

Muslims in Korea: *The Dilemma of Inclusion**

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Abstract

The Muslim community in Korea first appeared in the 1950s and has grown with increasing inflow of foreign workers to Korean society. Loosely communicated through Islam, the community develops its own identity and culture, diversifies ethnically, and remains isolated from the larger Korean society. Once it grows large enough to have a collective voice, however, there are two paths open to Muslims in Korea. One is the “interstitial identity,” meaning that they participate neither in the politics of the majority Korean society nor that of the origin country. The other is a “reconstituted identity” that aspires for integration into mainstream Korean society by actively participating while preserving their distinctiveness. The current Korean government’s multicultural policy may drive Muslims in Korea to take the first path. The current development of the Muslim community in Korea, however, may demand that the Korean government and people employ more inclusive multiculturalism policies to facilitate Muslims in Korea to take the second path. This reflective situation offers Korean society an opportunity to change the current multicultural policy oriented towards differential exclusion and assimilation into a more inclusive model of multiculturalism.

Keywords: Muslim immigrants in Korea, multiculturalism, Islamophobia, Korean multicultural policy, inclusion

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Introduction

As globalization accelerates and intensifies, Korean society is changing and diversifying culturally and ethnically. This increasing of foreign residents from diverse countries poses a new challenge: how can Korean society accommodate this new phenomenon and maintain a stable democracy? The increasing inflow of foreign workers particularly after the Seoul Olympics in 1988 has contributed to the multiculturalization of Korean society. This wave of migrants into Korea has included workers from Muslim countries. While the increase of foreign residents in Korea has inspired citizens and relevant government officials to address multiculturalism overall, it seems that Muslim immigrants in Korea particularly pose a great challenge either for Korean assimilation or multiculturalism.

The purposes of this article are to diagnose the current situation of Muslim immigrants in Korea and suggest a more positive direction for including them in Korean society. The article first introduces a brief history of Muslim immigrants in Korea and examines their present conditions. Then, it analyzes mutual perceptions between Koreans and Muslim immigrants. It also attempts to identify the origin of the vague, but seemingly pervasive anti-Muslim sentiment in Korea. Moreover, it seeks to analyze Korean approaches toward Muslims, with a focus on the overall Korean immigrant or multicultural policies. Finally, it discusses how to better include Muslims into Korea in the future.

With the inflow of foreign residents, Korean society has become increasingly diversified in ethnicity and culture. In keeping pace with this trend, Korean multicultural discourses appear to be rapidly increasing. In general, a state is considered multicultural when the number of its foreign people reaches ten percent of the entire population. According to recent figures, more than 1.2 million are foreigners among about 48 million people in Korea. Although this ratio does not match the level of more established immigrant countries with longer histories of accepting foreigners with a variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds, the Korean multicultural discourse is nevertheless both

rich and expanding.

Multiculturalism is an important discourse that can affect the future of Korea. However, even if we witness active discourse on multiculturalism in Korea, we also see many confusions and distortions. For example, it is often criticized that the Korean government has misappropriated the meaning of multiculturalism by equating it to assimilation. In other words, what the Korean government attempted to implement as “multicultural” policies has been in fact nothing more than assimilation policies.

Some people may appraise that the Korean immigrant policy so far has been successful to a considerable extent. However, such appraisal may miss the real point underlying the context. Even if we accept the positive evaluation of the Korean assimilation policy, we can still say that the success is not because of the assimilation policy itself, but rather the particularity of the Korean context. For example, among the 1,261,415 foreigners staying in Korea as of December 31, 2009, almost half (608,881) of them were of Chinese nationality; and Korean Chinese, who are Chinese citizens but of ethnically Korean origin, comprised the majority (409,079) of the Chinese residents in Korea (Korea Immigration Service 2009, chs. 2, 7). This particular context suggests that it is much easier for foreigners of Chinese nationality or Korean Chinese to adapt to Korean society because of cultural similarities, even if it is undeniable that they also experience some difficulties. In other words, they do not seem to be a serious problem in relation to Korean multiculturalism. But the increasing Muslims in Korea may be a real test either for Korean assimilation or multiculturalism.

In order to explore the success of the Korean government’s multicultural policy, it is necessary to examine how Korean society responds to minorities who do not share strong cultural and ethnic affinities. Muslims, therefore, may represent an important group to consider in delving into the dilemmas of Korean multicultural policy, since they share a low level of mutual understanding and cultural and religious traditions with ordinary Koreans.

The History and Demographic Features of Muslim Immigrants in Korea

The History of Muslims in Korea

The inflow of Muslims to the Korean peninsula was not a recent phenomenon, but rather a long historical process. It was via China's Tang dynasty (617-907) that the Islamic world first became aware of the existence of Korea, while Koreans first encountered Muslims during its own Goryeo dynasty (918-1392). However, there was no ethnic Muslim community in Korea until after the Korean War (1950-1953) (Baker 2006, 25).

