



SOUTH KOREAN HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL STUDY OF SOUTH KOREAN MUSLIMS

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the historical and political dynamics of the Muslim community in South Korea by highlighting the tension between Islamophobia and the state's inclusive policies. This study fills a research gap because previous studies tended to be partial and failed to comprehensively integrate historical, political, and social aspects. The method used was a qualitative one with a historical approach through literature review. The research findings indicate that although the state guarantees religious freedom and promotes Muslim-friendly policies, the Muslim community still faces discrimination and social marginalization. Under these conditions, the Muslim community develops adaptation strategies through identity strengthening, education, and interfaith dialogue. This study concludes that there is a tension between inclusive state policies and exclusive social realities, which drives the formation of cultural adaptation patterns and resistance within the Muslim community in the process of social integration.

Keywords: Islam in South Korea, Muslim minority, Islamophobia, inclusive policies, social integration

Introduction

Islam, as one of the world's major religions, has a long and dynamic history spread across various regions, including non-Muslim-majority countries like South Korea. The presence of Islam in South Korea presents a unique and complex socio-religious phenomenon, given that its society is known for being relatively culturally homogeneous and possessing strong secular tendencies. In this context, the Muslim community plays a role not only as a demographic minority but also as a social entity constantly negotiating with dominant cultural, political, and national identity structures.

Historically Islam has been present on the Korean Peninsula since the 9th century through trade interactions between Muslim traders from Arabia and Persia with local kingdoms.¹ Its began since the 9th century through trade interactions between Muslim traders from Arabia and Persia with local kingdoms.² During the Goryeo Dynasty (918–1392), these interactions developed significantly with the presence of Muslim communities from Central Asia, particularly the Uyghurs, who acted as intermediaries in trade and diplomacy. However, the development of Islam experienced a substantial decline during the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910) due to isolationist policies based on Confucian ideology, including the prohibition of foreign cultural and religious practices such as Islam. These policies even led to the disappearance of Muslim communities from local historical records for centuries. Islam only experienced a revival in the 20th century, particularly after the Korean War (1950–1953), through the contribution of Turkish troops in the UN mission and the establishment of

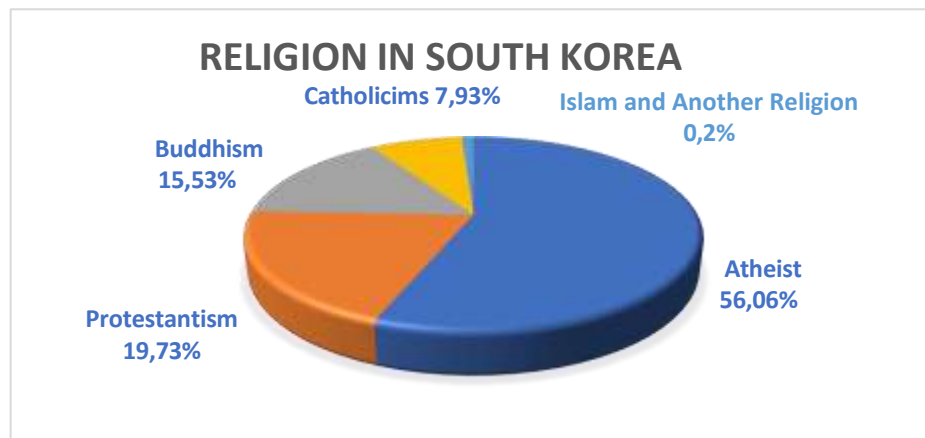
¹ Binar Candra, *Sejarah Islam Di Korea: Jalur Sutra Hingga Masa Modern - Saung Korea*, 25 Juni 2024, <https://saungkorea.com/sejarah-islam-di-korea-jalur-sutra-hingga-masa-modern/>.

² Febriyani Frisca, "6 Fakta Sejarah Islam di Korea Selatan Abad ke-19 Hingga Kini - Lifestyle Fimela.com," 2015, <https://www.fimela.com/lifestyle/read/2258402/6-fakta-sejarah-islam-di-korea-selatan-abad-ke-19-hingga-kini>.

the Korea Muslim Federation (KMF), a key institution in the development of the Muslim community in South Korea.³

The contemporary context demonstrates the complex relationship and dynamics of the Muslim presence in South Korea, which encompasses structural acceptance and social resistance. Formally, the state guarantees religious freedom and demonstrates an inclusive attitude through various policies, such as support for mosque construction, the development of the halal industry, and the promotion of Muslim-friendly tourism. However, in social practice, the Muslim community still faces various challenges, such as negative stereotypes, discrimination, and rising Islamophobia following global events like 9/11.⁴ This reflects the tension between inclusive state policies and social realities that have not fully accepted religious diversity.

