

NEW GENERATION OF MUSLIMS IN JAPAN The “Young Muslim” Community as a New Collective Identity and Space for Mutual Solidarity

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Abstract

Historically, research on Muslims in Japan has been focused on first-generation immigrants and their mosque-centered activities. However, youths socialized within the Japanese education system often experience alienation from existing mosque communities, which they perceive as culturally and linguistically tethered to their parents' nations of origin. Consequently, these actors have moved beyond labels such as “second-generation Pakistanis” or “converts” to forge a collective “Young Muslim” identity and a space for collaborative action. This paper examines the emergence of “Young Muslims” in Japan—a burgeoning demographic consisting of second-generation individuals and Japanese converts. Based on interviews, participant observation, and collaborative video projects, the research clarifies the motivations behind this self-identified category and the distinct characteristics of their community activities. Unlike the first generation, Young Muslims prioritize digital spaces and informal gatherings, intentionally avoiding doctrinal rigor or mutual religious surveillance. They primarily use Japanese to foster internal solidarity and engage non-Muslim society, seeking to dismantle domestic stereotypes. By developing their own networks and outreach, these youths are constructing a localized, Japanese-speaking public sphere. Ultimately, this movement represents a significant, yet previously overlooked,



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transformative trend within the contemporary landscape of Islam in Japan. [Secara historis, kajian mengenai Muslim di Jepang lebih banyak berfokus pada imigran generasi pertama dan aktivitas mereka yang berpusat di masjid. Namun, kaum muda Muslim yang tersosialisasi dalam sistem pendidikan Jepang sering kali mengalami keterasingan dari komunitas masjid yang ada, yang mereka pandang masih terikat secara budaya dan linguistik dengan negara asal orang tua mereka. Akibatnya, para aktor ini melampaui label seperti “generasi kedua Pakistan” atau “mualaf” untuk membangun identitas kolektif sebagai “Young Muslims” serta menciptakan ruang bagi aksi dan kolaborasi bersama. Artikel ini mengkaji kemunculan “Young Muslims” di Jepang, yaitu kelompok demografis yang terus berkembang dan terdiri atas Muslim generasi kedua serta mualaf Jepang. Berdasarkan wawancara, observasi partisipatif, dan proyek video kolaboratif, penelitian ini menjelaskan motivasi di balik munculnya kategori identitas tersebut serta karakteristik khas aktivitas komunitas mereka. Berbeda dengan generasi pertama, Young Muslims lebih mengutamakan ruang digital dan pertemuan informal, serta secara sengaja menghindari kekakuan doktrinal maupun pengawasan religius antaranggota. Mereka utamanya menggunakan bahasa Jepang untuk memperkuat solidaritas internal sekaligus berinteraksi dengan masyarakat non-Muslim, dengan tujuan menghapus stereotip yang berkembang di dalam negeri. Melalui pengembangan jaringan dan kegiatan sosialisasi mereka sendiri, kelompok muda ini tengah membangun ruang publik berbahasa Jepang yang berakar pada pengalaman Muslim lokal. Pada akhirnya, gerakan ini merepresentasikan suatu tren transformasi penting yang selama ini kurang mendapat perhatian dalam lanskap Islam kontemporer di Jepang.]

Keywords: young Muslims in Japan, second-generation Muslims, Japanese converts, digital media outreach, identity reconstruction.

A. Introduction

Interactions between Japan and the Muslim world have surprisingly deep historical roots. Japanese chronicles dating from the late eighth century record encounters between Japanese nobles and Arabs in the Tang Dynasty, China. During the era of samurai rule, which began in the late 13th century, fragmentary knowledge of Islam reached Japan through trade with the Arab world and accounts brought by Europeans. However, these contacts remained limited to diplomatic and commercial exchanges, and for most Japanese, Islam remained largely unknown.

Modern Japanese history began with the Meiji Restoration in the mid-19th century, a period during which records of interaction with the Ottoman Empire became more prominent. Notably, in 1890, the Ottoman frigate *Ertuğrul*, carrying a goodwill mission to Japan, ran aground off the coast of Wakayama Prefecture due to bad weather, resulting in nearly 600 casualties. The rescue of survivors by local residents and their subsequent repatriation by the Japanese Navy in 1891 fostered a lasting relationship of trust. Shotaro Noda, a journalist who accompanied the repatriation mission, remained in the Ottoman Empire and later converted to Islam, becoming the first recorded Japanese Muslim.¹

A permanent Muslim presence in Japan was established in the early 20th century. Tatar Muslims fleeing the Russian Revolution settled in Kobe and Tokyo, forming communities. Seeking knowledge of Islam for administrative purposes related to Japan's territorial expansion in China, the Japanese government extended protection to these Tatars and permitted the construction of mosques. As a result, Japan's first mosque was opened in Kobe in the mid-1930s, followed by another in Tokyo the following year. The former is the existing Kobe Mosque, while the latter later became the Tokyo Camii, which remains an important center of Islamic activity today.

Following World War II and the subsequent period of rapid economic growth from the mid-1950s to the early 1970s, Japan emerged as an economic superpower by the 1980s. This economic transformation provided the backdrop for a significant increase in both the Muslim population and mosque construction. The surge in Japan's Muslim population accelerated in the late 1980s amid the country's "bubble economy" and the resulting labor shortages. Migrant workers initially arrived from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Iran—countries with which Japan then had visa-waiver agreements. During the 1990s, the number of technical interns from Indonesia and international students from across the Muslim world also increased. Consequently, the Muslim population in Japan during this period consisted predominantly of foreign nationals. From the 1990s onward, these foreign residents played a central role in establishing mosques throughout the country.

Migration from Indonesia—the world's most populous Muslim-majority country—remained relatively limited throughout the 20th

¹ Akiko Komura, *Nihon no Isuraamu: Rekishi, shukyo, bunka wo yomitoku* [Islam in Japan: Deciphering History, Religion, and Culture] (Tokyo: Asahi Shimbun Publications, 2019).

century. Until the 1990s, most Indonesians in Japan were members of elite groups, such as diplomats or students, who typically returned to their home country after a few years. However, a series of institutional changes—including the Technical Intern Training Program (TITP) in the 1990s, the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) in 2008, an increase in students in the 21st century, and the Specified Skilled Worker (SSW) system in 2018—contributed to a significant rise in the Indonesian population across various residency statuses. At present, approximately 230,000 Indonesians reside in Japan. Applying the 87% Muslims proportion of the Indonesian population, the number of Indonesian Muslim in Japan is estimated at around 200,000, making them the largest national group within the Japanese Muslim community. According to the most recent data from Hirofumi Tanada, who has consistently calculated the Muslim population in Japan, the number of Muslims residing in the country is estimated at 420,000 as of the end of 2024.² Accounting for approximately 0.35% of Japan's total population of roughly 120 million, they remain a distinct minority. Nevertheless, this figure has grown rapidly in recent years, increasing from 3,500 in 1969 to around 70,000 in 2006, and reaching approximately 110,000 by 2010. The current population represents nearly a fourfold increase over the past 15 years. According to Tanada's data, there were approximately 55,000 Japanese Muslims as of late 2024, making them the second-largest group by nationality after Indonesians.