Even in the Silla dynasty that preceded Goryeo, it is conjectured that Koreans may have encountered people from the Islamic world in rare cases. Some historical materials from Silla and Goryeo dynasties hint at Korean encounters with Arab people. For example, Korean traditional poems like "Cheoyongga" (Song of Cheoyong) and "Ssanghwajeom" (The Dumpling Shop) depict stories about people of Arab or Turkish origins (Cheong 2002, 339). Moreover, Muslim merchants had visited the Korean peninsula for trading during both Silla and Goryeo dynasties. And some of these early merchants were even awarded Korean surnames and naturalized, becoming the founding ancestors of clans such as the Jang clan of Deoksu and the Seol clan of Gyeongju (Baker 2006, 27; Cheong 2002, 336-339). However, such cases were rare and rather symbolic. These cases also do not have significant implications for today because Muslims in the past were isolated from their culture of origin and all were assimilated and naturalized into the local society. Muslims in the past did not have a favorable situation to preserve their distinctive culture while those in contemporary Korean society seem to struggle to preserve their cultural identity.

A *de facto* Muslim community in Korea finally appeared in the 1950s, due to the influence of Turkish troops who stayed in South Korea after the Korean War. As a member of the United Nations Forces, Turkish troops not only engaged in battles, but also participated in postwar reconstructions such as building the Ankara School

and Orphanage. The Turkish troop commands had not allowed Islamic missions in the beginning, but they tacitly approved partial religious activities after 1955. That was the first time that Islam as a religion began to be recognized by Koreans. On September 15, 1955, the Nonghyup College organized the Korean Islam Association with 70 Korean Muslim participants.¹ The Islam community in 1950s Korea was still in an embryonic stage, facing new challenges.

The small Muslim community in Korea grew in the 1960s and 1970s, fueled partially by conversions among Korean construction workers who had worked in the Middle East on construction projects. The Muslim community in Korea grew large enough that the Korean Islam Association changed its name to the Korea Muslim Federation in 1967. During this time, President Park Chung-hee considered building a mosque with the intention of improving relations with Middle Eastern countries and inviting “oil money.” President Park offered to provide land for constructing a mosque while Middle Eastern countries responded by providing the funds necessary to build it. In September 1970, a 4,950m² mosque site was confirmed in Hannam-dong in Seoul, and with several fundraising activities, the first mosque in Korea was finally built in Itaewon in Seoul (Baker 2006, 28; Hong 2008, 25).

However, since then, interest in Islam slightly decreased until the 1988 Seoul Olympics, after which many Asian workers began to move to Korea and the number of Muslim workers from Islamic countries also increased. In the wake of this development, there were 35,000 Muslims in Korea by 1990, with additional mosques opened in Busan, the second largest city in Korea, and in Jeonju, the provincial capital of Jeollabuk-do province. It has been recently estimated that the number of Muslims in Korea is around 130,000-140,000, among whom at least 45,000 are Koreans.² The number of Muslims in Korea is not sig-

1. See “Hanguk iseullam hyeonhwang” (The Current State of Islam in Korea), http://www.islamkorea.com/islamkorea_2.html (accessed May 5, 2012).

2. Song Kyung-hwa and Ahn Su-chan, “I am a Korean Muslim,” *Hankyoreh*, May 17, 2011, http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/society/society_general/478222.html (accessed June 9, 2011).

nificant compared to the estimated 14 million Christians and over ten million Buddhists.³ More specifically, according to the National Statistical Office of Korea, the number of Christians in Korea in 2006 comprised 29.1 percent of the total population with 13,750,000; of the total number of Christians, 8,610,000 were Protestants and 5,140,000 were Catholics (Min 2009, 610).

Demographic Features of Muslims in Korea

Nowadays, the Muslim community in Korea comprises a small and loosely tied minority group, diversified internally in its ethnic and national backgrounds. Nevertheless, they communicate with each other through Islam. We can classify Muslim immigrants, legal and illegal, in Korea into five categories: Muslims from Arab, Muslims from non-Arab Middle East, such as Turkey and Iran, Muslims from Central Asia, Muslims from South Asia, and Muslims from Southeast Asia. According to the 2006 statistics of the Korean Ministry of Justice, the estimated number of legal and illegal foreign Muslims in Korea is 114,790, which comprises about ten percent of the total foreign residents in Korea (Cho 2008, 32). A considerable portion, estimated at over 30 percent, of Muslim immigrants in Korea is illegal.

However, it is very difficult to determine accurately the number of Muslims in Korea. The number may vary according to how it is calculated. The number of Muslims in Korea in Table 1 is estimated by the authors on the basis of 2009 statistics by the Korean Ministry of Justice. It may show differences from estimated numbers from other studies quoted in this article. According to our estimation, approximately 70,000 Muslim immigrants resided in Korea, including legal and illegal, at the end of 2009.

Although the number of Muslims in Korea had increased in the late 1980s and the 1990s, they did not attract either social attention or

3. See Baker (2006, 28-29). The number of Muslims in Korea is often estimated by the number of immigrants in Korea from Islamic countries added to the number of Korean Muslims. The estimated figure depends on how the population is calculated.