Based on 2025 census data, the number of atheists in South Korea was recorded at approximately 56.06%. The remainder is divided between Protestantism (19.73%), Buddhism (15.53%), Catholicism (7.93%), and other religions such as Islam and other faiths (0.2%).



Source: [Populasi berdasarkan jenis kelamin/usia/agama - kota dan kabupaten](#)

The primary source underlying the above figures is the periodic survey "Religious Awareness/Religious Population Ratio (2023–2024)" reported by Korea Research/summary media (combining surveys throughout 2024) and analyzed in academic articles on secularization trends in South Korea. The figure of ~51% non-religious repeatedly appears in these reports.⁵ Peer-reviewed academic articles (e.g., Religion journals, demographic studies of religion) provide context for trends (declining religious affiliation among younger generations, interfaith switching) so that survey figures are used as the primary reference for "status by 2025".⁶ This figure indicates that the majority of South Koreans are formally non-religious, but this does not mean they are completely devoid of spiritual or religious values. In practice, the moral and ethical teachings of Confucianism, Buddhism, and local religious traditions still influence the daily lives of Koreans.

Several previous studies have examined the presence of Islam in South Korea from various perspectives. Research by Siti Umayyatun (2017)⁷ highlighted the role of the Korea Muslim

³ Muhammad Alhuzaini, *Jejak Islam Di Korea Selatan: Sejarah Panjang, Dakwah, Dan Perkembangan Masyarakat Muslim*, 3 (2024): hlm. 56.

⁴ Muhammad Ridlo, "Geliat Menjanjikan Islam di Korea Selatan Usai Dibayangi Islamofobia - Islami Liputan6.com," 2022, <https://www.liputan6.com/islami/read/5138722/geliat-menjanjikan-islam-di-korea-selatan-usai-dibayangi-islamofobia>.

⁵ 이동한, "[2024 Religious Awareness Survey] Status of Religious Population and Religious Activities," 한국리서치 정기조사 여론속의 여론, 11 Desember 2024, <https://hrcopinion.co.kr/en/archives/31599>.

⁶ Brian D. Somers, "Korean Buddhism in the Era of 'Spiritual, but Not Religious': Adapting to Contemporary Society," *Religions* 15, no. 11 (2024): 1305, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15111305>.

⁷ Siti Umayyatun, *MASYARAKAT MUSLIM DI KOREA SELATAN: STUDI TENTANG KOREA MUSLIM FEDERATION (KMF) TAHUN 1967-2015 M*, 2017.

Federation in strengthening Islamic institutions in South Korea. Meanwhile, Zahwa Fabilla Ramadhanty (2025)⁸ examines the phenomenon of Islamophobia and its impact on Muslim social life. In addition, Anton Minardi (2011)⁹ discusses social and religious developments in South Korea in general within the framework of area studies. Other studies also tend to put Islam as a historical object of study or a stand-alone social phenomenon, without comprehensively linking it to the dynamics of the country's political policies.

However, these studies still have limitations. Most studies tend to be partial, separating historical, social, and political analysis, thus failing to fully explain how these three aspects interact to shape the experiences of the Muslim community in South Korea. Furthermore, few studies explicitly highlight the relationship between inclusive state policies and the realities of social marginalization faced by Muslims, and how the community responds to these conditions through specific adaptation strategies.

Based on this, a research gap exists that indicates the need for a more integrative and comprehensive study to understand the dynamics of the Muslim community in South Korea. This research aims to fill this gap by simultaneously examining historical and political aspects, connecting them with the social dynamics faced by the Muslim community as a minority group. With this approach, this research not only seeks to reconstruct the history of Islam's development but also analyzes how state policies and social structures influence the position and role of the Muslim community in South Korean society.

Thus, this research is grounded in its integrative approach, which combines three main dimensions: history, politics, and society, within a coherent analytical framework. This research try to examine the Muslim community not merely as an impacted object but also as an active subject in developing adaptation strategies, strengthening religious identity, and fostering interfaith dialogue. This research position is expected to make new contributions to the study of Islam in East Asia, particularly in understanding the dynamics of integration, resistance, and resilience of Muslim communities within a homogeneous and secular non-Muslim majority society.

Furthermore, this study aims to analyze how the South Korean government's policies managing religious diversity impact the social integration of Muslim communities. The research findings are expected to not only enrich knowledge in the field of Islamic history and politics but also provide practical contributions in formulating an inclusive and sustainable social integration model for minority Muslim communities in various countries with similar characteristics.