Over time, some Muslim migrants settled in Japan through marriage with Japanese nationals or bringing their families from their countries of origin. Children born into these households were raised as Muslims while simultaneously attending Japanese schools and adopting Japanese social norms. Since the late 2010s, as these children reached adolescence and university age, they began to identify themselves as “Young Muslims”. Their activities have gained momentum through regional networks and social media, and have recently been joined by young Japanese converts. Compared to foreign Muslims, Japanese Muslims have historically been less visible in both academic research and wider society. In Japan, Muslims remain a small minority and Islam is still widely perceived as an external religion with limited connection to Japanese culture. In recent years,

² Hirofumi Tanada, “Nihon no musurimu jinko 2025-nen” [Muslim Population in Japan 2025], *Research Papers: Muslims in Japan*, no. 29, Institute for Multi-ethnic and Multi-generational Societies (22 July 2025), <https://www.imemgs.com/masjid/833/>, accessed 2 March 2026.

however, the Muslim population in Japan has been steadily increasing. This demographic includes not only foreign-born residents but also young Muslims who speak Japanese as their native language, have been educated in Japan from an early age, and have internalized Japanese cultural values

This study focuses on the youth generation residing in Japan who primarily use Japanese in their daily lives and activities, and who identify as “Young Muslims”. This group mainly consists of second-generation Muslims (children of immigrants) and Japanese converts who were raised in non-Muslim households. The second generation includes those born to foreign Muslims who arrived after the mid-1980s and hold various nationalities; some possess Japanese citizenship (through a Japanese parent or naturalization), while others remain foreign nationals. Japanese converts identifying as “Young Muslims” include individuals who converted upon marriage, although many were drawn to Islam through various other channels during their youth. Estimating the size of this “Young Muslim” demographic is challenging. Based on Tanada’s 2025 data, if “Young Muslim” is defined as the second generation and converts for reasons other than marriage, the potential population includes 31,000 second-generation individuals and 3,200 “voluntary converts” among the 55,000 Japanese Muslims.³ However, this does not account for foreign-national second-generation individuals who were raised in Japan, nor those who converted through marriage but are active in youth circles.⁴ Therefore, it is difficult to define the “Young Muslim” category strictly in demographic terms.

Primary research on Muslims in Japan has largely been conducted in Japanese by Japanese scholars. For a long time, the focus was on the first generation of migrant workers from South and West Asia who arrived during the bubble economy period.⁵ Studies have examined the

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Some argue that estimates dividing Japanese Muslims into “marriage-based” converts and “voluntary” converts for other reasons, with the former constituting the majority, do not accurately reflect reality. Katsura criticizes this classification for perpetuating the stereotype that Japanese Muslims are predominantly passive converts for marriage, especially women, and a minority of voluntary converts, especially men. Yusuke Katsura, “Nihon ni okeru Isuramu e no kaishu puroseshu no bunrui” [Classification of the Process of Conversion to Islam in Japan: Focusing on Experiences Not Reducible to ‘Marriage’], *Shukyo to Shaka*, vol. 27 (2021), pp. 65–80.

⁵ Eg; Naoto Higuchi, et al., *Kokkyo wo koeru: Tai-nichi musurimu imin no shakaigaku* [Crossing Borders: Sociology of Muslim Immigrants in Japan] (Tokyo: Seikyusha, 2007); Tomoko Fukuda, *Toransunashonaru na Pakisutan-jin imin no shakai-teki sekai*, [The Social World of Transnational Pakistani Immigrants] (Tokyo: Fukumura Shuppan, 2012).

mosques established by these migrants since the 1990s, as well as their community activities.⁶ More recently, attention has shifted to the rapidly growing Indonesian community.⁷ Regarding Japanese Muslims, early research focused primarily on women who converted through marriage to migrant workers.⁸ As the first generation ages, issues related to death and burial have also emerged as research topics.⁹ In contrast, the second generation has only recently become a subject of academic inquiry as they reach adulthood and confront identity-related challenges within Japanese society.¹⁰ The existence of Japanese Muslims who converted for reasons other than marriage to foreign Muslims is also gradually becoming more visible in the literature.¹¹

Furthermore, recent scholars, drawing on Western debates, have criticized the tendency in Japanese research to focus primarily on “organized Muslims”.¹² To understand the reality of Islam in a specific region, it is insufficient to examine only formal organizations; it is also necessary to consider “unorganized Muslims”.¹³ According to Tanada, who defines “organized Muslims” as those who regularly attend

⁶ Eg; Hizuru Miki, “Masujido to chiiki shakai” [Masjid and the Local Community], in *Ikyo no nyukamaa-tachi* [Newcomers of Different Faiths], ed. by Hizuru Miki, (Tokyo: Shinwasha 2017), pp. 21–47. Okauchi, Daizo, *Kagawa ni mosuku ga dekiru made* [Until a Mosque was Built in Kagawa], (Tokyo: Shobunsha, 2023).

⁷ Eg; Yo Nonaka, “Zai-nichi Indonesia-jin musurimu no soshiki-ka to taso-ka” [Organization and Multi-Layering of Indonesian Muslims in Japan: Focusing on Mosque Construction Movements], *Shukyo to Shakai*, vol. 30 (2024), pp. 17–31.

⁸ Eg; Masako Kudo, *Ekkyo no jinruigaku: Zai-nichi Pakisutan-jin musurimu imin no tsumatachi* [Anthropology of Border-Crossing: Wives of Pakistani Muslim Immigrants in Japan], (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 2008).

⁹ Eg; Hirofumi Okai, “Oi to shi to mukiau: Nihon no mosuku ni okeru shi no hikiuke to maisō ni kansuru yobiteki kōsatsu” [Facing Aging and Death: Preliminary Considerations on the Acceptance of Death and Burial in Japanese Mosques], *Imin Kenkyu Nenpo*, vol. 29 (2023), pp. 43–55.

¹⁰ Eg; Sarah Yoshimi Qureshi, “Nihon ni kurasu musurimu dai-ni-seda” [Second-Generation Muslims Living in Japan: Aspects of Conflict as Seen Through Personal Narratives], *Keio SFC Journal*, vol. 21, no. 1 (2021), pp. 154–76.

¹¹ Yusuke Katsura, “Nihon ni okeru Isuraamu e no kaishu puroseshu no bunrui” [Classification of the Process of Conversion to Islam in Japan: Focusing on Experiences Not Reducible to ‘Marriage’], *Shukyo to Shakai*, vol. 27 (2021), pp. 65–80.

¹² Hirofumi Okai, “Mienikui mono wo miru to iu koto | [Seeing the Invisible: An Overview of Islamic Society in Japan and Challenges in Grasping the Reality], in *Nihon ni kurasu musurimu* [Muslims Living in Japan], ed. by Hiroko Minezaki, (Tokyo: Akashi Shoten, 2024), pp. 118–30.

¹³ Nadia Jeldtoft and Jørgen S. Nielsen, eds, *Methods and Contexts in the Study of Muslim Minorities: Visible and Invisible Muslims*, (London: Routledge, 2012).

congregational prayers at mosques, approximately 90% of Muslims in Japan fall into the category of “unorganized Muslims.” Previous studies tended to focus on “organized Muslims” because they are more accessible to researchers; however, a more comprehensive understanding of the community requires moving beyond these structures. This paper addresses these gaps by examining “Young Muslims”—a category that has been created by the youth themselves as both an identity and a “place of belonging”—and by uniquely analyzing second-generation Muslims and converts together, focusing on their community activities, media outreach, and the underlying motivations for their engagement.