Table 1. An Estimated Number of Muslims in Korea⁴

	Immigrants from Muslim countries	Muslim ratio in home country	Estimated Muslim immigrants in Korea
Middle East (Arab)	2,589	Legal 2,132	2,589
		Illegal 457	
Middle East (Non-Arab: Turkey and Iran)	1,954	1,002	1,954
		952	
Central Asia	25,475	16,584	21,418
		8,891	
South Asia	20,802	11,430	19,172
		9,372	
Southeast Asia	32,705	27,584	23,138
		5,121	
Total	83,525	58,732	68,271
		24,793	

academic concerns because of their insignificant number. Muslim immigrants were simply regarded as outsiders from Korean society. Recently, however, a series of researches have been conducted by scholars of area studies. Many of Muslim immigrants live in the so-called “Borderless Village” in Ansan, Gyeonggi-do province. They voluntarily organize regular meetings through mosques (*masjid*) or

4. This table was rearranged by the authors based on the 2009 Statistics issued by the Korean Ministry of Justice. We obtained our estimated number by multiplying the ratio of Muslims in their home country to the number of immigrants from Muslim countries in Korea. The ratios of Muslims in their home countries were obtained from the website *CIA World Factbook*. Moreover, although the ratios of Muslims among immigrants from Middle Eastern countries, including Turkey and Iran, were approximately 98-99 percent, we counted them as 100 percent for the convenience of calculation.

prayer gatherings (*musallah*) (Cho et al. 2008b, 178).

As mentioned above, Muslim immigrants in Korea can be categorized by region and ethnicity: Middle East (Arab and Non-Arab), Central Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. Among these categories, Muslims from South Asian and Southeast Asian regions comprise the largest number among the Muslim population in Korea. They come from Indonesia, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, and most of them are unskilled laborers. Although the ways in which they emigrate are varied, their networks and communities of migration are usually organized by Islam. Recently, however, there has been an addition of international students supported by their home governments to the immigrant population (Cho et al. 2008b, 180).

The number of Central Asian immigrants is rapidly growing, but it is difficult to calculate the proportion of Muslims. Since the former U.S.S.R occupied Central Asia during the Cold War, Russians and Slavs immigrated to the region and coexisted with the natives. The estimated portion of native Muslims from each country is 55 percent in Kazakhstan, 88 percent in Uzbekistan, and 75 percent in Kyrgyzstan.⁵ Among these countries, faithful Muslims can be limited to Uzbeks. Native Uzbeks are known to live in Korea as unskilled laborers, and the number of marriage-immigrants from this area is also increasing. In 2006, the marriage registration of Korean male and foreign female numbered 30,000 and among the total, marriages with Uzbek females counted for 314 cases (Cho et al. 2008b, 179-180).

Although Arabs occupy the lowest population proportion among Muslim immigrants, their number is growing recently due to the increase of international students to Korea. Accordingly, their nationality determines in a great way the types of immigrants. For example, Muslims from the Persian Gulf region, like Saudi Arabia, sustain stable lives thanks to their home government subsidies, while Muslims from Egypt or Sudan mostly live a life as simple workers (Cho et al. 2008b, 178-179).

5. See the website *CIA World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook> (accessed April 16, 2011).

Non-Arab Middle Eastern immigrants are comprised of Turks and Iranians. According to the Turkish Embassy, Turkish immigrants began increasing in 2002 and reached a peak at 1,000 in 2004, but since then their number has been decreasing slightly. Many of the Turkish immigrants are also simple laborers but, unlike other Muslim groups, Turks are successfully entering into Korean society. Iranian Muslims are generally gathered in the Uijeongbu area, yet empirical statistics on their present situations do not exist (Cho et al. 2008b, 178-179).

Muslims of these five categorized groups communicate with each other sporadically through minor channels and meetings. Although they differ in their respective motivation, adaptability, and even their faith in Islam, Muslim immigrants from diverse countries in Korea have a chance to meet each other, one example of which is Korean Muslims' joint prayers on Fridays at the Seoul Central Masjid in Han-nam-dong.⁶ There are also other *masjids* in Korea, where Muslims in Korea, including both immigrants and native Koreans, communicate through *salaat* (Islamic praying), for example, like Busan al-Fatin Masjid, Gwangju Masjid in Gyeonggi-do province, Jeonju Abu Bakr al-Sidiq Masjid, Anyang Rabita Masjid, Ansan Masjid, Pocheon Islamic Center, Bupyeong Masjid, and Paju Masjid. In addition, about 50-60 *musallahs*, small sites for *salaat*, are scattered across the country. They provide the space for communication among Muslims in Korea (Korea Muslim Federation 2005, 44-48).

Mutual Perceptions between Koreans and Muslim Immigrants

Many Koreans are not familiar with Islam and Muslims. Moreover, general perceptions and limited understandings that Koreans have on Islam and Muslims may be negative and prejudiced. From the Korean

6. Song Kyung-hwa and Ahn Su-chan, "Young Turks Contact 'Shahada,'" *Hankyoreh*, May 17, 2011, <http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/SERIES/298/478656.html> (accessed June 9, 2011).

War until recently, Koreans have regarded Muslim immigrants in general as simple strangers. Koreans show no great concerns towards them and this attitude may be characterized as “indifferent neglect.”

Like other religions such as Christianity, Islam also has quite a long history in Korea, yet Islam has failed to be recognized as “our” (Korean) religion. Islam is seen as a religion of foreigners and not for Koreans. Baker enumerates some reasons as to why Islam faces difficulties in attracting Koreans to mosques. Foremost, Koreans may regard Islamic practices and restrictions as being in conflict with or requiring deviations from Korean customs. Moreover, Korean society tends to emphasize ethnic and cultural homogeneity and thus exerts strong social pressure on its members to fit in rather than act differently. And finally, while Koreans are accustomed to statues or paintings in their worship, Muslims have no such images in their mosques (Baker 2006, 29-30). Because of such obstacles, as Baker notes, Islam is struggling for a toehold in Korea. As the number of Muslim immigrants in Korea increases, however, they may claim their identity and demand recognition. Although Korean perceptions on Islam and Muslim immigrants are gradually changing, the change can proceed in both positive and negative ways in the future.