Method

This study uses a historical descriptive qualitative research method that aims to describe and then analyze in depth the development of Islam and the Muslim community in South Korea based on historical and political data. The historical approach is used to reconstruct the socio-religious journey of Islam from the past to the present through the collection, verification, and analysis of primary and secondary data sourced from journal articles, websites, and theses. This study uses a historical method consisting of several critical steps. The first step is selecting data sources relevant to the research focus. Next, data sources (heuristics) are collected, including documents, archives, and literature related to the history of Islam in South Korea. The third stage is verification or source criticism, which examines the authenticity, credibility, and relevance of the sources used to ensure data accuracy. Then, the interpretation stage is carried out to analyze and interpret the facts found to form a logical and meaningful historical narrative. Finally, the writing of history (historiography), in which the research results are systematically and communicatively arranged for easy understanding by readers. By following these steps, the research can produce authentic and valid work and make a meaningful scientific contribution.¹⁰

⁸ Zahwa Fabilla Ramadhanty dan Hasbi Aswar, "Fenomena Islamophobia Di Korea Selatan Pada Tahun 2016-2024," *Rayah Al-Islam* 9, no. 1 (2025): 156–77, <https://doi.org/10.37274/rais.v9i1.1449>.

⁹ Anton Minardi, *Korean Studies In Korea*, Vol.II No. 1 (2011).

¹⁰ Kuntowijoyo, *Metodologi Sejarah* (PT. Tiara Wacana Yogya, 2003).

This study uses Stuart Hall's theory of identity and diaspora as the basis for analysis.¹¹ This approach was chosen because it aligns with the research focus, which examines the life and adaptation of the Muslim community in South Korea. According to Stuart Hall, cultural identity is not a fixed essence but a "production" that is always in process and continuously constructed through representation; therefore, this study integrates his theory of identity and diaspora as the main analytical framework to examine the position of Muslim communities. Through the lens of essentialism, identity is understood as a stable "being" or "one true self," in which Muslim communities are bound by shared cultural references and deeply rooted Islamic values as the foundation of their continuity within a predominantly non-Muslim society, while through the lens of constructivism, identity is viewed as a dynamic process of "becoming," one that is never complete and is continuously produced through representation and power relations. The combination of these perspectives enables this research to analyze Muslim communities not as passive objects but as active subjects who navigate conditions of "in-betweenness" through strategic positioning within Korea's relatively homogeneous social structure, so that the identity of the Muslim diaspora in South Korea can be understood as a product of hybridity that blends essential Islamic principles with constructive cultural adaptation in response to both historical narratives and contemporary social realities.¹²

In this study, data validity was conducted to ensure that the data obtained had a high level of reliability and aligned with the research focus. This study used a qualitative method with a literature study approach, so data validity was tested through source triangulation techniques, namely by comparing various references such as books, scientific journals, and official documents related to the history, social dynamics, and policies regarding the Muslim community in South Korea. According to Sugiyono, source triangulation is used to test data credibility by checking data from various different sources.¹³ Furthermore, credibility is strengthened by the use of relevant and up-to-date references and the alignment of the data with the theoretical framework used, namely Stuart Hall's theory of identity and diaspora. Furthermore, dependability is achieved by ensuring the research process runs systematically and consistently, while confirmability is achieved by presenting data based on clear sources so that it can be scientifically accounted for. As explained by Lexy J. Moleong, the validity of data in qualitative research can be seen through credibility, dependability, and confirmability so that research results are not subjective.¹⁴ Thus, the validity of the data in this study is expected to be able to produce accurate and reliable findings.

Results and Discussion

History of Islam in South Korea

Islam occupies a relatively new position as a minority religion in South Korea's modern history. In fact, the contact between Muslims and South Korea began before the Korean War. Early ties between the Islamic world and Korea can be traced back to the Tang Dynasty in China (617–907), which served as the first route for the Islamic world to learn about Korea. Meanwhile, Koreans first interacted directly with Muslims during the Goryeo Dynasty (918–1392). Despite this contact, a permanent ethnic Muslim community did not form in Korea until after the Korean War (1950–1953).¹⁵

Historical records indicate that some Muslim individuals from Central Asia had chosen to settle permanently in Korea during the Goryeo period. One of these two Central Asian immigrants came as an aide to a Mongol prince sent to accompany a Mongol princess who was to marry the Goryeo King Chungnyeol.¹⁶ Documents show that his original name was Samga, but after he decided to reside permanently in Goryeo, the King gave him the Korean name Jang Sunnyong. Jang married

¹¹ Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," *Sage Publications* (London), 1997, 13–20.

¹² Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora."

¹³ Sugiyono, *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif Kualitatif Dan R&D* (ALFABETA, CV., 2013).

