

Promoting Diversity, Introducing Islam: Muslim Indonesian Professionals in Contemporary Corporate Japan

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***Abstract:** The topic of how professionals' religious identity travels in a migratory context remains under-examined. Drawing on data from interviews with twenty Muslim Indonesians in Tokyo, this study discusses how Muslim professionals navigate their religious identity during employment and living in Japan. It finds that the image of Islam in Japanese professional settings is still positive, and suggests that working in Japan paves the way for Muslim Indonesians to promote cultural diversity in Japanese professional settings, which also serve as a platform for introducing Islam. This study contributes to the discourse on the emerging Muslim professional identity in non-religious societies.*

***Keywords:** diversity in Japan, Indonesian in Japan, Indonesian professionals, Japanese workplace, Muslim identity*

Introduction

It was a sunny weekend in early fall 2018 when I participated in a religious-based Indonesian community gathering in Tokyo. Held in one of the members' residences in Tokyo's Meguro City, the event was attended by about forty people, mostly men. All participants, except me, were Muslim Indonesian professionals who work in various industries across Japan. Most hail from the greater Tokyo area, but a number also traveled from other prefectures, such as Tochigi, Toyama, and Aichi. After short self-introductions and a recitation of the Qur'an, the participants had midday prayer and lunch together, followed by sharing sessions on the topics that attendees found most interesting: "My Workplace" and the "Experience of Hajj from Japan." During these sessions, two speakers shared stories about

their career journeys, including some tips and tricks on navigating business ethics and professional life in corporate Japan, while other speakers shared their religious experience of doing Hajj from Japan.

This story illustrates to some extent the activities Muslim Indonesian professionals in Japan engage in outside of work. For these people, such ethnic gatherings do not only offer them a chance to deal with the negative consequences of migration (Liu-Farrer, 2004) and provide the members a place to experience their home culture (Amin, 2019), but also serve as a platform to strengthen social networks and provide a space for learning and sharing while living in Japan. Muslim Indonesian professionals, however, comprise only a small number of foreign professionals and even fewer of all foreign workers in Japan.

The number of foreign professionals in Japan—those working in fields associated with professional or technical and specialized work and holding skilled working visas—has steadily increased, from 33,000 in 1990 to 198,000 in 2010 (Oishi, 2012). As of June 2022, the number increased to 502,476 people, comprising about 17 percent of the total 2,961,969 registered foreign nationals in Japan (MHLW, 2023). Indonesian nationals are among this group. In 2016, there were 1,556 Indonesians who held specified professional working visas. The number increased to 2,426 in 2018 and to 5,411 by the middle of 2022 (MHLW, 2023). Since there is no classification based on religious belief in the statistics on foreign nationals in Japan, the number of Muslim Indonesian professionals is not included in this study. The number of foreign professionals, including Muslims, is likely to continue increasing considering Japan's

plan to accept more foreign professionals (MOJ, 2018). This will contribute to future increases in diversity in Japanese society, as these people come from various backgrounds, races, cultures, and religious beliefs.

However, little attention is paid to the topic of religious beliefs and identity in the context of skilled migration to Japan. Previous studies on skilled migration to Japan are largely dominated by research on two-step migration (Liu-Farrer, 2011; Liu-Farrer & Tran, 2019; Sato, 2016) and those that put an emphasis on migration infrastructure (Conrad & Meyer-Ohle, 2018, 2019). Studies that examine the religious and ethnic backgrounds of foreigners in Japan (Kudo, 2009b; Mahmud, 2013; Onishi & Murphy-Shigematsu, 2003) tend not to focus on highly skilled workers and most were done prior to the era of global recruitment by Japanese corporations, and prior to the promotion of diversity and inclusive workplaces by the Japanese government. Studies on contemporary highly skilled professionals' migration to Japan that examine gender, race, and cultural backgrounds as well as various channels for reaching Japan (e.g., Budianto, 2023; Debnár, 2016; Hof, 2018) do not include a focus on religious identities, including Muslim identity. Studies on highly skilled Muslims are mostly done in the context of Western societies (e.g., Abdelhadi, 2017; Latif, Cukier, Gagnon, & Chraibi, 2018; Wallace, Wright, and Hyde 2014). The topic of Muslim professionals as highly skilled foreign workers in a Japanese context, therefore, remains under-examined.