There have been some recent changes in Korean attitudes and concerns regarding Muslims and Islam. The 9.11 attacks, which triggered ambivalent responses in Korea, provided a turning point for Korean perception of Islam. On the one hand, it triggered negative anxiety toward Muslims and Islam in general. On the other hand, it also elicited such a positive response among Koreans as to reflect on their negative perceptions on or neglect of Muslims. Lee Hee-Soo argues that, after 9.11, Koreans tried to identify their own misunderstandings of Islam, which they believed is greatly influenced by misconceived and prejudiced American perspective. Koreans wanted to listen to Islam and Muslims directly in order to construct a more balanced perception. It is Lee’s argument that such societal changes brought about a sympathetic understanding of Islam alongside the then prevalent anti-American sentiment (H. Lee 2006, 241-245).

Koreans' Perception of Muslims

A survey conducted by the Korean Broadcasting System (KBS) Research Center in 2010 revealed that Koreans' perception of Islam is negative in general. When questioned on the knowledge, interest, favorable impression, and image of Islam, the respondents answered negatively. For example, 56.3 percent answered "I don't know" to the question of "to what extent do you know Islam?" For the question of "do you have an interest in Islam?" 69.5 percent gave a negative response. It is interesting to note that regarding the question of whether they held a favorable impression of Islam, 72.8 percent responded that they had a "neither good nor bad impression." In addition to this seemingly *indifferent* attitudes, 74.4 percent of the respondents expressed that Islam's growth would not be beneficial to the development of Korean society. Furthermore, 55.3 percent of the respondents answered "yes" on the question asking whether they associated Islam with acts of terror. And on the question of whether they would allow their family members to marry Muslims, 73.9 percent of the respondents answered negatively. The results of this survey suggest that Koreans still regard Muslims as *guests* and not *neighbors* and want to keep their distance from Muslims.

Since the 2000s, Koreans also have begun to show a kind of Islamophobia. What has contributed to the contemporary negative sentiments toward Islam and Muslims? Since the Turkish participation in the Korean War, Islam has had more than 50-year presence in Korea. And even if Muslims have been treated as a minority, most Koreans have not regarded Muslims as a threat or harm to their own society. Rather, it seems that Koreans did not form a specific view on Muslims until recently. There are a variety of interpretations as to why the majority of Koreans now have a negative perception on Muslims, but this change overall may be greatly influenced by a Western tendency that connects Islam with terrorism, particularly after 9.11. Another possible interpretation is that the change may reflect the fundamentalist traditions among Protestant churches in Korea, which inherited its fundamentalism from American churches. In particular,

the 2005 conference commemorating the 50th anniversary of Muslims in Korea, which also catalyzed a call for change in Korean society, provoked tension between Korean Protestant churches and Islam.

In the wake of the 50th anniversary conference in 2005, we have seen the rise of some conspicuous conflicts between Islam and Christianity in Korea. Prior to 2005, Korean Protestant churches had been mainly concerned with overseas missionary activities of proselytizing non-Christians outside Korea and, thus, had less interest in domestic missionizing efforts. In 2005, however, when a number of Islamic scholars and religious leaders gathered in Korea for an international conference, "Islam and Other Religions: Coexistence and Cooperation," some conservative Christians in Korea began to express concerns against the enlargement and spread of Islam in Korea (H. Park 2007, 40-44). Conservative Korean Protestant churches have expressed some anxieties over Islam by criticizing Islamic fundamentalism.⁷ In general, they perceive Islam as a fundamentalist doctrine and believe that Korean Islam cannot be an exception. Sense of fear is also expressed in Christian missionary media, with such provocative headings as "Surging Islamic Raid" or "Islamization of Korea until 2020" (H. Park 2007, 38-39). These expressions, although overexaggerated, reflect to some extent Korean anxiety that Islamic fundamentalism associated with terrorism might creep into Korean society through the increase of Muslim immigrants. They worry that the increase of foreign Muslim workers in Korea and their marriage with Koreans may accelerate the spread of Islamic fundamentalism, which then would undermine Korean society (H. Park 2007, 40-41). In commemorating the 50th anniversary of Muslims in Korea, the Korea Muslim Federation published a booklet titled *Islam in Korea: Golden Anniversary of Islam in Korea* in November of 2005. The booklet contains "Dawah Plans in the Future," which outlines the following: (1) construction plan of a new *masjid*; (2) opening of the international Islamic primary school and kindergarten; (3) opening of a Dawah center; (4) the holy Quran translation committee; (5) the Korean Islamic college project;

7. For a critical review of Islamic fundamentalism in Korea, see Jun (2007).

and (6) translation and publication committee.⁸

Some conservative pastors of Korean Protestant churches perceived these Dawah plans as a serious and threatening attempt to Islamize Korea in the near future. One of the leading conservative pastors contended that Korean churches should be alert on the ongoing Islamic missionary activities in Korea. In an interview titled “Our Stance on Islam’s Missionary Activities” with the press circle of Korean Protestant churches on August 30, 2007, the pastor maintained that “Islam already has had a plan to make Korea into an Islamic state since 1988” (H. Park 2007, 42-44). This reflects an extreme anxiety of Korean protestant churches over Islam in Korea. Moreover, although the conference of 2005 was an academic gathering to enhance dialogues between religions, hosted by the Korea Muslim Federation and the Korean government as well as sponsored by many large corporations, some conservative Christians worried that the Korea Muslim Federation would use the conference for a political purpose and as a step toward Islamizing Korea (H. Park 2007, 45-46).