¹⁴ Moleong Lexy J, *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif* (Remaja Rosdakarya, 2017).

¹⁵ Jang Dong Jin and Choi Won Jae, *Muslims in Korea : The Dilemma of Inclusion*, 2012.

¹⁶ Eunsook Yang, "Silk Road and Korea: Past and Present," *Cultura* 14, no. 1 (2017): 89–92, <https://doi.org/10.3726/CUL.2017.01.09>.

a Korean woman and became the founding ancestor of the Deoksu Jang clan.¹⁷ This clan produced many high-ranking officials and respected Confucian scholars over the centuries. Twenty-five generations later, some 30,000 Koreans remember Jang Sunnyong as the grandfather of their clan.

The emergence of the Muslim community in South Korea began during the Korean War (1950–1953), which marked the beginning of the active spread of Islam on the Korean Peninsula. At that time, several United Nations (UN) member states, including Turkey, sent troops on a peacekeeping mission to Korea. Turkey itself sent a battalion of troops, equivalent to the number of troops sent by the United States. Turkish soldiers played not only a military role but also a very active role in humanitarian activities. They helped children affected by the war, established educational facilities such as the Ankara School, and contributed to improving the welfare of the South Korean people. The sincerity and honesty of the Turkish soldiers in helping the South Korean people aroused deep sympathy among the local community. This also paved the way for their interest in the Islamic religion, which these soldiers practiced.¹⁸

Since then, a Muslim community has slowly begun to form and organize, although its numbers remain relatively small. Currently, the Muslim community in South Korea is estimated to number around 0.2%. This number consists of local Muslims and immigrants from various countries in South Asia, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia, including Indonesia and Malaysia.¹⁹ The existence of this community is proof that Islam continues to grow and develop, even though it is in a society where the majority are non-Muslim.

Among the first Turkish soldiers involved in the early spread of Islam in South Korea was an imam named Abdul Gafur Kara Ismailoglu, a Turkish military imam who played a significant role in the spread of Islam in South Korea during and after the Korean War (1950–1953). He arrived in South Korea as part of a Turkish military contingent on a United Nations (UN) mission tasked with providing assistance to South Korea in the face of the armed conflict.²⁰ Their presence was not only military in nature, but also brought a religious dimension through preaching activities and spiritual guidance, which became the initial foundation for the growth of the Muslim community in South Korea.

Through a gentle and heartfelt approach to preaching, he succeeded in actively planting the first seeds of Islam in South Korea. Over time, the Islamic preaching carried out by Turkish soldiers, including other figures such as Zubair Kochi and Abdur Rahman, expanded. Although initially the Turkish military command did not officially permit preaching activities, in 1955 they began to grant indirect permission for religious activities.²¹ The role of these figures became an important foundation for the development of Islam in South Korea and paved the way for the formation of a more organized Muslim community. Islam began to gain wider recognition in Korea when, on September 15, 1955, Nonghyup College facilitated the formation of the Korean Islamic Association, comprising 70 South Korean Muslims. This was the first Islamic organization, marking the birth of the Muslim community in South Korea. Although still in its infancy and facing various social and cultural challenges, this community became the initial foundation for the development of Islam in South Korea.

During President Park Chung-hee's leadership, the Korean government began opening itself to the Islamic world in order to establish diplomatic and economic relations, particularly to attract investment from Middle Eastern countries. President Park even provided 4,954 square meters of land in Hannam-dong, Seoul, for the construction of a mosque. Financial support from Middle Eastern countries enabled the construction of the Seoul Central Mosque, which was finally completed in 1976 and became the first mosque in South Korea. Entering the 1990s and 2000s, the Korean Muslim community grew into a larger and more multicultural community. This occurred due to the

¹⁷ Jang Dong Jin and Choi Won Jae, *Muslims in Korea : The Dilemma of Inclusion*.

¹⁸ Jang Dong Jin and Choi Won Jae, *Muslims in Korea : The Dilemma of Inclusion*.

¹⁹ Alhuzaini, *Jejak Islam Di Korea Selatan: Sejarah Panjang, Dakwah, Dan Perkembangan Masyarakat Muslim*.

²⁰ Nabila Paradays, *Potret Komunitas Muslim di Korea Selatan: Studi kasus Korea Muslim Federation (KMF), 1990-2020*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (2022): 105.