This study attempts to contribute to the discourse on foreign professionals in contemporary Japan, as well as on the migration of Muslim professionals, by examining the narratives of Muslim Indonesian professionals in Japan and taking their religious identities and beliefs into account. In contrast to many studies on overseas Indonesians (Palmer, 2016) and Indonesian communities in Japan (Efendi, Chen, Nursalam, Indarwati, & Ulfiana, 2016; Nawawi, 2010), the study presented here distinctly examines Indonesian Muslims as highly skilled workers in Japan. Considering that Indonesia is the only Muslim majority

country which ranks among the top-10 countries for most populous foreign nationals in Japan (MHLW, 2019), that Indonesians comprise Japan's largest Muslim population (Tanada, 2018; Yamagata, 2019), and the fact that Indonesia is a multicultural country, this study places Indonesian Muslim professionals in the spotlight and discusses how these people, as highly skilled foreign workers, navigate and negotiate their Muslim identity during their employment and life in Japan.

Two research questions are used to frame the present study: (1) How do Muslim Indonesian professionals adapt, navigate, and negotiate their Muslim identity, and what kind of strategies do they develop? (2) What does it mean to be a Muslim in a Japanese professional working environment, and how do they represent themselves? In a larger context, this study sheds light on the phenomenon of skilled migration to Japan from a developing and Muslim majority country, as well as on the careers and lifestyles of Muslims in non-religious societies.

Method

This study employs a qualitative approach to investigate the case study of Muslim Indonesian professionals in Japan. Qualitative data was collected through in-depth interviews with twenty Muslim Indonesians, ten men and ten women who, at the time of the interview, worked in the Greater Tokyo area. Fieldwork was conducted in Japan over the course of two years, with the interviews taking place in Tokyo between September 2018 and March 2020. All of the informants were recruited using the snowballing technique, which is a sociological sampling technique where study subjects recruit their acquaintances. All of them met the criteria of being an Indonesian national who identifies as Muslim, who holds a skilled working visa, and who qualifies as *seishain* (regular full-time employees) in a company in Japan.

The informants in this study represent a balanced composition in terms of sex, educational background, type of company at which they work, and age. It is important to note that each interviewee is

relatively young (under 40) and all graduated from reputable universities in Indonesia, Japan, or other countries. To protect the privacy of my informants, I use pseudonyms instead of writing their real names. The interviews were all recorded, transcribed, and translated into English before being categorized and analyzed in line with the proposed research questions. In analyzing the data, I followed Weiss (1995)'s qualitative data analysis methods, namely coding, sorting, local integration, and inclusive integration.

Muslim Identity in Ethnic Migration to Japan

The development of discourse on Islam and Muslims in Japan is inseparable from the entry of migrant workers from Muslim majority countries to Japan since the late 1980s, as is widely acknowledged and discussed in the literature on ethnic migration to Japan. According to Kojima (2012), the foreign Muslim population is estimated to have kept increasing during the two decades following, until the mid-2000s. As this study puts an emphasis on Indonesian Muslims' ethnic and religious identity, it is important to discuss such identities in the context of ethnic migration to Japan. Discourse on identity in migratory contexts is discussed in various terms, from how ethnic and religious identities are maintained and reconstructed, to how migrants perceive, negotiate, and make use of their ethnic and religious identities in the host country.

As the cases of Bangladeshi, Pakistani, and Iranian workers in Japan (Onishi & Murphy-Shigematsu, 2003) demonstrated, Muslims' identities are maintained and reconstructed during the acculturation process in Japan. Part of this process includes the internal negotiation of whether to accept or not accept the dominant narratives of the host society. Further, it shows how religious identity goes through a reconstruction process alongside ethnic identity. Onishi & Murphy-Shigematsu (2003)'s study further indicated that there are at least three narratives that come out as the result of acculturation in Japan: (1) accepting the dominant narrative of Japanese society, (2) rejecting the dominant narrative, and (3)

incorporating and redefining religious identity.