While this study analyzes the narratives of young Muslims across various initiatives, it also draws upon broader global debates on “being young and Muslim in a globalized and secularized world.” The volume edited by Herrera and Bayat, which compiles case studies of Muslim youth from Europe, the Middle East, Africa, the United States, and Southeast Asia, represents a seminal study addressing this theme head-on. Their research demonstrates that Muslim youth constantly negotiate the tension between being Muslim and being young in contemporary society, navigating their daily lives with struggles akin to those of their non-Muslim peers. Concurrently, global constraints surrounding Islam, such as hostility, exclusion, and Islamophobia, alongside local socioeconomic hardships like poverty and unemployment, drive these youths to seek and reinforce their Islamic identity.”¹⁴

Turning to Europe, more than half a century has passed since the initial influx of Muslim immigrants, and the region is now home to a large population of a new generation of Muslims born and raised there. Despite regional variations, Europe can be seen as experiencing a reality that is roughly twenty to thirty years ahead of Japan, where the influx of Muslim migrant workers began in the late 1980s; thus, the European experience serves as a valid comparative axis for the Japanese case. Extensive scholarship has been produced on second- and third-generation Muslims in Europe. A widely discussed characteristic of these groups is their break from the parental generation and their countries of origin. While first-generation immigrant parents practice an “Islam” deeply embedded with cultural traditions of their native regions, second- and third-generation youths tend to seek a “deculturized” Islam, separated from these inherited cultural forms. It has also been argued that a

¹⁴ Linda Herrera and Asef Bayat, eds, *Being Young and Muslim – New Cultural Politics in the Global South and North* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

segment of these youths, in their search for such a “deculturized” Islam has gravitated toward forms of global Islam, including extremist groups.¹⁵

Conversely, the vast majority of second-generation immigrants in Europe do not undergo “radicalization”; instead, they maintain their Muslim identity while negotiating and adapting to Western values and societal norms. Recent scholarship has therefore increasingly focused on the everyday lives and personal narratives of these second-generation youths,¹⁶ often framed through the concept of “lived Islam.”¹⁷ Adachi notes that second-generation British Muslim youths decouple Islam from the cultural traditions of their parents’ countries of origin, and argue for its compatibility with Western society by emphasizing shared values.¹⁸ Examining second-generation Bengali Muslim immigrants in East London, DeHanas terms their hybrid identity-formation strategy—which separates religiosity from parental cultural Islam and rearticulates it within Western institutions and values—as “elastic orthodoxy.”¹⁹ Similarly, Yamashita, in his study of second-generation Algerian immigrants in France, contrasts the “transplanted Islam” of the first generation, inseparable from patriarchal North African cultural norms, with the second generation’s orientation toward a hybrid “adaptive Islam” blended with French culture, which also serves to justify the selective religious practices.²⁰ Furthermore, it has been documented that Western Muslim youths have developed “cool” forms of Islamic popular culture through music, fashion, commodities, and social media, as a means of reconciling Western values with a deculturized Islamic faith, thereby countering the

¹⁵ Olivier Roy, *Jihad and Death: The Global Appeal of Islamic State*, trans. by Cynthia Schoch (London: Hurst & Company, 2017).

¹⁶ Nilüfer Göle, *The Daily Lives of Muslims*, trans. By Jacqueline Lerescu (London: Zed Books, 2017).

¹⁷ Nathal M. Dessing, Nadia Jeldtoft, Jørgen S. Nielsen, and Linda Woodhead, eds, *Everyday Lived Islam in Europe* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016).

¹⁸ Satoshi Adachi, “Saiki-teki kindai no aidentiti-ron: Posuto 9/11 jidai ni okeru Igirisu no imin dai-ni-sedai musurimu” [Identity Theory in Reflexive Modernity: Second-Generation Muslim Immigrants in Britain in the Post-9/11 Era] (Kyoto: Koyo Shobo, 2020).

¹⁹ Daniel Nilsson DeHanas, “Elastic Orthodoxy: The Tactics of Young Muslim Identity”, in *Everyday Lived Islam in Europe*, ed. by Nadia Jeldtoft, Jørgen S. Nielsen, and Linda Woodhead (London and New York: Routledge, 2013).

²⁰ Yasuyuki Yamashita, “Haiburiddo bunka to shite no Furansu no atarashii Isuraamu” [France’s New Islam as a Hybrid Culture: From the Narratives of Second-Generation Immigrant Muslims who Avoid Religious Practice], *Sociologi*, vol. 63, no. 1 (2018), pp. 39–57.

spread of radical Islamist ideologies.²¹

The challenges of living in a globalized contemporary world are equally experienced by Muslim youth residing in Muslim-majority regions. Against the backdrop of the Islamic revival and reform movements, Egyptian youth have often been depicted as “religiously consistent, self-contained subjects.” However, Schielke argues that they in fact embody ambivalence: while expressing sympathy for Salafi orthodoxy, they are simultaneously immersed in popular culture, aspire to European freedom, and experience frustration with their tedious daily routines.²² Turning to the Asia-Pacific context, Nasir focuses on Muslims in Singapore and Sydney, Australia, demonstrating through cases of hip-hop and tattoos how Muslim youth consume and integrate global popular culture into their religious lives. In this context as well, youth are depicted not as living solely by “perfect religious discipline”, but rather as forming their unique subjectivity while vacillating between the temptations and freedoms of contemporary society and their religious obligations.²³ Although “Muslim youth” has garnered significant academic attention in recent years, the Japanese case remains almost entirely underexplored within this body of literature. This paper seeks to address this critical gap. The characteristics of Muslim youth documented in other national contexts—such as the break from the parental generation, the consumption and hybridization of popular culture with Islam, and the experience of inner conflict at the intersection of contemporary global norms and religious obligations—serve as the theoretical framework for analyzing young Muslims in Japan.

This paper draws on a range of materials generated through collaborative engagements with young Muslims in Japan, including activity reports, transcripts of public discussions, lectures, and audiovisual productions. One important source of these materials is the All-Japan Muslim Meeting, where Muslims from across the country gather to discuss specific themes and present proposals to Japanese society. The meeting has been held irregularly since 2015 by the Laboratory of Islamic Studies at my university, and I became involved in its management in

²¹ Maruta Herding, *Inventing the Muslim Cool: Islamic Youth Culture in Western Europe* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2013); Pam Nilan, *Muslim Youth in the Diaspora: Challenging Extremism Through Popular Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017).

²² Samuli Schielke, “Ambivalent Commitments: Troubles of Morality, Religiosity and Aspiration among Young Egyptians”, *Journal of Religion in Africa*, vol. 39, no. 2 (2009), pp. 158-85.

²³ Kamaludeen Mohamed Nasir, *Globalized Muslim Youth in the Asia Pacific – Popular Culture in Singapore and Sydney* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

2018. Subsequent meetings included the 5th meeting in November 2018, titled “How to Convey God: Reports by Mothers and Children”, and the 6th meeting in December 2020, titled “The Expanding Circle of Young Muslims: The Potential of Community”.