²¹ Ali An Sun Geun, *Islam Damai di Negeri Asia Timur Jauh* (UIN Jakarta Press, 2011).

influx of Muslim immigrants from various countries in Asia and the Middle East, which contributed to the diversity of the Islamic community in South Korea. Since then, the Muslim community has continued to grow, especially between the 1990s and 2000s, when Muslim immigrants from various countries in Asia and the Middle East began arriving in South Korea. The influx of Muslim migrants gave birth to a larger and more diverse multicultural Muslim community, strengthening the presence of Islam in modern Korean society.²²

Thus, the history of Islam in Korea demonstrates a long process that began with initial contact during the classical period and then developed more significantly after the Korean War through the role of international actors and the accompanying socio-political dynamics. This journey confirms that although Islam existed as a minority religion, its existence continued to grow and adapt until it became part of the religious diversity in South Korea to this day.²³

Social Dynamics of Muslim Minorities

The Muslim community in South Korea is a minority group facing complex social dynamics, particularly in terms of identity, integration, and internal diversity. Muslims in Korea come not only from local ethnicities but also from various countries such as Indonesia, Pakistan, and Middle Eastern countries, forming a multicultural community. This diversity has led to the emergence of unique social patterns, in which they strive to maintain their Islamic identity while adapting to Korean culture, such as using the Korean language and adapting to an urban lifestyle.²⁴

On the other hand, the process of social integration of Muslims in South Korea has not always been smooth. As a minority group, they often face challenges in the form of stereotypes, prejudice, and even Islamophobia, which arise from a lack of public understanding of Islam. Several studies have shown that negative sentiment toward Muslims can be influenced by global factors such as terrorism and the media, which then impact Korean society's perception of Islam. Therefore, efforts to build a positive image of Islam and interfaith dialogue are crucial for creating a harmonious social life.²⁵

Furthermore, Muslims in South Korea also face challenges in carrying out their daily religious practices. Limited prayer facilities, a lack of halal food, and an unsupportive work and educational environment are major obstacles. In these circumstances, the Muslim community tends to build strong internal networks, such as through religious organizations and diaspora communities, to support each other in practicing their religious life. This demonstrates that internal solidarity is a crucial strategy for maintaining a minority presence within a non-Muslim society.²⁶

In a broader context, the social dynamics of Muslims in South Korea also reflect the dilemma between maintaining identity and integrating. Some Muslims choose to distance themselves from the majority society, while others seek to actively participate in Korean social life without abandoning their Islamic identity. This situation has given rise to two tendencies: interstitial identity and reconstituted identity, demonstrating the complex position of Muslims as a minority in South Korea.²⁷

State and Inclusive Policies

In the context of national politics, South Korea has demonstrated a relatively pragmatic approach to the existence of the Muslim community as a religious minority. Since the Park Chung-hee administration, state policy has begun to open up space for relations with the Islamic world,

²² Dong-Jin Jang dan Won-Jae Choi, *Muslims in Korea: The Dilemma of Inclusion*, 2011, hlm. 163.

²³ Umayyaton Siti, *Peran Korea Muslim Federation (KMF) Dalam Pertumbuhan Islam di Korea Selatan Tahun 1967-2015 M*, 2017.

²⁴ Bandit Aroman, "Muslims in South Korea: Development and Existence," *Krirk University (Bangkok)* Vol. 43 (2025).

²⁵ Abdul Salam Noh Se Ik dkk., "Principles of Islam and Social Integration: A Conceptual Framework for Promoting Peaceful Coexistence in South Korea," *Peradaban Journal of Religion and Society* 3, no. 1 (2024): 18–32, <https://doi.org/10.59001/pjrs.v3i1.146>.

²⁶ Mahlulatul Mufidah, "Interaction of Indonesian Muslims with the Qur'an at the Great Mosque of Baitul Makmur South Korea," *Thailand Islamic Journal* 1, no. 2 (2024): 79–89.

²⁷ JANG Dong-Jin dan CHOI Won Jae, *Muslims in Korea: The Dilemma of Inclusion*, 2012.

particularly for diplomatic and economic purposes with Middle Eastern countries. This is reflected in the government's support for the construction of the Seoul Central Mosque in 1976, which became a symbol of the state's initial recognition of the existence of Islam in South Korea.²⁸

Furthermore, the South Korean government has gradually developed inclusive policies that support cultural and religious diversity, particularly since the increase in immigrants in the 1990s and 2000s. Multiculturalism policies were introduced to accommodate migrant workers and foreign residents, including Muslims, through programs of social integration, education, and protection of basic rights. However, these policies remain limited and are more oriented toward economic needs than toward full recognition of religious pluralism.²⁹