The first narrative, which is the most common acculturation narrative in their study, demonstrated acceptance and adaptation to Japanese ways in terms of culture and language. The narrative is described as "I am almost like the Japanese." This specific assimilation strategy has been used to avoid conflicts and is dependent on the situation. In contrast, the second narrative revealed the difficulties of assimilating into Japanese society and included the process of questioning the gap between what the migrants imagined living in Japan to be like and the reality they experienced. This narrative can be described as "they do not see who I am." The third narrative, described as "I have become a better Muslim," revealed migrants' attempts to differentiate themselves from Japanese people by emphasizing their Muslim identity (Onishi & Murphy-Shigematsu, 2003).

Other studies (e.g., Eraliev, 2018; Kudo, 2016; Law, 2000) have also shown that Muslim migrants in non-Muslim societies tend to develop a stronger religious identity in their host countries because they use it as a means of self-definition. Religious identity is therefore used to distinguish or differentiate them from people in the non-Muslim majority host societies. Religious identity, moreover, is also used as an immigration category in some countries (Mattes, 2018), indicating that discussions of identity of some ethnic groups is closely related to discussions of religious identity. Aside from geographical reasons, there are other factors that affect religious identity.

In research on Pakistani Muslim migrants married to Japanese women (Kudo, 2016), several factors affecting Pakistanis' self-perception of their Muslim identity were identified, namely occupational shifts and marital statuses. These people first gained more flexibility and autonomy following the shift in their occupations from factory laborers to entrepreneurs. This autonomy was what allowed them to restore and reconstruct their Muslim identities in a migratory context, as that same autonomy made practicing Islam easier. Being married and having children are

the other factors that affected their religiosity, as they often felt more morally responsible having the status of husband or father. Religious identity has also been used to develop Muslim migrants' ethnic networks and communities (Amin, 2019; Kudo, 2009b, 2009a), which provide them valuable information for their businesses.

Displaying and Negotiating Muslim Identity

This study finds that in Japanese workplaces, displaying religious identity is a double-edged sword; it can be both beneficial and problematic. There is also the dilemma of whether to display religious identity or not. For some people, religion is an inherent part of their identity. Religious identity, particularly Muslim identity, is oftentimes used as means of self-definition in non-Muslim host societies (Eraliev, 2018; Kudo, 2016; Law, 2000). Indonesian professionals in Japan are no exception. The following quote from my interviews indicates the assertion process of religious identity and its associated concerns:

Speaking of my religious beliefs, since the job interview, I have stated clearly that I am religious, that I am a Muslim and I need to pray, and there are times when I am obliged to fast. I asked their opinion on it. From my side, I am fine with that. I can adjust myself. But from the company's perspective, it might turn out to be something negative. Since the beginning, I made a deal with the company. For now, I am not wearing a hijab, but in the future, who knows; I might decide to wear one.

Thirteen out of my twenty informants revealed and asserted their religious identity from the beginning of their employment process: the job interview. Bunga, quoted above, is one of them. Even though she graduated from an Indonesian university, her background in Japanese studies and one-year experience of studying abroad in Japan provided her with an adequate grasp of both the Japanese language and cultural norms required for employment in Japanese firms. However, when it came to working in Japan,

she was still worried that her religious beliefs might affect her employability. During the interview for her position in a medium-sized Japanese telecommunications firm, she made it clear to the interviewing committees her concerns regarding her being religious.

As a Muslim woman, Bunga was concerned with not only the openness of the company to which she was applying, but also the possible changes in the way she would dress when it came to the decision for her to wear a hijab. She was worried if the decision would affect the company's image because of an employee wearing a hijab. She received what she perceived as a comforting answer from the managing director that such issues are indeed not a problem for the company.

