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## **The Development of the Muslim community in Post-war Japan: the Future role of the Tokyo Jamii.**

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The Tokyo Jamii is the only Islamic building in the Turkish Ottoman style among more than 105 Islamic places of worship (mosques = masjids) in Japan, and its majestic pencil-shaped minaret and lead-roofed dome rising above Inokashira Street has become a daily sight in the town of Yoyogi Uehara. Before discussing the future of the Tokyo Jamii, let us look at the development of the Muslim community in Japan in the post-war period and the challenges it faces, tracing the growth of the Muslim population and the establishment of places of worship.

### **<The current situation of the Muslim population in Japan>**

The predecessor of the Tokyo Jamii, *Tokyo Kaikyo Reihaido*, was established in 1938. In 1953, Tatar immigrants were granted Turkish citizenship and many emigrated to Turkey, the USA and other countries. After the war, the Muslim community in Japan was restarted as a small community consisting of Tatar immigrants who had acquired Turkish citizenship but remained in Japan, and Japanese Muslims who had joined the faith before and during the war.

The Muslim population has gradually increased since the 1950s with Japan's return to the international community and rapid economic growth, due to the conversion of Japanese students to Islam and the arrival of foreign Muslims in Japan for work and study purposes. The Muslim population in Japan, including both foreigners and Japanese, increased from about 3,500 at the end of the 1960s to about 8,000 by the mid-1980s. The number of foreign Muslims continued to increase through the 2000s, and the number of permanent residents with the status of spouse, etc. of a Japanese national or permanent resident increased to around 30,000 by the mid-1990s. The number of foreign Muslims continued to increase through the 2000s, and the number of foreign Muslims who became permanent residents or spouses of Japanese citizens increased. The number of Japanese and second-generation Muslims who became Muslims through international marriage also increased, and the Muslim population in Japan increased its presence from 110,000 in 2010 to 130,000 in 2016 and 200,000 in 2018.

As of the end of 2019, the Muslim population in Japan stood at 230,000. The breakdown is 183,000 Muslims of foreign nationality. In addition, the Muslim population of Japanese nationality includes 14,000 Muslims who converted due to international marriage, 28,000

children and young Muslims born into their families, 3,000 naturalised Muslims (foreign Muslims who have acquired Japanese nationality, including children and young people) and 2,000 Muslims (including children and young people) who have joined the faith themselves, The Muslim population of Japan in 2010 was 110,000, which means that the number has doubled in nine years.

### **<Deployment of mosques in Japan>**

Immediately after the end of the war in 1945, there were two mosques in Japan: the Kobe Mosque and the Tokyo Mosque (*Tokyo Kaikyo Reihaido*), the predecessor of the Tokyo Jami'i. For a while after the war, the Tokyo Mosque functioned as the only large-scale place of worship in eastern Japan, and at its peak, around 800 Muslims would gather for mass prayers, overflowing the chapel, but it was closed in 1983 due to ageing.

The situation surrounding mosques changed dramatically with the opening of the Ichinowari Mosque in Kasukabe City, Saitama Prefecture, in 1991, mainly due to the rapid increase in the number of foreign Muslims since the end of the 1980s, who contributed funds through their charitable donations and construction campaigns, and by the end of the 1990s there were eight mosques in the Kanto region and one each in Aichi and Toyama Prefectures. By the end of the 1990s, eight mosques had been established in the Kanto region and one each in Aichi and Toyama prefectures. Later, the number of Muslims who achieved economic success as self-employed people in the used car export and halal industries increased, making it easier to secure funds for the establishment of mosques, and the diversification of domestic and international charity routes also helped to secure funds, and the 2000s saw a rush of mosque construction.

By the time the Tokyo Jami'i was opened in 2000, the landscape of the Muslim community in Japan had undergone a major transformation compared to more than a decade earlier. The Muslim population exceeded 50,000 and nearly 20 mosques had been established in various parts of the country, and the Tokyo Jami'i was one of these mosques that resumed its activities. Since then, due to the increase in the Muslim population and the nationwide expansion of Muslim residential areas, as of the end of 2019, more than 105 mosques have been opened from Hokkaido to Okinawa Prefecture.

