be found that talk about the poor values and teachings of Islam. Those issues also become part of some countries to do not accept Islam into their country where a state limits certain people to enter their country because there is a feared value that might be transmitted in their country.

The last, the image of Muslim workers among the Japanese people are not good. The development of technology increasingly speed-up information. This is supported by those who preach it is the western media that has a wider market segment. While each carries issue related to terrorism, these media broadcast seem to always carry the name of Islam in it. It makes Islam negative image today is very difficult to be dammed. On the other hand, precisely with the spread of many negative issues about Islam, it makes many people curious and finally find out about Islam, and also after the search about Islam not few decided to convert to Islam (Abdo, 2006).

On October 2014 Japan has direct experience with terrorists. That is when two Japanese journalists named Kenji Goto and Haruna Yukawa held hostage by Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) militants, and this has become one of the world's concerns about ISIS and Islam (Fumerton, 2015). Although this event is very hit Japan, open thinking makes the Japanese society not directly assess the terrorist acts are not innate of a particular religion but it is based on personal decisions (Huey, 2015). In addition, there are many people who agree with the increasing number of Muslims in Japan. This is based on the reason that Japan is a free country by anybody, Japan does not take care of religious, and they appreciate the affairs of others. Since 2006 Japan is increasingly open to Islam with increasing Facility such as halal food and praying rooms in some hostels and restaurants, also in 2014 increasing doubled from the previous year (Seiza, 2016).

## **2.2 Potential of Opportunity**

In this viewpoint, it can be seen that the increase in the number of Muslims in Japan could be an opportunity. Firstly, the opportunity to develop the halal business. Due to the growing demand, then this could be an opportunity to open a variety of restaurants and hotels with halal theme by serving menus and services are halal. It has the potential to become a leader of halal tourism in East Asia region. Evidence of this success can be seen when the number of Muslim tourists increased in Japan. Some evidence of Japan's growing interest in Islam is by increasing efforts that are ultimately halal certified (Yusof & Shutto, 2014).

As known that halal food can be eaten by everyone and scientifically meat with halal cuts is good for health. Because the cutting system by means of slaughtering by cutting three nerves can eliminate the level of animal pain and remove the blood in the meat so that the meat becomes healthier and durable compared with the non-halal meat (Rahman, Khatun, Rahman, & Ansary, 2014). As an increasing of Muslim population in the world, and Japan already ready with this, so automatically Japan's tourism will increasingly impact the tourism-based economy.

Second, the migrant of Muslim workers become the solution for labour market needs, sticking to predictions of increasing world Muslim population that will also affect the growing number of Muslims in Japan, restrictions on migration related to religion or culture will be very difficult to realize and become less meaningful. By not assessing foreign workers based on religious and cultural background but ability (Aoki, 2013). It can be said that the rise of the Muslims is not a benchmark for Japan although in fact its number is increasing. This policy will certainly benefit Japan in the reserves of its labours.



Third, the migrant of Muslim workers in Japan become the solution of aging population, with a culture of slow marriage and small numbers of children in Japan that have already shown worse results and assuming this as a culture, to fix this condition, they must include the opposite culture and new values. One of them is foreign cultural mixing through mixed marriage. Cultural mixing is not always a problem to a population, as long as it does not interfere with each other and rub against each other (Piper, 2003). As one of the simpler issue, in Islamic value is very hard in taking the property of others. This is evident in the very safe Arab countries with theft issue and it is very related to the low number of thefts in Japan.

### 3. Conclusion

Along with the growing issues of terrorism concerning Islam in the world that began with the incident of 9/11 by Al-Qaeda, which then raised many roots of terrorism-new terrorism in various parts of the world. Up to this date, ISIS and various extremist Muslim issues that continue to grow and continue to worsen are the images of Islam and the Muslim community in the world. Many also eventually emerged the information media that is antithetical to it. Eventually many people who seek the truth of Islamic teachings and more specifically the meaning of the word 'jihad'. Therefore, some of people eventually convert to Islam.

Three potential of threat such as the terrorist's terror, Muslims are fanatic, and shifting values and local cultures cannot be a reference that Islam is a dangerous religion, because such flatterers are irrelevant because the thinking of Islam is overwhelming as it develops in various countries by adapting it to the existing local culture prior to the entry of Islam.

Japanese image as a closed country is not even relevant anymore. This is due to the absence of data that Japan has mandated a limit on foreigners to come and be part of Japan. In addition, the opening of Japan with anyone can be seen from the characteristics of Japan that are not binding with any religion, and view religion as a mere culture. It is just a fairly difficult requirement such as language and culture that must be followed according to Japanese rules.

Open minded people, being able to see things from two sides makes many Japanese realize that radical groups are only a small part of Islam. It can be said that although Islam has a negative image but, will not be a threat that very much affects Japan. Even if calculated properly, it could be an opportunity to improve both social, economic and culture of Japan.

Meanwhile, with the economic orientation, a culture of contrast between Islam and Japan, of course, will cause obstacles. Associated with work culture, Japan is famous as a hard-working country, with great respect for time. Whereas the contrary as a practical religion that must provide time to worship has the most active rituals than other religions. Among the five prayers time that should not be missed, with the need also a place free of 'najis' (unclean or free from various types of dirt). In addition, the fasting month one month in full will also affect work performance.

In addition, cultural differences, especially in worship and education also made Muslims in Japan eventually voice their demands to build mosques and Muslim schools. Some of the concerns are the science of religion, the study and the value of dressing when swimming lessons in formal schools which in Islam are not justified to open 'aurah' (body parts to be covered). But because it is still a small minority, and small minorities do not receive special attention.

If the increase of Muslims in Japan continues to grow along with the number of halal business places and followed by the realization of the prediction that the population of Islam will become the largest population in the world by 2025 will benefit Japan. The barriers between cultures are certainly commonplace in many fields of work. But if it can be correlated, it will provide a win-win solution for both and of course Japan will also benefit from the limitation of labor market shortage due to its aging Population.

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