She was glad to find that her workplace was open to diversity in their employees. She later found out that the actual working conditions of the company were even better than what she had expected in terms of flexibility, gender, and work-life balance. She recalls, "To boost our productivity, the employees who work in the office are allowed to wear casual dress. Even a junior staff member like me can wear jeans." The company she works for is trying to reform its working style in order to improve employees' productivity. Regarding her religious concerns, the company even provided her a designated room for praying with a special tag to indicate if the room is in use. This level of support from the company, which went beyond her expectations, made her feel grateful.

Besides assertion, I argue that displaying one's religious identity in Japanese workplaces is also indicative of a process of negotiation and sacrifice, particularly when it comes to practices that are common in Japanese professional settings, but are limited by religious boundaries, such as *nomikai*. A crucial after-work gathering over drinks where employees spend time with their boss and colleagues discussing both private and business issues (Haghirian, 2010), *nomikai* is considered a normal business practice in Japan, but some of my informants, especially wom-

en, found themselves uncomfortable participating in it for religious reasons. In Islam, there is a concept of restriction called *halal* that prohibits Muslims from consuming non-halal products, such as alcohol. With regards to this issue, some people found a way to maintain normal relations with colleagues by attending *nomikai*, but choosing not to drink or pour alcohol, as described below by Indra:

At first, there was a feeling of discomfort and I found it difficult to express my objection to participating in *nomikai*. But I used Islamic rules and values to determine my actions so that I could feel confident and relieved. I then managed to explain to them about the prohibition of drinking in Islam. Whether I participate or not, they must be gossiping about me, so I take it easy. No hard feelings. I don't feel discriminated against, either. I sometimes participate in *nomikai*, but I'm not pouring or drinking alcohol. What I don't like is that I need to pay the same amount as they do, say, like five thousand [yen], even though I don't drink and don't even eat that much because there are not many foods I can eat. I think it's a little bit unfair. But I still sometimes participate in *nomikai* because I want to show my respect to them. On the one hand, despite all of the restrictions, I show my intentions to join the *nomikai* because I want to communicate and build rapport with them. But on the other hand, I also must follow my religious beliefs. The difficult part is there.

In a professional context, Indonesian professionals follow the basics of Japanese business manners. However, when it comes to practices that contradict their religious values, they start to negotiate, and to some extent, sacrifice themselves. As Indra's case illustrates, he found himself uncomfortable participating in *nomikai* for several reasons. First, it went against his religious values, as drinking alcohol is prohibited in Islam. Second, he found it unfair that he is required to pay the same amount of money even though he does not drink. Given such unfavorable conditions, he still chooses to participate in

nomikai because of his desire to build rapport with his colleagues. He negotiates by sacrificing a little in order to fit in with his professional circle.

The sacrifice involved with negotiating religious beliefs in professional settings sometimes means crossing religious boundaries. However, for people who possess strong religious values like Indra, such values come before anything; those like him try to meet professional expectations without going against any Islamic values. In contrast, another narrative regarding participation in *nomikai* demonstrates that being religious in Japanese work settings can, to some extent, involve adjusting religious practices such as dietary restrictions. Satria described how he compromised with *halal*:

The relationship with colleagues is fine so far. Usually, we go for *nomikai* with fellow foreign staff. They know that I don't eat pork, but I drink a little bit. I'm not that strict. They just comment that my religious practice is kind of different from our fellow Singaporean colleague who observes the Islamic rule very strictly. I said, Islam in Indonesia is more moderate, they're more open to accepting diversity, and overall are more open minded.

Satria's case, on the one hand, demonstrates that some people modify and adjust their religious practices for practical reasons, for instance, to maintain social relationships with coworkers through participation in *nomikai*. It also indicates, on the other hand, that such adjustments are made according to how they define *halal*. As a concept, *halal* is settled, but how it is defined can vary depending on the individual. Individuals might perceive *halal* in different ways and therefore the definition of *halal* becomes a personal matter. It is also what makes his colleague, a Muslim Singaporean woman, refrain from asking him about his preference to drink alcohol. While Satria does not consume pork, he does drink small amounts of alcohol, which is technically also forbidden. He puts an emphasis on his choice to drink alcohol as a personal preference that does not repre-

sent Muslims in general. His choice is also related to him finding ways to participate in *nomikai*, since this is an inseparable part of the Japanese work culture, especially for male employees.