Such Islamophobia emerging in Korea raises some questions: “how could Korean Islamophobia establish a firm and consistent structure in such a short period?”; and “what makes the Islamophobic sentiments distinguishable from the anti-immigrant sentiment toward Korean Chinese or North Korean refugees?” These questions consequently lead to explore the origins of Korean Islamophobia. It seems useful to explore the origins of Korean Islamophobia endogenously as well as exogenously. Korean Islamophobia involves endogenous elements such as Koreans’ self-identity as well as exogenous ones, for example, Western perception of Islam.

First of all, a single-nation sentiment based on ethnic homogeneity is deeply embedded in the Korean self-identity. This self-identity tends to show exclusive attitudes towards outside members while being more inclusive with inner members. And it is investigated that this self-identity leads to the dual attitudes towards foreign immigrants in Korea: Koreans normatively tries to be leniently open to and

8. For details, see Korea Muslim Federation (2005, 38-40).

inclusive of foreign immigrants while, in practical matters, tending to show exclusive attitudes (Kang 2007, 36). It is also pointed that Koreans have an interdependent concept of self that tends to distinguish in-groups and out-groups. Koreans, having an interdependent collective tendency, take family as the most important in human relations, and further cherish affective relations such as kinships, school ties and connections, and hometown and regional relationships. This collective identity tends to show exclusive attitudes towards outside members (J. Kim 2006, 28-29, 69). This concept of self-identity of Koreans underlies a newly erupted Korean Islamophobia that was affected by exogenous factors. In explaining Korean Islamophobia, exogenous factors are more conspicuous. Hence, it is worthwhile to explore the exogenous factors.

Korean Islamophobia was nakedly expressed by a few conservative pastors of particular Korean Protestant churches. It is also pointed that these conservative voices are influenced by the tradition of fundamentalism in Korean Protestant churches. It may be interpreted that this fundamentalism is endogenously influenced by Korean self-identity that tends to claim the “purity” of Korean culture. But it is worthwhile to notice that it is also affected by exogenous factors. We are going to trace that the fundamentalism in Korean protestant churches has historical origin in the fundamentalism in American churches, inheriting its core ideas such as absolute commitment to Christianity on the basis of biblical inerrancy. It is also analyzed that the conservative Korean churches have maintained an intimate relationship with conservative American churches. For example, leaders of conservative Korean protestant churches have studied for their academic degrees or stayed for their sabbatical leave at conservative seminaries in America to communicate with American conservative church leaders. And also it is observed that American church leaders are often invited for special lectures in missionary and education programs in major Korean Protestant churches (S. Lee 2004, 274). Following this lineage, we are arguing that the fundamentalist tradition in American churches have contributed to shaping Korean Islamophobia. Of course, although it is very hard to find out how the two fundamentalisms of Korean Protes-

tant churches and American ones are interacting each other, both traditions share anti-Islam sentiments. Kim Sang-Keun (2009) analyzes that Korean Islamophobia is simply a polemical discourse produced by a conservative/fundamentalist camp of Korean Protestant churches, which has been influenced by American-Christian fundamentalism. Kim also worries that it could hinder the communication between churches and ordinary people of Korean society by losing its convincing ground.

The fundamentalist tradition within Korean Protestant churches, having a historical origin associated with American fundamentalism, played a grave role in shaping Korean Islamophobia.⁹ It is inferred that, historically speaking, the fundamentalist tradition within Korean Protestant churches has inherited the core ideas of American fundamentalism such as biblical inerrancy, which provided the conservatives in Korean Protestant churches with justifiable grounds against Islam in contemporary Korea. Missionaries to the Korean peninsula in the nineteenth century such as Underwood or Appenzeller had been educated in fundamentalist theologies in America. Thus, it seems to be a natural process that the missionaries instilled conservative theologies and religious faith into Korean people (Rhie 1998, 24-29). Many of them were educated in conservative theology seminaries like Princeton Theological Seminary. Moreover, among 33 American missionaries, 16 missionaries' alma maters were known to be from Princeton Theological Seminary (K. Kim 1998, 15). Above all, one of the evidences that Korean Protestant churches accepted and maintained fundamentalism shows their strict adherence to biblical inerrancy and firm rejection of liberal theology. Their fundamentalism has been firmly embedded and internalized. It may be argued that, in the 1930s, Korean Protestant churches unconditionally accepted the trend of American protestant churches and applied it to Kore-

9. For a brief explanation of the development of American fundamentalism, see Bae (2010, 18-25). For an historical overview of the background for the emergence of "Islamophobia" or "anxiety of Islam" in the Western world and the United States, see Gottschalk and Greenberg (2008, 13-43).