Inclusive policies toward Muslims in South Korea are not specifically regulated in a single article, but rather are encompassed in general, universal regulations. This is reflected in the South Korean Constitution, particularly Article 11, which guarantees the principle of equality before the law, and Article 20, which guarantees religious freedom for all citizens. Furthermore, inclusive policies are also reinforced through the Framework Act on the Treatment of Foreigners Residing in Korea (No. 8217 of 2007), particularly Articles 3 and 5, which regulate the fair treatment and social integration of foreigners, and the Multicultural Families Support Act (Act No. 8937 of 2008), in Articles 3 and 10, which emphasize the protection and support of multicultural families. Thus, normatively, South Korea has an inclusive legal framework that guarantees religious freedom.³⁰

However, in terms of implementation, these inclusive policies still face various challenges, particularly in domestic social and political aspects. Public sentiment, still dominated by cultural homogeneity and ethnic nationalism, often presents obstacles to the acceptance of minority groups, including Muslims. This is evident in the emergence of resistance to the construction of religious facilities such as mosques in several regions, indicating a gap between state policy and social realities in society.³¹

Overall, South Korea's policy toward Muslims can be understood as an attempt to balance global interests and domestic stability. While the country strives to project an image of inclusivity and openness to diversity, it still faces limitations in implementing policies that fully guarantee equality for minority groups. Therefore, strengthening more substantial inclusive policies based on human rights principles is crucial to supporting the sustainability of Muslim social life in South Korea.³²

Islamophobia and Social Challenges

The phenomenon of Islamophobia in South Korea is a significant social challenge for the Muslim community as a minority group. Islamophobia manifests not only in the form of personal prejudice but also develops into a social construct influenced by the media, global discourse, and the public's lack of Islamic literacy. In many cases, Islam is often associated with negative issues such as radicalism and terrorism, thus forming biased perceptions among Korean society. This condition is exacerbated by the lack of direct interaction between local communities and Muslims, which leads to the repetition of these stereotypes without adequate clarification.³³

²⁸ okyu kwon, "Muslims in Korea: The Dilemma of Inclusion," *Korean Journal of Sociology* (Korean), 2012, 12–14.

²⁹ Eka Srimulyati, "Indonesian Muslim Diaspora in Contemporary South Korea: Living as Religious Minority Group in Non-Muslim Country," *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga dan Hukum Islam* (Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh), 2021, 5–7, <https://doi.org/10.22373/sjhk.v5i2.9733>.

³⁰ "Republic of Korea: Framework Act on Treatment of Foreigners Residing in the Republic of Korea (as amended in 2025)," Refworld, diakses 16 April 2026, <https://www.refworld.org/legal/legislation/natlegbod/2007/147061>.

³¹ Lee Hyun Mee, "Multicultural Policies and Challenges in South Korea," *Asian Social Science Journal*, 2014, 8–10.

³² OECD, "Rejuvenating Korea: Policies for a Changing Society," *Gender Equality at Work*, advance online publication, 28 Oktober 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1787/c5eed747-en>.

³³ Nur Sakinah dan Erna Kurniawati, "Understanding The Human Rights Discrimination of South Korea Muslims," *E*, 2024, 8–9.

The impact of Islamophobia is evident in the daily lives of the Muslim community in South Korea, both in the social, educational, and professional sectors. Muslims often face implicit discrimination, such as difficulty obtaining certain jobs, differential treatment in academic settings, and restrictions on the expression of religious identity. Muslim women who wear the hijab are the most vulnerable group, as their visual identity makes them more easily recognized and targets for stereotypes. This demonstrates that religious symbols not only serve as a form of identity but can also influence an individual's social standing in a society that tends to be culturally homogeneous.³⁴

Furthermore, social challenges also arise in the form of community resistance to the presence of Islamic symbols and religious facilities. The rejection of mosque construction in several regions of South Korea is a clear example of the tension between the principle of religious freedom and local attitudes. This rejection is usually motivated by concerns about cultural change, the increasing foreign population, and misunderstandings of Islamic teachings. This phenomenon demonstrates that Islamophobia is not only individual but can also be institutionalized in the form of social movements that reject the existence of Muslim communities.³⁵

Amid these challenges, the Muslim community in South Korea continues to develop constructive strategies for adaptation and resistance. Various Islamic organizations, such as the Korea Muslim Federation, play a crucial role in facilitating religious needs and acting as a bridge of communication between Muslims and the wider community. Furthermore, the diaspora community is also active in social activities, education, and interfaith dialogue to promote Islam as a religion of peace and inclusivity. These efforts are gradually helping to reduce prejudice and open up more positive interactions within Korean society.³⁶

Overall, Islamophobia and the social challenges facing Muslims in South Korea reflect a gap between the formal principles of religious freedom and the social realities on the ground. Although the state provides legal guarantees for religious freedom, social acceptance remains a challenge that requires time, education, and ongoing interaction. Therefore, strengthening religious literacy, intercultural dialogue, and more inclusive policies are key to creating a more tolerant and harmonious society in the future.³⁷