Other accounts demonstrate that by displaying and asserting their religious identity, some people feel that they receive extra care from Japanese colleagues. For example, interviewees shared that “they even reminded me that I should avoid this food because it contains alcohol,” and that “they often-times choose restaurants that are Muslim-friendly so that I can join.” In other words, their religiosity has to some extent been recognized by others. Muslims’ religious identity apparently is perceived more positively by Japanese colleagues in those work settings where colleagues are willing to learn more about Islam and how a Muslim identity can affect adjustment to life in Japan.

In contrast to those who openly display and negotiate their religious practices, the rest of my Muslim informants chose not to show their religious identity. Dini, who works for a large Japanese firm, is one of them. She believes that being religious is a personal affair, and therefore, her religion is not something she should show to others in the workplace. Instead, she chooses to assert her ethnic and national identity as an Indonesian professional only.

Representing the Self as a Muslim Indonesian Professional

Being a Muslim Indonesian professional does mean to bear a Muslim identity, though, and therefore working in a Japanese company where the majority of one’s colleagues are non-Muslim Japanese can be both a challenging and exciting experience. Bunga describes herself as being different from the rest of the company:

In the beginning, they always referred to me as ‘that Indonesian who can’t eat meat.’ And then they started to talk about my religious beliefs, about where I am from, and it somehow led to further discussion about Islam and Indonesia.

She remembers clearly when her existence in the company drew the interest of her fellow employees. As the only foreigner and the only Muslim in her department, she felt a double sense of being a minority in the dominantly ethnic Japanese working environment. However, her employment in the company has played a part in paving the way to so-called diversity in the Japanese workplace. Japanese employees are able to take the opportunity to understand more about different cultures, countries, or religions through their interactions with foreign workers. Bunga took this opportunity to represent herself as a Muslim Indonesian, so that she can introduce not only her religious beliefs but also her country of origin.

A different situation is experienced by Tari, who works in a male-dominated company as the only woman and only foreign engineer. Tari’s case introduces some other strategies Muslim Indonesians have to deal with situations in which one feels a double or even triple sense of being a minority. She chooses to explain her religious beliefs in logical ways. For example, she pointed out to her coworkers the fact that many people do not drink alcohol for health reasons, so she is not the only one who does not drink. This reasoning is what she employs to get out of casual *nomikai* participation. To make up for it, she buys her colleagues cookies. Thus, the strategy used by Tari regarding *nomikai* participation is different from Satria’s. Satria does not mind negotiating his religiosity, while Tari keeps strictly to her Islamic values. She represents herself as a Muslim professional who consistently follows Islamic values and rules. She asserts that being different is not an issue for her and she keeps her professionalism in the workplace, maintaining her relationships with colleagues in her own way.

Another key factor expressed by some interviewees in representing oneself as both a professional Indonesian and professional Muslim is consistency. This is closely related with how such individuals follow Islamic rules and how they define halal.

Every time I join a new company, I always tell them that I am a Muslim, and I need time for praying, especially for the Friday noon prayer. So far, there's no problem, as long as I am consistent. For meals, I always say that I don't eat pork or drink alcohol so that they can arrange it easily.

It is very important for these people to be consistent in what they believe, practice, and negotiate. As a Muslim in a non-religious country, they feel they serve as representatives of the Islamic world. In order to avoid confusing Japanese people or just non-Muslims in general, consistency becomes paramount. This study finds that consistency becomes a pathway for not only gaining the trust of Japanese coworkers, but also for creating a positive image of Indonesian Muslims. In Japan, where the image of Islam is still developing and the Muslim community is divided into small factions with different perspectives regarding Islamic practices (Yulita & Ong, 2019), such consistency is key in business environments. This responsibility for representing Islam in Japanese-majority working environments is one outcome of displays of religious identity in non-religious settings, particularly in societies with very little Muslim presence.