In addition, this paper draws on collaborative fieldwork and project-based engagements with young Muslims. In January 2020, my students collaborated with “Young Muslims” from outside the university to organize “Yuke Muslim Kaigi” (Gathering in the Steam), held at a public bathhouse (*sento*) in Kanda, Tokyo. This event emerged from a desire to broaden networks and share information about Islam and Muslims in Japan in a setting other than a mosque, while fostering connections among youth by introducing Islam to non-Muslims interested in the topic. Since 2022, I have also been involved in the “Young Muslim’s Eyes” project, in which Muslim youth—including my students—produce and disseminate their own video works. These works have been shared online and presented at a screening and talk show at the Madani Film Festival in Indonesia in October 2023, as well as at an exhibition and public lecture at Tokyo Camii, one of the largest mosques in Japan. Their statements and captions in the video works produced for the “Young Muslim’s Eyes” project are also used as analytical materials. This study further draws on interview data collected between 2021 and 2023 from six individuals who either self-identify as “Young Muslims” or participate in activities under that label. At the time of the interviews, five participants were in their twenties and one was in their teens. Among them, four were male and two were female; four were second-generation Muslims and two were converts to Islam. The study also incorporates participant observation data from their activities, as well as information available on websites and social media platforms related to these initiatives.

B. The Emergence and Expansion of Community Activities of “Young Muslims”

Between 2016 and 2017, Amin Qureshi, a second-generation Muslim and then-graduate student at Waseda University in Tokyo, began organizing irregular gatherings. Driven by a desire to “create a community where Muslim youth living in Japan can gather and enjoy themselves”, he reached out to other young Muslims in similar circumstances. These gatherings were named “Space for Young Muslims” (SYM). Qureshi was deeply committed to building a network for young Muslims in Japan. He

studied organizational management and activities through the websites of young groups outside Japan like the Muslim Students Association (MSA) in the United States and Islamic Societies (ISOC) at major British universities. He also traveled to the United Kingdom to collect information from the secretariat of the Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS), which oversees the various campus ISOCs. He also occasionally organized dinners and other gatherings, seeking to explore the direction of their activities by having participants exchange opinions.

Qureshi was also involved in managing the “National Conference of Masjid (Mosque) Representatives”, which has been held regularly at the Waseda University Graduate School. In February and September 2018, closed meetings were organized by its “Next Generation Subcommittee”, inviting younger Muslims residing in Japan. According to the conference minutes available online, the February 2018 meeting focused on the theme “The Youth Generation, Islam, and Japan”, with approximately 15 participants. The September 2018 meeting, titled “Young Muslims and the Muslim Community: Thinking from the Perspective of Young Muslims’ ‘Sense of Belonging””, drew about 20 participants, including both foreign and Japanese Muslims of the younger generation, and featured open and substantive discussions.²⁴ Ghuftron Yazid, one of the invitees who later became a central figure in expanding Young Muslim activities, noted that through this conference he met many second-generation Muslims he had not previously known and was struck by their high level of awareness, which led him to further engagement in subsequent activities.”

Following this conference, Ghuftron took the initiative to launch monthly events under the name “Young Muslim Club.” The first gathering was held in November 2018 at Tokyo Camii in Yoyogi-Uehara, Tokyo.²⁵ Meanwhile, SYM, originally founded by Qureshi, was later reorganized, and an independent organization called “Olive” was established. Olive

²⁴ The National Conference of Masjid (Mosque) Representatives” has been hosted by the Laboratory of Asian Studies, Graduate School of Human Sciences, Waseda University, since 2009. Minutes from the 1st (2009) to 11th (2019) conferences, including the 2018 Next Generation Subcommittee meetings, can be found at <https://www.imemgs.com/category/conf/page/2/>, accessed 2 March 2026.

²⁵ Tokyo Camii is one of the largest mosques in Japan, located in Yoyogi-Uehara, Tokyo. Its predecessor was the Tokyo Kaikyo Reihaijo, built in 1938 for Tatar Muslims who fled the Russian Revolution. After the old building was demolished in 1986, the site was donated to the Republic of Turkey and rebuilt in 2000 as the current Tokyo Camii and Turkish Culture Center (See: Hiroomi Takii, *Mosuku e oide yo* [Come to the Mosque!], (Tokyo: Komine Shoten, 2018).

functions as a trans-regional network with the aim of connecting Young Muslims across Japan and supporting local activities.”²⁶ The Young Muslim Club, initially launched by Ghufron at Tokyo Camii, is currently managed by Olive and continues to be held irregularly as a “pop-up” event without a fixed base.²⁷

Furthermore, around the same period, activities under the name “Space for Young Muslims” also emerged at the Nagoya Mosque, which maintains close ties with Qureshi. Since 2014, a group of mothers at the mosque had been working to create a “sense of belonging” for second-generation junior high and high school students through regular “Meetings for Middle and High Schoolers.” In 2018, as the initial participants approached high school graduation, the group was renamed “SYM Nagoya Mosque” to allow continued participation without hesitation after graduation. This SYM continues to function as a platform for young Muslims in the Nagoya area and remains active today.²⁸ Through the formation and activities of groups identifying as “Young Muslims,” such as SYM and the Young Muslim Club, the category of “Young Muslim” gradually became a tangible social reality among those involved.

1. *Characteristics of the Young Muslim Club’s Activities*

The Young Muslim Club held monthly gatherings at Tokyo Camii from November 2018 until February 2020. In-person activities were then suspended due to the outbreak of COVID-19. The pandemic subsequently led to the emergence of several online-based activities. The first gathering was held in November 2018 under the theme “The Party with Panel Discussion.” According to the organizer, Ghufron, there were differing opinions during the initial planning stages. He reflects: “However, I simply wanted to do something bright and cheerful. I felt that if people gathered, it would be fun in some way, so we held an event that was just about getting together and talking. This became a sort of ‘debut album’ for the events that followed.” Approximately 40 young people attended this inaugural meeting, and its success led to

²⁶ See the Olive instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/olivejapanorg>, accessed 2 March 2026.

²⁷ On the other hand, activities for young Muslims at Tokyo Camii are currently conducted under the name “Tokyo Camii Youth.” For details, see their Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/tokyocamiityouth/>, accessed 2 March 2026.

²⁸ For SYM at Nagoya Mosque, see <https://nagoyamosque.com/sym>, accessed 2 March 2026.

the continued organization of subsequent events. Each meeting was organized around a specific theme. In the second session, “My Favorite Quotes,” participants discussed their personal mottos. Ghufroon notes that “at this point, the direction of the club began to take shape. I realized we could create a space to discuss life experiences that people might usually feel too shy to talk about.” This orientation toward thematic, experience-based discussion came to characterize many of their subsequent activities, including “The World of Modest Fashion” in February 2019, “A Tea Party with Sweets from Around the World” in March 2019, “Art and Crafts” in April 2019, “Journey of Your Food” in May 2019, “Eid Party” in June 2019, “Life: All Things Intertwined” in July 2019, “Gardening Weekend” in December 2019, and “the Beans Makanai Party” in February 2020.

Occasionally, these activities connected participants’ conversations with verses from the Qur’an. For example, in the January 2019 session, “Tell Me the Color of the Sky That Day,” participants shared photographs they had taken, discussed the emotions associated with them, and created a collective collage of everyone’s “sky.” Since the Qur’an contains numerous references to the sky, these conversations were at times linked to relevant Qur’anic verses. A similar approach was adopted in the November 2019 event, “Words and Images”, in which participants wrote down words and emotions evoked by various photographs and cross-referenced them with passages from the Qur’an, reflecting on the countless “signs of God” scattered throughout the world. Other sessions incorporated more explicit Islamic themes. In the October 2019 event, “Let’s Talk about Hajj”, Young Muslims who had performed the pilgrimage to Mecca shared their experiences in a talk-show format. Although most participants were already familiar with the Hajj as one of the five pillars of Islam, the event was organized because opportunities to hear firsthand accounts from the perspective of young Muslims were limited. These narratives ranged from deeply emotional experiences, such as families weeping at Narita Airport upon departure, to practical advice, such as preparing many personal prayers in advance, since several sites along the pilgrimage route are believed to be places where it is said that any wish will be granted.