an society.¹⁰

The spectrum of Korean perceptions on Muslims ranges widely from extreme fear or Islamophobia to favorable perceptions. But the majority appears to be in-between, expressing indifference or neutral sentiments. For instance, a recent survey of 1,200 Korean college students towards Koslisms, descendants of Muslim immigrants or families, does not show Islamophobia. Rather, what is of note is the degree of favorable perception. Catholic students showed the most positive attitude toward Koslisms, followed by students of no religion, Buddhism, and then Protestantism. In other words, Protestant students have the most negative perception while Catholic students held the most favorable. This result coincides to a certain degree with the general trend of Protestant churches' negative stance towards Islam in Korea. The survey also indicates that while the respondents are generally open to having personal friendships with Muslims, they are reluctant to having special groups or collective meetings and even more reluctant when it comes to having family relationships through marriage. This suggests that the respondents want to keep a degree of social distance from Koslisms (Cho et al. 2010, 292-293, 303-304). This attitude of "indifferent neglect" among the surveyed students is similar to the results of the aforementioned KBS survey. In sum, while it is undeniable that there is Korean Islamophobia, especially evident among some conservative Protestants who express fear about the growth of Islam and the increase of Muslims in Korea, the general trend of "indifferent neglect" prevails among the majority of Koreans.

Muslim Responses to and Demands from Korean Society

As the Korean economy developed, the Muslim community in Korea grew with increasing inflow of foreign workers to Korean society. Although Muslim immigrants in Korea are ethnically diverse, the Mus-

10. For detailed explanations of the origin of Korean churches' fundamentalism traced back to American Churches fundamentalism, see K. Kim (1998), Rhie (1998), and Bae (2010).

lim community in Korea loosely communicates with one another through Islam to develop its own identity and culture in Korean society. The construction of a distinct identity among the Muslim community in Korea is still in its beginning stages, however. The emergence of Muslim communities in the West shows four stages of development: first, the migration of the pioneers is followed by a chain migration of generally unskilled male workers from the same villages, which then is followed by the migration of wives and children, and finally, a generation of Muslims born and educated in the West emerges (Lewis 2003, 82-83). Muslim immigrants in Korea still remain in-between the first and the second stage. For example, pioneering Muslims from Egypt have begun to invite male relatives and friends through personal networks. They do not show any interest in Korean language and culture, as Muslims in this second migratory stage only dream of returning to their home country once enough money has been saved (Cho 2008, 62). But recent trends also indicate the beginnings of the third and fourth stages.

According to a 2007 survey on Muslim adaptability to Korean society, Muslims in Korea express some difficulties with their daily lives and Korean indifference to their religious practices. Experiences related to food have been one of the greatest difficulties. In most factories or workplaces, it is common to provide food that is mixed with pork, which Muslims do not eat. As for Korean prejudice against Muslims, they responded that it is comparatively low. For instance, one Sudanese responded:

In my case, though I have stayed comparatively long in Korea, I cannot say that I have no difficulties at all. For example, when I responded that I am a Muslim to someone asking me, "Where are you from?" I experienced at times somewhat of a negative response. But this negative response is not so serious in comparison to the experiences in other countries. I can say that the prejudices against Muslims exist in Korea but it is not so serious (Cho 2008, 55).

The same survey also indicated that some students complained of religious discrimination in schools. For example, a certain university does

not respond to the demand that Muslim students need a small space for praying, on the grounds that the university is a Christian mission school. An interviewee complained, “I don’t know why the university offers circle rooms for other religions while denying it for Muslims. If the university offers a small space, it would be good to pray and to see friends there . . . ” (Cho 2008, 51-59).

What distinguishes Muslims in Korea from other foreign immigrants is that they are forming a community through Islam while other immigrants form their community on the basis of their nation of origin (Yoo, Kim, and Ahn 2010, 155). At the same time, although it is undeniable that they are forming a community centered on mosques, they are also constructing a social network based on their original home country (Cho 2008, 59-61). Moreover, they also have begun to show some modest interest in Korean culture and society. The responses are sporadic and remain minimal, however. Overall, as the Muslim community in Korea is still loosely connected and ethnically diverse, their demands and responses have not developed into a collective level.

Another recent development has been an increase of intermarriages between Koreans and Muslims and the subsequent birth of their children, Koslisms. Although they are small in number, it seems that they are creating their own identity in Korean society. Overall, while Muslim immigrants in Korea attempt to acculturate themselves selectively to Korean society, they maintain their own social networks through religion, which plays an impeding factor in developing a relationship with the larger Korean society. They show a strong tendency to maintain their Muslim identity while, in private sphere, they try to adapt themselves to Korean culture.¹¹

*The Relationship of Muslim Immigrants and Koreans:
Lack of Communication*

Against the background of Korean self-identity and even broader

11. For details, see Cho et al. (2009), Ahn (2009), and Yoo, Kim, and Ahn (2010).

Korean culture, the fundamentalist tradition within Korean Protestant church, combined with the Korean perception of the 9.11 attacks as terrorism associated with Muslims and Islam and the Korea Muslim Federation's Conference in 2005, has contributed to the emergence of Korean anxiety over Islam and Muslims in Korea, i.e. Korean Islamophobia. But historically speaking, we don't see any active relationship between Muslim immigrants and Korean citizens before entering into the 2000s. Although we saw an emergence of a small Muslim community first in Korean history in the 1950s, the atmosphere of indifferent neglect towards Muslims in Korean society has been dominant until the 2000s. An anxiety over Islam in Korean society came to appear with the 9.11 incident and the Korea Muslim Federation's Conference in 2005 alongside religious worries from the fundamentalist tradition of Korean Protestant churches. But this anxiety still remains very limited in its scope while a majority of Korean citizens are lacking interest in and experience of Muslim cultures and the basic ideas of Islam.