### **<Development of Muslim social action and challenges for Muslim communities>**

Mosques are primarily places where Muslims gather for worship, but they also function as centres of Muslim communities in their respective regions. Mosques are not only places of religious practice, but also serve a variety of functions for Muslims, including a spiritual centre, a place of relaxation, a place for counseling and information exchange, a place for mutual

support, a place for religious education for children and adults, and a place for festivals, initiation, marriage and funeral ceremonies. In addition, mosques are the main centres for activities that support the overall life of Muslims and strengthen Muslim identity in non-Muslim societies, such as the construction of cemeteries where burial in the ground is possible, securing Halal food, building Islamic schools and passing on Islamic culture and values. In addition, activities such as those aimed at promoting harmonious coexistence with Japanese society, the local community and the local population are also carried out.

With the development of the Muslim community, the quality and quantity of mosque activities have increased, but nearly 30 years have already passed since the first mosque was built by Newcomer Muslims, and the first generation of Muslim immigrants is ageing. The sustainability of the Muslim community that they have led and built up is an important issue for Muslims at the moment. Specifically, there are three issues: firstly, the maintenance and physical succession of mosques and other religious facilities; secondly, the nurturing and succession of the second generation of Muslims who will lead the Muslim community in the future; and thirdly, the coexistence of the Muslim community and Japanese society.

#### **<The Muslim community and the future role of the Tokyo Jamii>**

The Friday and Eid prayers held by the Tokyo Jami'i bring together Muslims of all ages and ethnicities from an extremely diverse range of nationalities and ethnicities. Muslims gather not only from Tokyo but also from all over the Kanto region, as well as Muslim tourists who have come to Japan. The prayer hall has a capacity of 2,000 people, and the spectacle of collective worship is spectacular. The Tokyo Jamii is a place that transcends borders, nationality, ethnicity, generation and gender.

According to the Tokyo Jamii website, there are public cultural courses, charity bazaars, Young Muslim Club events, cultural courses such as Arabic language and calligraphy, Islamic courses on the Qur'an, a hijab group for women, a young mothers' group (Anne Frank group), and flower workshops. The organisation also runs a wide variety of activities, from hobby courses such as flower workshops to the Tokyo Jamii Tour for non-Muslims, which takes place every Saturday and Sunday. Another activity not mentioned on the website but worthy of special mention is the delivery of Islamic lectures to high schools in neighbouring prefectures. Like other mosques, they also fulfil a variety of functions, such as a place for relaxation, consultation and exchange of information on daily life, mutual assistance, initiation, marriage and funeral ceremonies. Some activities contribute to the maintenance and strengthening of Muslim identity, while others are aimed not only at coexistence with non-Muslims and understanding of Islam, but also at people who are interested in Islamic culture, the Middle East, Turkey and other cultures in general. Activities are also carried out for people with an

interest in Islamic culture, the Middle East, Turkey and other cultures at large. There is also a halal market, and the Turkish Cultural Centre, which is attached to it, offers various courses, including language courses, film and art exhibitions, a library and a café. As described above, Tokyo Jamii is a space where everyone can find their own 'place' for their activities in a sense, including Muslims and non-Muslims, those who are interested in Islam and those who are not, those who are interested in different cultures, women and second-generation people, and so on. Furthermore, it does not exclude young people who are not interested in events and activities, but come here in search of pictures for Instagram.

Looking at the current state of such a wide range of activities, one wonders whether there is anything to point out as the future role of Tokyo Jamii. The role of Tokyo Jamii in the future is to continue the management of the various activities and facilities that have been planned and realised by Tokyo Jamii, its staff and others involved, and, to repeat, to provide "a space where anyone can discover their own 'place' of activity in a certain sense", and in the process of management, to further enrich and develop activities with new ideas and transformations. The role of Tokyo Jamii in the future seems to be to provide a space for everyone to discover their own activities, and to further enrich their activities with new ideas and changes in the process of management. We look forward to a space with greater 'inclusiveness' in the future.