In January 2020, the club hosted “New Year! Halal Oogiri”—an Islamic adaptation of the traditional Japanese comedic wordplay game (Oogiri). The project aimed to share the kinds of “inside jokes” that Muslims find humorous in a joyful atmosphere. One prompt asked, “What is the kindest lie in the world?” A typical Muslim answer was “Insha’ *Al-Jāmi’ah*, Vol. 64, No. 1, 2026 M/1448 H

Allah” (God willing). While Muslims use this phrase when speaking about future plans, recognizing that no plan can be realized without God’s will, it is also sometimes employed as a polite or vague refusal. Participants jokingly explained that when a Muslim says “Insha’Allah”, it might be best to interpret it as “I’ll go if I can.” Many non-Muslim youths also participated in this event, creating a lively atmosphere in which Muslims and non-Muslims bonded through shared humor rooted in Islamic culture.

Several characteristics of the Young Muslim Club’s activities can be identified from these examples. First, they were proactive initiatives organized by Young Muslims themselves to create a space of their own, with little to no involvement from the first-generation immigrant Muslims. Second, although these gatherings were organized by Muslims, formal “Islamic study sessions” were intentionally excluded. While the monthly themes varied, many were framed around topics that, at first glance, seemed unrelated to religious doctrine. Third, Japanese functioned as the common language of communication. Although many participants had family roots in countries such as Pakistan, Indonesia, and Bangladesh, they had been raised in Japan and therefore used Japanese as their primary language. As a result, these gatherings remained open and accessible not only to Muslims but also to non-Muslims interested in Islam or in interacting with Muslims.

2. *The Underlying Consciousness Young Muslim Community Activities*

What lies behind the emergence of these new youth-led initiatives, exemplified by the Young Muslim Club? This subsection examines the motivations and underlying consciousness of the participants, drawing on statements from Young Muslims involved in the club’s activities. One primary factor was the perception that existing mosque communities, particularly those established by their parents’ generation, had significant limitations. One participant recalled a “bitter” childhood experience of being taken to a mosque by her parents. She explained that the community was largely dominated by individuals from [Country X] and [Country Y] and had become a space where some members frequently expressed strong criticism of Japanese society. She found this environment deeply uncomfortable and felt that it was not a place where she belonged. Although she identified as a Muslim, she also strongly identified as Japanese; as a result, she experienced emotional distress when repeatedly hearing negative portrayals of Japanese society from individuals whose

primary social and cultural affiliations lay outside Japan. This experience reflected a broader concern raised by another participant, who noted that mosques in Japan had largely become spaces primarily for foreign Muslims. According to this participant, while some non-Muslim Japanese individuals express interest in visiting mosques, their motivation is often to experience what they perceive as an “exotic” foreign culture.

Another Young Muslim described feeling inadequate in mosque settings where many attendees were “well-versed” in Islam. This led her to feel inferior because of her own perceived lack of religious knowledge. She explained that many people around her appeared to be devout and knowledgeable Muslims, whereas she had received little Islamic education since childhood. Consequently, she felt a significant gap in religious knowledge that made attending the mosque difficult, and she often perceived that her level of faith was being measured against that of others. Similar concerns were raised by other Young Muslims, who critically described mosque environments in Japan as spaces that were not “fun” but rather settings in which individuals felt pressured to “perform” being a good Muslim. They noted that when Muslims gathered, there was often an expectation to discuss the Quran or assess one another’s level of religiosity, which they found highly stifling. They further explained that one reason young people find it difficult to enter such spaces is that obligations and taboos are overly emphasized. In their view, however, Islam is fundamentally a teaching about how to live well as a human being; if this essence were better communicated, the discomfort might diminish.

Most existing mosques were founded by the immigrant generation and, as a result, remain spaces primarily for foreign nationals. While non-Muslim Japanese may visit out of curiosity, their mental image of a “Muslim” often excludes those who were raised in Japan and speak Japanese fluently. In addition, language barriers present a significant challenge. Many mosques use the native languages of their respective specific ethnic communities, leaving Young Muslims unable to follow conversations or even understand the sermons. One respondent highlighted the linguistic barrier by explaining that Friday sermons delivered in a foreign language often made it difficult to remain engaged. As a result, attending the sermon became a struggle against drowsiness, and listening to words they could not understand for approximately 30 minutes felt almost torturous.

Alongside the limitations of existing mosques, there was a strong

desire among Young Muslims to differentiate themselves from the activities and practices of the parent generation. Two individuals who had been involved in the movement since its early stages explained that the emergence of activities under the “Young Muslim” framework reflected a conscious effort to distinguish themselves from the first generation, including their parents. From the outset, they viewed their community as fundamentally different from the traditional parent-led Muslim communities in Japan. They emphasized that their ways of engaging with mosques, interacting with fellow Muslims, and using language differed significantly from those of the older generation.

A participant who joined the Young Muslim Club at a later stage and became deeply involved recalled being surprised by the extent to which the group operated independently of the parent generation. He described this autonomy as both refreshing and groundbreaking, noting that decisions and activities were organized entirely by Young Muslims themselves, without parental involvement. The group’s informal and self-directed atmosphere particularly appealed to him. For Japanese converts who grew up in non-Muslim households, tensions with the first generation also contributed to the appeal of Young Muslim spaces. One convert explained that he often felt pressured by senior Muslims, who tended to adopt a paternalistic attitude toward his religious learning. He recalled being treated as someone who lacked sufficient knowledge of Islam and being criticized for practices such as listening to music, which some senior Muslims considered forbidden.

Participants also spoke about the significance of gathering under the identity of “Young Muslims”. One participant reflected on the origins and meaning of this label:

“Previously, we were called ‘second-generation Muslims’, meaning we were born into immigrant households. Sometimes a country name was attached, like ‘[Nationality]-descent second-generation.’ But these terms don’t include converts. The term ‘Young Muslim’ was intended to embrace all young Muslims who were seeking companionship, regardless of their different backgrounds.”

For those who moved from rural areas to attend university in Tokyo, these activities provided their first opportunity to connect with peers who shared similar backgrounds. In many regional cities, mosques are populated primarily by older immigrant Muslims, limiting opportunities for interaction with other young Muslims.

One participant explained that involvement in Young Muslim activities enabled him to meet friends with whom he could communicate naturally in Japanese. These connections helped alleviate feelings of isolation and provided valuable opportunities to interact with Muslims who, like himself, had been born and raised in Japan. Through such peer networks, some participants developed a stronger sense of identity as both Japanese and Muslim. One individual reflected that Japanese Muslims are often categorized simply as “Muslims” and regarded as culturally different from mainstream Japanese society. Until high school, he had believed that being Japanese and being Muslim were incompatible identities. However, his experiences within the Young Muslim community led him to realize that the two identities could coexist.

The significance of the “Young Muslim” category extended beyond community building and identity formation. One Japanese convert explained that seeing people who had been born and raised in Japan living fulfilling lives as Muslims played an important role in his own conversion process. By the time he converted, the Young Muslim framework was already established, providing a social category and community with which he could readily identify.