The interaction and communication between ordinary Korean citizens and Muslim immigrants are not active simply because the Muslim community in Korea has not grown enough to make their voices heard. And even when Muslims do demand public concerns towards them, Korean citizens and the government do not pay great attention. As mentioned above, Koreans show diverse attitudes toward Muslims, ranging from Islamophobia to sympathetic and positive understanding. But it seems that Islamophobia overshadows other perspectives on Muslims in Korea. At times, it attracts support from ordinary Koreans when it invokes a fear of terrorism. For example, Islamophobia was widely shared with the killing of Kim Sun-Il in Iraq in 2004 and the case of the Saemmul Community Church in Afghanistan in 2007 in which its 23 members were abducted by a Taliban militant group and two of them were killed eventually.¹² Moreover, some Koreans

12. For details, see "A Series of Daily Records on the Killing of Kim Sun-Il," *Newsis*, May 23, 2004, and "A Series of Daily Records on the Abduction of the Members of Korea's Saemmul Community Church for Overseas Voluntary Service," *Yonhap News*, July 31, 2007, respectively. There were also various responses at the time to

seem to share the conservative Protestant church leaders' criticism that Islamic countries do not allow Christian missionary activities in their territory even though they try to spread Islam in other countries. And finally Korean Islamophobia is also strengthened by the perception of Islamic fundamentalist intolerance and illiberal practices such as polygamy and intermarriage between Muslims that are not compatible with contemporary Korean practices.

As aforementioned, Islamophobia in Korea is very limited in scope. And just as Islamophobia is an imagined product of the historical interaction between the West and the Middle East, the Korean anxiety of Islam may be also largely an imagined one. But the mood of Islamophobia does have material consequences in that it contributes to the general lack of understanding of Muslims and the consequential indifferent neglect of Muslims in Korea. Beyond indifference, however, there appears to be three types of fear present in Korean Islamophobia, which have grave implications for policy making. The first fear is security-related while the second is economic and the third is religious. Koreans seem to fear the possibility of Muslims committing acts of terror on Koreans. Many Koreans tend to believe that many of the terror incidents were caused by Islamic fundamentalists. According to the KBS survey in 2010, of the 55.3 percent of the respondents who believed that there was a clear relationship between Islam and terrorism, 39.9 percent thought so because they believed that some religious and political leaders manipulated their followers to commit acts of violence; and 32.4 percent of the respondents believed that some fanatic Muslims committed non-religious acts of terror as well.

As for the economic fear, it has been commonly argued that the influx of foreign labors deprive Koreans of jobs. This perceived threat has motivated the recent and significant drives against immigrants that call for the deportation of illegal foreign workers. It is not hard to find NGOs asserting that the government's wrong immigration policy led to the increase of illegal immigrants in Korea.

the case in major daily newspapers, such as *Chosun Ilbo*, *Dong-A Ilbo*, *JoongAng Ilbo*, and *Hankyoreh*.

The third anxiety involves potential religious conflicts, especially as the Muslim population grows. Contemporary Koreans have not witnessed serious religious conflicts in their society besides some minor tensions and uncomfortable expressions between Christian church and Buddhist temple. The religious tensions in modern Korea have not been serious enough to jeopardize political and social stability. However, as indicated above, some Christian groups have already expressed concern over the increase of Muslims in Korean society and how this may challenge the status of Christianity in Korea.

The Korean Government's Multicultural Policy and Muslim Immigrants in Korea

A great number of Muslim immigrants are living in Korea as foreign workers with temporary residence status. They are different, however, compared to other foreign workers in Korea, especially those from East Asian countries who share to a considerable degree cultural heritage and religious affinities with the majority of Korean citizens. Although Muslims are protected by the Korean government's so-called multicultural policy, no specific measures to embrace Muslims and Muslim cultures are advocated in this policy. Korea's multicultural policy is focused on immigrant workers, most of who came to Korea for economic reasons. Thus, in a sense, it is nothing more than an extension of the immigration policy or policies for foreigners residing in Korea. It has not been a policy of multiculturalism in that it does not advocate respecting and incorporating diverse cultural, ethnic, and religious practices and identities. Thus, the Korean multicultural policy should be distinguished from a true "multiculturalism policy."