Muslim Community Adaptation Strategies

The presence of Muslim communities in South Korea can be analytically understood through the lens of Stuart Hall, particularly his influential argument in *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* that cultural identity is not a fixed essence but a continuous process of becoming. In this perspective, Muslim communities are not merely transplantations of religious identity from their countries of origin into a new sociocultural environment. Instead, they are active agents engaged in the ongoing production and transformation of identity within a diasporic condition. This means that adaptation is not simply a matter of survival or adjustment, but a dynamic process through which new forms of Muslim identity are articulated. The South Korean context, with its relatively homogeneous society and strong cultural cohesion, intensifies this process of identity negotiation. Consequently, adaptation must be seen as both a social necessity and a creative cultural practice.³⁸

In the framework proposed by Stuart Hall, diaspora is characterized by fragmentation, displacement, and the necessity of negotiating multiple cultural references. Muslim communities in South Korea embody this diasporic condition as they navigate between Islamic norms and Korean societal values shaped by Confucian ethics, nationalism, and advanced modernity.³⁹ This intersection creates a complex field of interaction where identity is neither wholly preserved nor entirely

³⁴ Eka Srimulyani, "Indonesian Muslim Diaspora in Contemporary South Korea: Living as Religious Minority Group in Non-Muslim Country," *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam* 5, no. 2 (2021): 6–7, <https://doi.org/10.22373/sjhk.v5i2.9733>.

³⁵ kwon, "Muslims in Korea: The Dilemma of Inclusion."

³⁶ Siti Umayyatun, *Masyarakat Muslim Di Korea Selatan: Studi Tentang Korea Muslim Federation (KMF) Tahun 1967-2015 M.*, vol.3 no.01 (2024): hlm. 136.

³⁷ OECD, "Rejuvenating Korea."

³⁸ Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora."

³⁹ Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora."

transformed. Instead, it is continuously reconstructed through everyday practices, such as language use, religious observance, and social interaction. The experience of being Muslim in South Korea thus reflects a condition of “in-betweenness,” where individuals and communities are situated between different cultural logics. This in-betweenness becomes the very site where strategies of adaptation are formulated and enacted.⁴⁰

From this standpoint, strategies of adaptation can be conceptualized as strategies of identity production rather than passive assimilation. Muslim communities actively negotiate their position within South Korean society by selectively adopting, modifying, or resisting cultural elements.⁴¹ For instance, the development of halal food industries tailored to Korean tastes, the use of the Korean language in religious gatherings, and the incorporation of local cultural sensibilities into Islamic practices all illustrate forms of hybridization. These practices resonate strongly with Hall’s notion that identity is constituted through difference as much as through similarity. Adaptation, therefore, involves the creation of hybrid identities that reflect both continuity with Islamic traditions and engagement with Korean cultural contexts. Such hybridity should not be seen as a dilution of identity, but rather as its transformation and expansion.⁴²

At the same time, the role of representation remains central in shaping these adaptive strategies. According to Stuart Hall, identities are constructed within and through representation, meaning that how Muslims are portrayed in media, public discourse, and institutional narratives significantly affects their self-understanding and social positioning. In South Korea, where Islam is often perceived as foreign or unfamiliar, Muslim communities must navigate external representations that may range from curiosity to suspicion. These representations can produce pressures that influence whether communities adopt more assimilative, negotiative, or resistant strategies of adaptation. In this sense, adaptation is not only an internal process but also a response to external discursive forces. The interaction between self-representation and imposed representation becomes a crucial dimension in understanding how Muslim identities are formed and reformed.⁴³

Ultimately, the strategy of adaptation among Muslim communities in South Korea illustrates the broader theoretical claim that identity is always in a state of becoming. Drawing on Stuart Hall, it becomes evident that adaptation is neither linear nor uniform, but contingent upon historical, social, and political contexts. Muslim communities do not simply integrate into Korean society; they participate in reshaping the cultural landscape through their presence and practices. Their adaptive strategies reveal the fluid, negotiated, and hybrid nature of diasporic identity in a globalized world. Therefore, studying these strategies provides not only empirical insights into the Muslim experience in South Korea but also contributes to a deeper theoretical understanding of identity, diaspora, and cultural transformation.⁴⁴

The Muslim community in South Korea has developed various adaptation strategies to maintain their religious identity while adapting to a predominantly non-Muslim social environment. One key strategy is cultural adaptation, where Muslims—both local and immigrant—learn to understand the language, norms, and customs of Korean society without abandoning Islamic principles. This process creates a form of acculturation that allows them to maintain their religious teachings while remaining accepted in everyday social life, such as in the workplace, education, and social interactions.⁴⁵

In addition to cultural adaptation, Muslim communities also strengthen internal social networks as a survival strategy. They build mosque-based communities, religious organizations, and diaspora groups to support each other in meeting spiritual and social needs. The Korea Muslim

⁴⁰ Hussey Ian, “Catatan Penting tentang ‘Identitas Budaya dan Diaspora’ karya Stuart Hall,” *Journal Of The Society For Socialist Studies* (Canada), advance online publication, 2014, <https://doi.org/10.18740/S4QP4S>.