Being away from home and living in an environment with few Islamic traditions also leads to what I call the "self-reflection of being an overseas Muslim." As Tari relates:

My life in Japan made me learn my own religion even deeper, since I have the chance to deliver the core values of Islam to the people here. If I lived in Indonesia or Malaysia, I would not be able to do that, as I would not participate in Islamic teaching. But here, even though my understanding of Islam is not that deep yet, when I get the chance to share my Islamic values, I become aware of my own understanding of Islam. It is like, God gives me chances for self-reflection. It helps me maintain a good attitude.

The above quote demonstrates how Tari explores her own Muslim identity through self-reflection. It is not only her employment in Japan, but also her life in Japan in general that drives her to consider her Muslim identity more deeply. Such opportunities for self-reflection are an outcome of living beyond one's own cultural territory. Self-reflection as an overseas Muslim may lead one to represent oneself as a better Muslim and allow one to introduce the values of Islam to people outside Islamic territories, or in this study, to the people in the workplace.

Being Muslim in a Japanese company also comes with uncomfortable moments. None of my informants, in fact, ask or even expect their colleagues to adjust the menu whenever they go for meals. There are also times when they are asked invasive or potentially embarrassing questions about their religious beliefs, such as questions regarding the prohibition of drinking, which does not make sense for most Japanese people. These complicated interactions and mixed feelings are some factors that can affect a Muslim Indonesian professional's sense of attachment to their coworkers and company.

Still, none of my informants reported feeling discriminated against. Since Muslims experience less obvious religious discrimination in Japan in comparison to Western societies (Yamashita, 2022), the informants in this study might perceive incidents of discrimination in Japan as special treatment rather than as discrimination. They understand all the consequences of pursuing a career in a completely different environment from home and see it as a challenge; they consciously fight for their career by being patient. Furthermore, they share a common desire to not be treated differently because of their religious beliefs. Some remarked that, as they are Muslims in Japanese firms, they feel they should not be too demanding about their religious needs. For these people, being allowed to practice their religious beliefs in work settings is enough. Provisions like a specified prayer room provided by some companies make Muslim employees feel grateful, because the company accommodated their religious needs despite not being obligated to do so. Almost

all of my informants expressed gratitude towards their respective employers for allowing them to practice their religions freely.

Bridging Ethnic, National, and Religious Identities in Japan's Professional Settings

Working in non-religious Japanese firms allows some people to take advantage of their religious identity. Muslim Indonesian professionals who display a strong religious identity at work tend to perceive their employment in Japan as the way of *da'wah*, or a chance to introduce Islamic values to others through their actions. They share thoughts that stem from such religious beliefs, for instance: “as a Muslim, I represent myself by being *ikhlas* (sincere) and friendly and also by promoting ‘no *ijime* (non-bullying)’ in my division.” They often have an interest in introducing the values of Islam to their Japanese coworkers. As Tari remarks:

Japanese people are to some extent willing to understand. I love to explain about Islam when they don't know. Some values in Islam are similar to values in Japanese culture. It makes it easier for me to explain. The real challenge is whether their intention is from the heart or not. But so far, there is no problem with that.

The above quote illustrates Tari's willingness to introduce Islamic values to her coworkers, who are her most immediate social connections in Japan. Tari did not stop at the introduction of Islam, though. In a division meeting during her second year working as a data scientist, she proposed a project related to halal as part of a bigger project targeting inbound foreign tourists. She recalled her experience:

When I first proposed this project of a halal app, they didn't believe me. They didn't realize that such issues regarding halal food exist in Japan, or that foreign tourists find it difficult to find halal food here. Junior staff are generally not allowed to handle projects, but because this project is about inbound foreigners and I am the only Muslim, I was giv-

en the chance.