Although the term "multicultural society" has been frequently used in Korean government policies, its meaning is very limited in the sense that it refers simply to the phenomenon in which peoples of diverse ethnic, cultural, and religious origins live in a same society. It does not refer to any normative values and goals. The Korean multicultural policy is represented by the 1st Basic Plan for a Foreign Resi-

dent Policy (2008) and the Multicultural Family Supporting Law (2008). These policies formed against the background of increasing marriage immigrants and migrant workers in Korea since the 1980s. In fact, the Korean foreigners policy is closely related to the immigrant policy, and the concept of “multicultural family” frequently used in government policies refers to the family of married immigrants, including a Korean spouse, either male or female, and their children (J. Park 2010, 177-182). The Korean multicultural policy is simply oriented toward assimilation, and Muslims in Korea are also treated within this assimilation-emphasized framework of the Korean multicultural policy.

Immigrant policies that other contemporary societies employ provide three representative models of differential exclusion, assimilation, and multiculturalism. The differential exclusion model adopts a policy that accepts foreign workers in a specific labor market, but does not give social benefits equivalent to the ones extended to its own citizens, citizenship, and the right to vote. According to the assimilation model, a recipient country demands that immigrants assimilate into the mainstream society through abandoning the language, culture, and social practices of the migrants’ country of origin. The multicultural model, on the other hand, encourages immigrants to preserve their distinctive culture, and its aim is not assimilation but rather a symbiosis with the mainstream culture (J. Park 2010, 83-85).

The Korean multicultural policy employs a mixture of these three models. For foreign laborers, specifically for unskilled workers including overseas ethnic Koreans who do not have Korean citizenship, the government policy is similar to the differential exclusion model. For the policy for marriage immigrants, on the other hand, the Korean government employs the assimilation model. And policies for the foreign skilled workers and long-term residents resemble the multiculturalism approach. For instance, the government extends to them the right to vote in local elections. But the scope and practices are very limited. Overall, the Korean multicultural policy still remains in the differential exclusion model (J. Park 2010, 190).

The Korean approach towards Muslims in Korea follows the

model of differential exclusion model, except for marriage immigrants. This approach has been shaped by, on the one hand, Koreans' perceptions of Muslims that range from indifferent neglect, held by the majority of Korean citizens, to the overexaggerated Islamophobia, shared by a small portion of Koreans, and the lack of collective voices from the Muslim community itself in Korea, on the other hand. However, as the Muslim community grows and they assume a collective voice, it is predicted that the Korean government policy will increasingly move away from exclusion and toward multiculturalism.

Conclusion

Islamic identity varies even among Islamic countries, as can be seen from different approaches to Islam in Turkey, Iran, Egypt, Indonesia, or UAE. And even within a particular country, Islamic identity can range from conservatives and neo-fundamentalists to reformists and secularists. Differences in Muslim identities could be further conditioned by the generation and the country in which an individual is adapting to live. And globalization further drives Muslims living in foreign countries to create new identities (Monshipouri 2009, 243-262). Likewise, the identity of Muslims in Korea may vary according to their religious faith or their home country. It can be said that Muslims in Korea are in the process of shaping their own identity.

As of now, Muslims in Korea have been isolated from the mainstream Korean society. But, as the Muslim community in Korea grows, we expect an increase of contacts and communication between Muslims and Koreans. This change will inevitably accompany some ethnic and cultural conflicts. It is further expected that Korean society will face the situation of employing a more inclusionary policy towards them. It needs to provide an expanded space for communication between Muslims and Koreans. Korean society will also encounter the rise of second and third generations of Muslims in Korea, just like Western societies have experienced. Empirically, we see an increasing number of Muslims, with an estimated number of about 4,000, who

are descendants of Muslim immigrants or families in Korea.¹³ And Muslims of new generation born in Korea are seeking their own identity in Korean society. They may shape a hybrid identity between Islam and Korean culture. They may try to adapt themselves to Korean society while preserving and creating their respective ethnic and religious identities.

This may urge Korean society to change from the current policy of differential exclusion and assimilation to a more inclusive model of multiculturalism. Once the Korean Muslim community grows large enough to make a collective voice, the Korean government will have to make decisions regarding how to more positively respect and embrace their cultural, religious, and ethnic identities.

There are some future paths open to Muslims in Korea. One is the “interstitial identity” (a third space), which means that they participate neither in the politics of the majority Korean society in which they reside nor in the politics of their country of origin. This is meant to create, especially among the younger generation, a form of hybridized political identity that can be described as somehow in-between (Monshipouri 2009, 222). According to this path, they may remain an isolated, voluntary minority without meaningful communication with the larger Korean society. The other path is for a “reconstituted identity” that aspires for integration into the mainstream society while maintaining their differences. As the cases in European societies show, Muslims fear assimilation that could mean stripping them of their Islamic identity, but they increasingly want to become citizens of Europe (Monshipouri 2009, 238). This path would mean that Muslims in Korea would more actively participate in the mainstream Korean society while preserving their own identity. There is a strong possibility that the current Korean multicultural policy will drive the Muslims in Korea to take the first path, while more inclusive policies of multiculturalism may contribute to opening the second path for the Mus-

13. Song Kyung-hwa and Ahn Su-chan, “‘Koslim,’ ‘Ali,’ ‘My Country is Korea.’” *Hankyoreh*, May 18, 2011, http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/society/society_general/478375.html (accessed June 9, 2011).

lims in Korea. In considering the European experience, it is very unclear whether the assimilation model will succeed in Korean society. Both Korean society and the government have a strong tradition and desire to maintain its homogeneity, but the current Korean reality poses a new challenge of how to include the increasingly diverse population while maintaining its social stability.

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