⁴¹ Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora.”

⁴² Zachlul Adinda dkk., “Halal Tourism: A Critical Review of the Development and Implementation,” *JKAP (Jurnal Kebijakan Dan Administrasi Publik)* 28, no. 1 (2024): 1, <https://doi.org/10.22146/jkap.90194>.

⁴³ Stuart Hall, *REPRESENTATION Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (Sage Publication Ltd, 1997).

⁴⁴ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity At Large* (Public Worlds, 1996).

⁴⁵ Srimulyani, “Indonesian Muslim Diaspora in Contemporary South Korea.”

Federation plays a crucial role in organizing religious activities, providing prayer facilities, and serving as a forum for communication among Muslims in South Korea. This network also assists in providing information on halal food, Islamic education, and other religious activities.⁴⁶

Another strategy is through educational approaches and intercultural dialogue. The Muslim community actively introduces Islam to Korean society through seminars, social activities, and inclusive face-to-face interactions. This approach aims to reduce negative stereotypes and Islamophobia by presenting a peaceful, tolerant, and open image of Islam. Furthermore, the younger generation of Muslims also plays a crucial role as agents of integration, particularly through social media and academic environments that are more open to diversity.⁴⁷

Economically, Muslims in South Korea are also adapting by taking advantage of existing job and business opportunities, including in the halal sector, such as restaurants, food products, and halal tourism. The presence of halal businesses not only meets the internal needs of the Muslim community but also serves as a means of introducing Islamic culture to the wider community. This demonstrates that economic adaptation can bridge the gap between religious identity and participation in Korea's modern economic system.⁴⁸

Overall, the adaptation strategies of the Muslim community in South Korea reflect their ability to balance maintaining their religious identity and integrating with the wider community. Through a combination of cultural adaptation, strengthening internal networks, social dialogue, and economic participation, the Muslim community has been able to survive and thrive amidst various challenges as a minority group. This strategy not only strengthens their presence but also contributes to creating a more inclusive and multicultural Korean society.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this discussion shows that the adaptation strategies of Muslim communities in South Korea cannot be understood as a simple process of assimilation, but rather as a form of dynamic and ongoing identity production. From the perspective of Stuart Hall, identity is not fixed, but always in a state of *becoming*, shaped by historical, social, and political contexts. This is evident in how Muslim communities not only preserve Islamic values as an essential foundation, but also actively negotiate their identities within the relatively homogeneous social structure of Korean society. Thus, adaptation emerges as a cultural practice that reflects a condition of “in-betweenness” between different systems of values.

Furthermore, the adaptation strategies of Muslim communities demonstrate a complex process of identity hybridization. Practices such as the use of the Korean language in religious activities, the development of halal industries tailored to local tastes, and the incorporation of Korean cultural values into everyday life represent concrete forms of fluid and negotiated identities. This process affirms that diasporic identity is not merely preserved but continuously reconstructed through social interaction and lived experiences. Therefore, hybridity should not be seen as a weakening of identity, but rather as its expansion and transformation within an ever-changing global context.

At the same time, the role of representation and external discourse remains crucial in shaping these adaptation strategies. The perception of Islam as something foreign within Korean society often compels Muslim communities to respond through adaptive, negotiative, and sometimes resistant strategies. In this sense, identity is not only formed internally but also as a response to external social constructions. Consequently, the adaptation strategies of Muslim communities in South Korea not only provide empirical insights into the lived experiences of a religious minority but also contribute to a deeper theoretical understanding of diaspora identity as fluid, contextual, and continuously transformed within the dynamics of a globalized world.

⁴⁶ Siti, *Peran Korea Muslim Federation {KMF} Dalam Pertumbuhan Islam di Korea Selatan Tahun 1967-2015 M.*

⁴⁷ Jang dan Choi, *Muslims in Korea: The Dilemma of Inclusion.*

⁴⁸ Ajeng Puspa Marlinda dkk., “Halal Tourism as a Strategic Option for South Korean Tourism,” *Journal of Islamic Marketing* 14, no. 5 (2023): 1276–90, <https://doi.org/10.1108/JIMA-03-2021-0074>.

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