Even though Tari is a junior staff member in her current company, she was provided the opportunity to develop her own project. However, Tari also went through a long process of negotiation and assertion to ensure her supervisors and colleagues that she was capable of handling such a project. It was her cultural capital as both a foreigner and Indonesian as well as her Muslim identity that allowed her to successfully propose the project and gain the trust of her supervisors. Tari finds her active participation in the pitching and development of the project to be a real example of Islamic values, especially since it will be useful for others in society. The opportunities provided through professional employment in Japan, therefore, can allow Indonesian Muslim professionals in Japan to introduce not only Islam as a religion, but also Islam as a set of values that shape the way Muslim people think and act. In this sense, it demonstrates the intersection of ethnic, national, and religious identities, all of which are inseparable parts of being a foreign worker in Japan.

As Muslims who grew up in a predominantly Muslim society, where religion had a pervasive effect on all aspects of life (Onishi & Murphy-Shigematsu, 2003), almost all my informants found Islamic values intrinsic to their ways of thinking. Particularly for those who strongly embody Islamic values, like Adi, Indra, and Tari, such values are reflected in their lifestyles. Tari's case, again, illustrates how her Islamic values shape how she perceives her work:

My work here is the way I contribute to society. If the technology I develop can help society, then I would feel grateful. If it can generate profit for the company, I would feel even more grateful. The point is *shakai-kōken* (social contribution)—that I can give something to society and particularly to Islam. In this company, for example, I developed a project to help Muslim residents and tourists find halal restaurants.

By being the leader of the halal app project, Tari had

the chance to introduce Islam and the concept of halal to a wider Japanese audience. She perceived of her work as her contribution to society, particularly Muslim communities, largely influenced by her Islamic values.

Muslim Indonesian professionals in Japan, as I have discussed in the previous section, do not only represent themselves as Muslim Indonesians, but also as Muslim professionals. This representation includes the process of bridging their ethnic and national identities as Indonesian and their religious identity as Muslim in a migratory context. Being skilled professionals as well, these identities coincide and result in the emerging identity of the Muslim Indonesian professional. Being a Muslim Indonesian professional involves the process of displaying and negotiating identity, and the inherent self-reflection that process brings.

This study, therefore, suggests that Indonesian Muslim professionals in Japanese workplaces do not only display, assert, retain, and negotiate their foreign ethnic and national identities as Indonesians and their religious identity as Muslims, but also develop more hybrid identities, like that of the Muslim Indonesian professional. In the case of Muslim Indonesian professionals in Japan, I argue that ethnic, national, and religious identities occupy an increasingly significant position in Japanese professional settings, as such identities are inseparable parts of life for foreign professionals in Japan.

In the context of the Japanese workplace, the emerging presence of Muslim professionals, regardless of their ethnicity or nationality, paves the way for increased diversity in professional settings. In this study, Japanese companies are seen finding ways to begin accommodating the needs of Muslim workers, such as by providing spaces for prayer during working hours. In a wider context, this kind of change contributes positively to the government's promotion of inclusive workplaces (Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, 2018) for everyone, including foreigners.

Conclusion

Following the changes in the domestic labor market, inbound migrants, including Muslims, are not only becoming a part of the Japanese labor market, but also Japanese society. Throughout this study, I have argued that religious identity is actively navigated, displayed, and negotiated by Muslim Indonesian professionals during employment and life in Japan. Doing so, however, involves the adjustment of religious practices and, occasionally, their sacrifice in instances where they clash with practices common in Japanese professional settings, such as *nomikai*.