The backdrop to these community activities was the limitation of the existing mosque communities established by the first generation of Muslim immigrants. The second-generation Young Muslims, in particular, grew up attending these traditional communities at the behest of their parents and experienced their constraints firsthand. Those spaces were often linguistically foreign and culturally segregated from the Japanese host society. For youth who had internalized Japanese culture and values, these mosques did not feel like a place where they belonged. Furthermore, such communities often functioned as sites where they were judged based on the extent to which they practiced Islamic teachings and whether they qualified as “good Muslims.” Both second-generation and convert Muslims reported experiences of being rebuked for “un-Islamic behavior” by elders in the existing communities. In this climate, one Young Muslim noted that “many second-generation peers have distanced themselves from Islam.” However, the youth discussed in this paper did not leave the faith as they understood Islam fundamentally as “beautiful teachings for living well as a human being.” By adopting the label “Young Muslim”, they created a community distinct from that of their parents and expanded their activities.

The category of “Young Muslim” and the activities associated

with it provided a refuge for second-generation individuals and converts seeking a sense of belonging. Given that their backgrounds and levels of religious practice are highly diverse, it was logical for their activities to consciously avoid the format of “religious study.” To avoid repeating the bitter experiences encountered in existing mosque communities, they intentionally refrained from monitoring or judging one another’s religious observance. Instead of formal study, they developed activities—such as dialogue through words and images or comedic Oogiri events—that successfully engaged second-generation Muslims, converts, and non-Muslim Japanese alike.

C. Outreach and Expression by Young Muslims

The previous section focused on the communities that Young Muslims built for themselves, clarifying their activities and the underlying consciousness that necessitated such spaces. Beyond creating new environments for mutual gathering, some Young Muslims are also engaged in disseminating information—both to peers raised in similar circumstances in Japan and to Japanese society at large. A particularly prominent trend in recent years is the emergence of Young Muslims who produce video works and share them on social media. This section takes the “Young Muslim’s Eyes” project, in which I participated as a member, as a case study to examine the content of these videos and the messages these young creators intend to convey.

The “Young Muslim’s Eyes” project was co-conceptualized by me and my research colleagues, anthropologist Kae Amo (Kyoto University) and filmmaker Kenichi Sawazaki (Research Institute for Humanity and Nature). We initiated this video production and dissemination project by involving three Young Muslims: Yunus Ertuğrul and Mamoru Hasegawa (both former students of mine), and their friend Ahmed Alian.

To date, Muslims in Japan have primarily been positioned as a minority “observed” by the majority. From an academic perspective, they have been “objects of study”, and given that the majority of Muslims in Japan are foreign nationals, they have often been viewed as “subjects of support’ by government agencies or local support organizations. However, as discussed in detail throughout this paper, there is a growing population of young Muslims who have been raised and educated in Japan, living within Japanese values and culture since childhood. Like their non-Muslim peers, they are digital natives for whom producing and sharing content

via smartphones and social media is an integral part of daily life. This project sought to integrate their everyday practices of video production into a collaborative framework involving researchers and filmmakers. The project's goal was to shift the status of Japanese Muslims from being those who are "observed", "studied", and "supported" to those who "observe" and "film" Japanese society. Furthermore, since the filmmaker and researchers also participated in the production, members were placed in a reciprocal relationship of filming and being filmed. Through this approach, we aimed to fluidify the traditional power dynamics between the photographer and the subject,²⁹ intending to embed "intersecting gazes" within the works produced by each member.³⁰

The Young Muslims produced their video works with several distinct audiences in mind. These intentions were articulated in "#Shapes of the Gaze: Young Muslim's Eyes", a documentary by Kenichi Sawazaki' that captured their production process, as well as during a talk show held in conjunction with the exhibition at Tokyo Camii. The project resulted in several video works created by Yunus, Hasegawa, and Alian. These works, together with Sawazaki's documentary, were made available online through YouTube. In addition, we facilitated dialogue and gathered feedback through workshops, exhibitions, and screenings at film festivals, engaging directly with visitors and audiences. Although they received technical support regarding filming and editing from Sawazaki, who was both a filmmaker and a member of the project, the conceptual content of the works was entirely created by the Young Muslims themselves. Each creator employed distinct methods to convey their respective messages to society.

The following section introduces the profiles of the three

²⁹ This perspective is grounded in the critiques of cultural anthropology by James Clifford, who argued that Western anthropologists cannot unilaterally write about "non-Western" cultures as "objective fact" from a privileged position (See: James Clifford, "Introduction: Partial Truths", in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. by James Clifford and George E. Marcus, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986). It also draws on George Marcus and Michael Fischer, who criticized the positioning of photographs and films as purely objective data from a similar standpoint (See: George Marcus and Michael Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

³⁰ For further details on the "Young Muslim's Eys" project and its methodological significance, see Kenichi Sawazaki, et al. "Emergent Use of Visual Media in Young Muslim Studies". *Trajectory* 5 (2004), <https://trajectory.minpaku.ac.jp/articles/2024/vol05/02.html>, accessed 2 March 2026.

individuals and examines the content of the visual works they produced.³¹

1. *Ertugrul Yunus: Demystifying Islam through “Muslim Memes”*

Yunus was raised as the eldest son of a Turkish father and a Japanese mother. Until graduating from high school, he lived with his family in a regional city. He then moved to the Tokyo metropolitan area to attend the university I teach and began living independently. He received an Islamic upbringing from his parents and routinely attended a local mosque with his father during his early childhood. While still in elementary school, he even completed the Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca) alongside his father. Despite this background, Yunus recalled experiencing a profound sense of isolation during his high school years, as he struggled to reconcile being a Muslim with living his life as a Japanese high school student. After entering university and relocating to Tokyo, however, he began studying Islam more deeply and started producing and sharing videos on YouTube as a young Muslim. Through his involvement in the “Young Muslim Club” at Tokyo Camii, he developed friendships with many other Muslims and significantly broadened his horizons. Since graduating from university, he has been working for a Japanese food manufacturer while continuing his active participation in the “Young Muslim’s Eyes” project.

Yunus produced a work that introduces “Muslim Memes” through a conversation with a non-Muslim junior student, aiming to convey the everyday life of an ordinary Muslim. While memes generally refer to humorous images or videos that spread online, Yunus defines “Muslim Memes” specifically as humorous content related to Islamic culture that Muslims themselves enjoy. Although such memes remain relatively unknown in Japan, he points out that a vast range of Muslim memes circulate internationally online. One meme introduced in his work juxtaposes photos of a Muslim family’s refrigerator during Ramadan and during ordinary periods. One photo shows a refrigerator overflowing with food, while the other is nearly empty. One might assume the empty refrigerator represents the fasting month of Ramadan; however, Yunus reveals that the opposite is true. He describes this as “a super common thing among Muslims”, surprising his non-Muslim partner. Because Muslims fast from dawn to sunset, many prepare an abundance of food

³¹ The video works produced under the “Young Muslim’s Eyes” project are available on the project’s website at <https://project-y.me.net/en/index/>, accessed 7 June 2026.

for the evening meal, a practice humorously captured by the meme.