Nevertheless, in line with the editor's request, I would like to express my personal opinion on the future role of the Tokyo Jamii in light of the development of the Muslim community and the challenges it faces. It may seem obvious, but please bear in mind that the Muslim population of Japan includes a large number of Japanese Muslims. Considering the future of Islam in Japan, Islamic education in the broadest sense for Japanese Muslims will be important. There have long been calls for Islamic education in Japanese, and in recent years the number of Japanese Islamic jurists has been increasing, but this is still insufficient. The Tokyo Jami'i, mosques and Islamic organisations should cooperate to establish a system of Islamic education for Japanese Muslims, regardless of whether they are adults, men or women, children or young people. The way of dealing with Islam is left to each individual Muslim, and acceptance of Islamic teachings should be different for each person. However, if the promotion of understanding of Islam among the Japanese population is to be advocated with the aim of coexistence in Japanese society, it will be necessary to work on the Islamic education of Japanese Muslims, of whom a considerable number are converts (many are women). The Tokyo Jami'i, with the cooperation of the Religious Affairs Office of the Republic of Turkey, is one of the most powerful actors. In particular, the number of children and young people among the Japanese, the so-called second generation, is increasing rapidly and now exceeds 20,000. We would like to see further focus on Islamic education for the second generation, who will be responsible for the future of Islam in Japan, and on activities with a view to shaping

Muslim identity.

Another point I would like to mention is the response to the elderly Muslim population. The number of settled Muslims who are also in their 50s or older is increasing. The ageing of the population creates demands related to care and end-of-life care. It may be necessary to address the shortage of Islamic cemeteries, of which there are only six in Japan, but the operation and construction of welfare and medical facilities such as nursing homes and hospitals should also be envisaged. I seem to recall a discussion held more than a few years ago at a conference of mosque representatives organised by Waseda University, where the idea of a 'Japanese version of waqf (property donation system)' was raised for the construction and operation of facilities, so why not consider this again?

### **< Coexistence with Japanese society >**

Coexistence with Japanese society and local residents and activities to promote understanding of Islam are issues faced by many mosques. Ignorance and lack of understanding of different cultures and different things, not just Islam, can lead to prejudice and fear. Many Japanese residents have negative attitudes towards Islam and Muslims, and only a few may have friendships or interactions with Muslims. Complaints and problems with Muslims and mosques are triggered by certain minor issues. As we have seen, the Tokyo Jamii is no exception to this rule, with its wide variety of activities, easy access for all, and seemingly good relations with the local community. Mosque officials from all over the region say that caution is needed, especially during times of collective prayer. Neighbours reportedly complain about problems with parking on nearby roads and in public parking lots, smoking on the streets, congestion on nearby footpaths and noise. Some mosques actively try to participate in local events and interact with local residents, as Islamic teachings state that 'it is a religious duty to take care of the community'. In addition to activities to promote understanding of Islam through the Tokyo Jami'i Tour, which is held every Saturday and Sunday, Tokyo Jami'i also makes contact with local neighbourhood chairpersons, holds various events and lectures, invites people to Iftar (the meal after the fast), and hangs a banner saying 'You are free to visit' to emphasise that the mosque is open for visitors. Despite various attempts, such as these, problems and complaints are said to be a headache.

As the above-mentioned proposals, concepts and activities to promote coexistence and understanding are shared within the Muslim community, feasibility and measures for improvement may emerge. However, networks and links between mosques in the country are still weak and information sharing and coordination of social activities does not seem to be progressing. The Tokyo Jamii has not been active in inter-mosque exchanges in the past, but we hear that the current Imam has begun attempts to visit mosques in various regions. There

are mosques and organisations in various regions that have experience of exchange and activities with the Japanese community, and it would be good if the Tokyo Jami'i took the initiative in attempting to form a network. The resources and achievements of the Tokyo Jami'i are abundant and substantial, and although no single activity can be easily copied by other mosques, they can provide many useful hints to other mosques and organisations. The Tokyo Jami'i, characterised by its outward-looking activities open to Japanese society, has much to contribute, but at the same time there may be other concepts and examples of activities to learn from other mosques and associations. If mutual cooperation and collaboration between mosques can be established, while also working with local authorities implementing multicultural policies, efforts to live in harmony with Japanese society will change in a positive direction.

We look forward to the future development of Tokyo Jami'i's social activities in the context of the remarkable development of the Muslim community in Japan.