The narratives provided by the Muslim Indonesian professionals in this study go beyond simple negotiation of whether or not to accept the dominant narratives of Japanese society. Rather, they indicate a broader discourse on emerging hybrid identities like that of the Muslim Indonesian professional as a result of the intersections of ethnic, national, and religious identities combining in the non-religious skilled migratory context of corporate Japan. As Burke (2004, pp. 5) argued that “identities are the sets of meanings people hold for themselves that define ‘what it means’ to be who they are,” this study further suggests that foreign workers’ religious, ethnic, and national identities are inseparable from their employment and mobility. In a Japanese context, these identities form a kind of cultural capital that allows them to deal with issues that Japanese staff might otherwise not approach or be able to cope with. As with the case of Pakistani Muslims in Japan who gained the autonomy to restore and reconstruct their Muslim identities, mediated by their entrepreneurial work, Indonesian professionals’ employment in Japan also plays a great role. As most of the Muslim Indonesians in this study work for large companies, it is their professional employment in such large companies that provides a space for them not only to introduce Islam to a wider audience, but also to shape the image of two worlds that Japanese people are not familiar with: Muslim and Islamic worlds. It shows how an institutional context can shape Muslim Indonesians’ attempts not only to incorporate and navigate their identity, but also to

make use of it.

In an individual context, Muslim Indonesians' employment in Japan paves the way to professional and personal growth. They perceive their employment in an environment where the majority of their co-workers are not religious as a channel for pursuing *da'wah* (the call to actively encourage others to pursue greater piety). This study found that the *da'wah* practiced by Muslim Indonesian professionals in Japan manifests in the form of self-reflection and a greater sense of the self as a representation of a good Indonesian and Muslim. Because they are showing their coworkers a real, living example of Islamic values, they feel a responsibility to be consistent in how they shape their image. This sense of responsibility was strongly emphasized by my informants. Their consistency also allows their Japanese counterparts to get to know them and to trust them, which is key to living in Japan, as trust is a major pillar in Japanese society.

Based on this group of interviewees, this study finds that being Muslim in a Japanese professional setting does not negatively affect the way Muslim Indonesian professionals work, and that they can successfully play active roles in their companies. These more neutral views towards Muslims by Japanese working professionals, especially when compared with views in the West (e.g., Abdelhadi, 2017; Latif, Cukier, Gagnon, & Chraibi, 2018; Wallace, Wright, and Hyde 2014), leads to another key finding of this study, namely that the sense of discrimination itself is defined and perceived differently according to the individual. For the Muslim Indonesians in this study, in general, their employment in Japanese companies is not synonymous with any form of perceived discrimination. Even for the women, being a woman who is also Muslim was not reported as an obstacle in the pursuit of a professional career in Japan; rather, being a double minority is seen as a challenge and opportunity instead of a problem or insecurity. My interviewees have accepted their identity as a minority in a non-religious Japanese-majority working environment.

To conclude, this study has gone beyond the discourses of brain drain and brain gain, which currently dominate the literature on skilled migration. Instead, I argue that Muslim Indonesian professionals' employment in Japan allows them to contribute to a worldwide Muslim society by vesting in them the power to create a positive image through their identity and cultural capital. As highly skilled workers who are also Muslim, they are privileged with the chance to play an active role in determining how Japanese people view Muslims by making use of their identity and capital in the company. This is a chance that less-skilled workers may not have.

This study, furthermore, also sheds light on the phenomenon of skilled migration to Japan from a developing and Muslim majority country perspective and contributes to the discourse on the development of inclusive workplaces in Japan. As of yet, the growing number of Muslim professionals in Japan play only a small part in the larger discourse on the promotion of inclusive workplaces in Japan. The issue now is how the Japanese will deal with the growing presence of foreigners in Japanese corporations who come from different backgrounds, races, and religious beliefs.

Finally, this study also contributes to discourse on intra-Asia migration. As Liu-Farrer & Yeoh (2018) suggest, the particular practices of migration at work in Asia today provide a platform for reconceptualizing theories in migration studies, and so the practice of Muslim professionals' migration from Indonesia to Japan has a part to play in revealing particular paths of career and lifestyle-oriented mobility. Additionally, employment in Japan, as discussed herein, is seen as a way to achieve *da'wah* and introduce a positive conception of Islam in a non-Islamic and majority non-religious nation. However, due to the nature of the qualitative research presented here, this study does not aim for generalization. Rather, it suggests that there should be further study conducted on emerging Muslim professionals' migration in Asia, and moreover, that studies looking particularly at how professional, religious, and gender identities intersect and travel in a migratory context are worth

pursuing.

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