By utilizing Muslim memes, Yunus created entertainment-oriented content that introduces the daily lives of ordinary Muslims in a format that non-Muslims can easily understand. As he observes in the video, searching for the term “Islam” in Japanese primarily yields videos featuring older Muslims with specialized religious training explaining Islamic doctrine. According to Yunus, such content is not something that average Muslims—let alone non-Muslims—can casually watch and enjoy. Instead, he sought to create accessible and entertaining videos grounded in everyday life, hoping to demonstrate to a broad Japanese audience that Muslims can take many different forms. In his view, YouTube already contains an abundance of videos dedicated to formal Islamic knowledge, typically presented by highly religious individuals with extensive Islamic education. His goal, by contrast, was to portray what he describes as a relaxed, ordinary Muslim whose experiences differ from those represented in doctrinal discussions. This motivation stems from a desire to help the many people in Japan who know little about Islam gain at least a basic understanding of what it means to live as a Muslim.

Simultaneously, Yunus and his peers sought to address their works not only to non-Muslims but also to their former selves and to young Muslims currently experiencing similar feelings of isolation. Yunus described his own video as a message to his high school self. Growing up in a regional area with almost no Muslim peers, he felt persistently alone as a Muslim throughout his adolescence. Looking back, he reflected that seeing someone like himself producing such videos online would have provided reassurance during that period. He therefore hopes that young Muslims facing similar circumstances today will encounter and benefit from his work.

Finally, Yunus understands the production and dissemination of these videos as a religiously meaningful practice. He explained that he views this activity as a form of accumulating good deeds that may benefit him in the afterlife. Whereas his father’s generation devoted considerable effort to building mosques and establishing Muslim communities in order to survive and maintain their faith in Japan, Yunus sees himself contributing in a different way. Rather than constructing physical institutions, he seeks to give form to his own experiences, conflicts, and concerns and share them with others. Although this approach differs significantly from that of his parents’ generation, he regards it as his own way of fulfilling his religious responsibilities. He also noted that,

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since entering full-time employment, opportunities to engage in such meaningful activities have become more limited, which has strengthened his desire to continue creating spaces in which these contributions remain possible

2. *Abmed Alian: Internalizing Complexity and Capitalism*

Alian was born to Pakistani parents and raised in Tokyo. Having been educated in the Japanese public school system from an early age, Japanese is his native language. Attending the mosque with his parents formed a routine part of his upbringing, and, remarkably, he became a *hāfiẓ*, memorizing the entire Qur'an while still in elementary school. During his high school years, he participated in a study group at a mosque in Tokyo and attended the “Young Muslim” gathering organized by Waseda University, discussed in Section B. There he met Qureshi and other members, leading to his involvement in young Muslim initiatives from their early stages. Currently, Alian studies philosophy at a prestigious university in Tokyo while simultaneously managing a consulting firm that he founded. His daily life involves conducting business with overseas clients while remaining actively engaged in young Muslim initiatives as a core member. Reflecting on his background, he explained that both Islamic scholarship and Western academic thought have become deeply internalized within him through his immersion in both intellectual traditions.

One of Alian's works, titled “When My Face Became Mine”, depicts these various facets—the many “faces” he holds—summed up as “himself as a single Muslim.” Another work, “Capital with Love”, explores the frustration he experiences as a business owner operating within a capitalist economic system. Both works are composed of personal monologues accompanied by on-screen text.

Unlike Yunus, whose primary focus is introducing ordinary Muslim life to non-Muslims, Alian also seeks to address existing Muslim communities in Japan. He explained that, alongside communicating with Japanese society, he hopes to convey an important message to Muslim communities themselves. In his view, understandings of what it means to be a Muslim have become overly rigid within the Japanese Muslim community. He argues that one reason non-Muslims maintain stereotypical views of Muslims is that Muslims in Japan have themselves contributed to fixing a narrow image of Muslim identity. Because he regards Islam as a religion that accommodates diversity, Alian hopes his

work will encourage Muslims to become more aware of the diversity that already exists within their own community.

3. *Mamoru Hasegawa: The Reflective Journey of a Convert*

Hasegawa is a convert Muslim who was born and raised in Tokyo. His family runs a *senjo* (traditional Japanese public bathhouse), and he grew up in a traditional downtown neighborhood deeply imbued with local community ties and traditional Shinto culture. As an only child, his parents began hosting foreign exchange students of his generation when he was in junior high school, a practice they have continued ever since. Among the exchange students they hosted were several young Muslims. During high school, Hasegawa studied abroad in the United States, where he also made Muslim friends. He subsequently enrolled in the university where I teach and began studying the Indonesian language and Islam. Within the university context, he shares a senior-junior relationship with Yunus.

Through traveling to Indonesia and participating in young Muslim initiatives, Hasegawa became increasingly drawn to Islam. The event titled “Yuke Muslim Kaigi (Gathering in the Steam)”, mentioned earlier, was conceived by Hasegawa, Yunus, and their peers, and was successfully held at his family’s bathhouse. Following his involvement in these activities, he converted to Islam a few years ago and later pursued graduate studies, completing his master’s thesis on Muslims living in Japan.

He produced two works. The first chronicles his journey toward conversion. By tracing his upbringing and everyday life at home and in his neighborhood, he interweaves his encounters with Islam, experiences of fasting and prayer, university studies, and participation in Muslim communities beyond the university through active learning. Including footage from his *Umrab* (minor pilgrimage to Mecca), the work depicts his emotional transformation as he became increasingly drawn to the faith. He remarks: “Not all Muslims speak Arabic. But if you are Muslim, you can start a conversation with *Assalamu’alaikum*. Despite differences in thinking or practice, everyone is connected through Islam. As I studied Islam and met other Muslims, I found myself gradually captivated.”

His second work, “The Daily Life of a Male University Student during Ramadan”, portrays the experience of fasting within the rhythms of everyday student life. It shows him breaking his fast with other Muslims at a mosque as well as sharing meals with peers after university classes. It also documents the morning of Eid, the festival marking the end of Ramadan, and the celebrations held at the mosque. Reflecting on this

experience, he describes a strong sense of collective accomplishment at the end of the fasting month, as though everyone had completed a shared endeavor together.

Hasegawa, meanwhile, expressed his desire to create a “point of entry” for others to engage with Islam by sharing his personal journey as a convert. Having grown up as a non-Muslim in Japan, he notes a clear difference between himself and Muslims such as Yunus and Alian, who were born into Muslim families. He argues that his positionality allows him to convey aspects of Islam that are accessible to those outside the faith. As he explains, if his videos contain relatable elements, they may become easier for non-Muslim audiences in Japan to watch and engage with. He adds that his conversion was based on a positive personal encounter with Islam, and that by sharing this experience, he hopes to slightly reduce prevailing prejudices against Islam in Japan.

Focusing on the video works and underlying motivations of the three participating Young Muslims, I have illustrated how these individuals are moving beyond the confines of their immediate community to disseminate their messages to the wider world. As digital natives, this generation possesses significantly more advanced video production skills than their predecessors, and they face a much lower psychological barrier to broadcasting their perspectives online. The works of the three individuals highlighted here were distinct in their approaches. Yunus employs “Muslim memes” to cheerfully introduce the existence of “laid-back” Young Muslims. Hasegawa produced a narrative about being born and raised in Tokyo’s downtown, navigating Japanese culture while discovering Islam and eventually converting. Alian, a ḥāfiẓ and philosophy student who also leads a consulting firm, created a work depicting his multifaceted identity and the role of Islam as the unifying thread of his life.

The primary audience for these works is Japanese society. Their efforts reveal a subtle yet clear desire to be recognized by the host society and to challenge prevailing misconceptions about Islam. At the same time, they also address existing Muslim communities in Japan, which were largely established by the first generation. To borrow Alian’s perspective, while Islam is a “religion that embraces diversity”, the existing community in Japan has become rigid. Their works embody a critical awareness of this stagnation. Furthermore, they intend for their videos to reach other young Muslims raised in similar circumstances who may currently be struggling with a sense of isolation. Yunus, for instance, explicitly frames

his work as something that would have reassured his younger self during high school, when he experienced uncertainty regarding his Muslim identity. His goal is to encourage younger Muslims who find themselves in that same position today. Moreover, the production and dissemination of such content is perceived as a “good deed” —a way to accumulate “points” toward entering Heaven.

Of course, these three are not the only Young Muslims engaging in video production to communicate their experiences. Members of the aforementioned SYM Nagoya Mosque are also actively producing and disseminating their own content.³² Similar sentiments were echoed in interviews with them:

“I used to wonder why I had to go through such unpleasant experiences just because I was born Muslim. But meeting and talking with Muslims of my own generation made me feel much better. I think there are people out there who are the only Muslim in their school or neighborhood and don’t feel confident enough to say they are Muslim. I made this video so that I could be a role model for them.”

“When you search “Islam” on YouTube, videos of overseas terrorists often come up. It’s sad if someone who finally takes an interest in Islam sees only those kinds of videos. That’s why we talk about “filling YouTube with our videos.” I want to clear up the misunderstandings held by Japanese people.”

D. Concluding Remarks: Characteristics and Future Outlook of Young Muslim Activities

This section synthesizes the characteristics of the activities of Young Muslims discussed thus far and contextualize them through a comparative analysis with existing scholarly debates on Muslim youth in Western countries and other regions of the world.

Since the mid-1980s, the influx of foreign Muslim laborers into Japan has led to the establishment of settled families. Children raised as Muslims in these households have now reached university age. Many who grew up in regional areas have relocated to the Tokyo metropolitan area for education or employment, seeking connections with Muslim peers. This marked the emergence of “Young Muslim” activities, which

³² Videos produced by members of “SYM Nagoya Mosque” can be viewed on the YouTube channel “Young Muslim Channel” (<https://www.youtube.com/@YoungMuslimChannel>, accessed 2 March 2026).

were subsequently joined by Japanese converts. Section C examined the background of these community activities through the case of the Young Muslim Club, and Section D analyzed the content and objectives of the video works produced through the “Young Muslim’s Eyes” project.

As demonstrated in Section C, Young Muslims perceive clear limitations in the existing Muslim communities established by the first generation and express a strong desire distinguish from their parents’ generation. In contrast to the first generation, which prioritized the physical construction of mosques across Japan, the significance of the mosque has considerably diminished among Young Muslims. For the first generation, establishing mosques was a primary concern, as they provided both places of worship and spaces for social gathering. Indeed, the majority of the more than 150 mosques currently in Japan were founded by foreign Muslims who arrived after the mid-1980s.³³ In contrast, there is little to no movement toward mosque construction among Young Muslims. While they regard mosques as convenient physical venues for community activities, they do not consider them indispensable. Instead, they believe they can gather elsewhere and actively utilize online platforms as alternative spaces for engagement.

Furthermore, Japanese is the primary language used in their activities and outreach. While some Young Muslims speak the languages of their parents’ countries of origin at home, Japanese serves as the most appropriate common language for a group with diverse ethnic backgrounds. Having acquired Japanese through the national education system, it is the language with which they are most proficient and comfortable. Moreover, they are highly conscious of using Japanese as a means of engaging with the broader non-Muslim Japanese society. Non-Muslims who are interested in Islam frequently participate in Young Muslim Club activities. As demonstrated in Section D, Young Muslims hope their self-produced videos will be viewed by a wider Japanese audience. Having been raised within Japanese society and its value system, they possess a strong sense of belonging to Japan. Consequently, they seek to correct misunderstandings and challenge stereotypes surrounding Islam.

This paper has demonstrated that Young Muslims in Japan reject the “culturally bound Islam” of their parents and are seeking a way

³³ Hirofumi Tanada, *Mosques in Japan: Social Activities of Muslims in Japan* (Nihon no mosuku: Tai-nichi musurimu no shakai-teki katsudo), (Tokyo: Yamakawa Shuppansha, 2015).

of being Muslim that is more closely connected to Japanese society. This process of deculturization and the recognition of compatibility between Islam and local values mirrors the European cases identified in previous scholarship. Although Japan has not experienced a trend toward radicalization, the development of an Islamic popular culture—expressed through activities such as discussing faith in humorous *Oogiri* events or producing YouTube content—shares important similarities with the practices of young Muslims in Western societies.

At the same time, the Japanese case is distinctive in the creation of the specific category “Young Muslim.” By self-identifying as “Young Muslims”, these individuals have cultivated a sense of solidarity among peers. Previously, labels such as “second-generation [nationality] Muslim” or “convert” were often imposed by Japanese society and functioned as a form of “othering.” In contrast, the label “Young Muslim” resists such externally imposed categorization and seeks to encompass youths from diverse backgrounds under a shared identity. Although most Young Muslims were raised in economically stable households, belong to relatively privileged social groups, and have not experienced the social exclusion or marginalization historically faced by Muslim youth in many countries, they have nevertheless often experienced profound inner conflicts in navigating life as Muslims in Japan. For these youths, who have long struggled to reconcile their Muslim identity with their experiences as young people in Japan, embracing the label of “Young Muslim” has provided both a space for mutual support and a collective framework through which they can confront these challenges alongside their peers, enabling them to integrate these identities and be both Muslim and young in contemporary Japanese society.

While Muslim activities in Japan—such as mosque construction and community building—have historically been driven by foreign nationals, the Young Muslim movement is emerging as a significant new current within Japanese Islam. In conclusion, I would like to offer a future outlook for Young Muslims by highlighting two emerging trends. The first is the growing connection and collaboration between Young Muslims and the new wave of “first generation” Muslims arriving in Japan. This development has the potential to expand the boundaries of the “Young Muslim” category. For instance, the number of young Indonesian Muslims in Japan has increased dramatically over the past decade. Many of these individuals, residing in Japan as students or highly skilled professionals, are now collaborating with local Young Muslims

on a variety of Islamic initiatives. While building their own communities and mosques, some are also seeking to engage in *da'wah* (proselytization) directed toward Japanese people and to establish networks with Muslims beyond the Indonesian community. As a result, the “Young Muslim” demographic may broaden beyond its current core of second-generation and Japanese converts.

The second trend concerns the possibility that the “Young Muslim” category itself, which has served as a vessel for identity since the late 2010s, may eventually fulfill its role and fade away. As one second-generation leader reflected:

“Our generation, who called ourselves ‘Young Muslims’, will eventually grow up, but perhaps we will always be ‘the Young Muslims’, while the next generation chooses an entirely different name for themselves.”

Similarly, a Japanese convert noted that not all converts are interested in building networks within the Muslim community, as many remain occupied with work and maintain strong ties to their non-Muslim social circles. In this view, the current sense of solidarity among Young Muslims is rooted in a shared generational consciousness that may gradually weaken over time.

In a Japanese Muslim community where scholarly attention has long focused on the activities of the immigrant first generation, this paper has argued that the Young Muslim movement is becoming a significant new current. The number of young Muslims who speak Japanese and have internalized Japanese values is expected to rise. While the future trajectory of their activities remains uncertain, their increasing presence and ongoing collaborations suggest that their influence within the Japanese Muslim community will only continue to grow.

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