



Title	Conversion to Islam in Japan : An Analysis of Conversion Stories from the 1980s to Early 2000s
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Citation	グローバル日本研究クラスター報告書. 2018, 1, p. 73-100
Version Type	VoR
URL	https://hdl.handle.net/11094/68057
rights	
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Conversion to Islam in Japan: An Analysis of Conversion Stories from the 1980s to Early 2000s

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1. Introduction

This paper aims to illustrate the conversion processes of contemporary Muslim Japanese through analyzing testimonies written by converts who embraced Islam during 1980s to early 2000s.

In spite of rather negative images of Islam represented by the media or public discourse, there is a wide-ranging tendency of conversion to Islam in many countries. For example, it is estimated that recently in Britain, 5,200 (of whom 72% are white) converted per year,¹ and in America, 20,000 people per year.² So far, academic research on converts to Islam has been conducted in an interdisciplinary domain encompassing sociology, psychology and Islamic studies in the Western context, especially in Britain.³

Scholars mostly agree that the conversion to Islam, whether as a result of marriage or not, takes place through individual reflection mainly by reading literatures, interacting with Muslims, and travelling to a Muslim country rather than the effect of social pressure or organized missionary work. As is often imagined, marrying a Muslim can be one of the important factors for conversion. However, for the majority of the converts, conviction for Islamic practice and teaching is not obtained exactly when they get married, but either before

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¹ M. A. Kevin Brice, "A Minority Within a Minority: A Report on converts to Islam in the United Kingdom", Faith Matters, 2011, p. 4.

² Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, Jane I. Smith, and Kathleen M. Moore, "Muslim Women in America: The Challenge of Islamic Identity Today", Chapter 3: Embracing Islam, Paragraph 3 [Kobo Edition], Oxford University Press, 2006.

³ See: Ali Köse, "Conversion to Islam", Taylor and Francis, 1997. Maha Al-Qwidi, "Understanding the stages of conversion to Islam: the voices of British converts", PhD thesis, University of Leeds, 2002. Allievi, S. "Les convertis à l'islam. Les nouveaux musulmans d'Europe", L'Harmattan, 1998. Anne Sofie Roald "New Muslims in the European Context: The Experience of Scandinavian Converts", Brill Academic Pub, 2004. Kate Zebiri, "British Muslim Converts: Choosing Alternative Lives", Oneworld Publications, 2007.

or after their marriage.⁴ Given the current situation in which Islam or Muslims are often linked to political issues, the converts are often described on one hand as critics of Western society, and on the other hand, as potential mediators between the West and Islam.⁵

Compared to such tendencies in the West, the conversion processes of Muslims have never been a central topic of study in Japan probably because of the invisibility of Muslim Japanese. Tanada (2010) estimated that 11,000 of the 100,000 Muslims who make up the entire Muslim population in Japan are Muslim Japanese.⁶ It is merely 0.008% of the population of Japan. He further estimated that 9,000 out of 11,000 converted upon marriage to a Muslim and 2,000 converted spontaneously.

However, according to the *Imams* of Masjid (mosques) in Japan, the number of converts to Islam in Japan is increasing,⁷ and there is rapid growth of the number of Masjid all over Japan. According to Tanada, there were only 2 in the early 1980s, but reached 80 in the 2000s, and today, the number has exceeded 100.⁸ The conversion to Islam accelerated, if one assumes that the tendency in Japan is somehow similar to that of the West, then one might say that the conversion to Islam has accelerated.

However, this seemingly new tendency has not yet been examined in detail. Only a few researchers have discussed how Japanese people reach the Islamic faith. Kudo (2008) focused on Japanese wives of Pakistani immigrants and examined how Japanese females interpret and redefine Islam from an anthropological perspective.⁹ She observed their “second conversion (Daini no nyūshin 第二の入信)” experience, in which the women come to gain conviction for the Islamic faith, and which occurs sometime after nominal conversion upon marriage.

⁴ Brice, op. cit., p. 18–19.

⁵ Zebiri, op. cit.; Brice, op. cit., p.29–31; Roald, op. cit., p. 289–304.

⁶ Tanada Hirohumi 店田 廣文, *Nippon no mosuku: tainichi musurimu no shakaiteki katsudō* 日本のモスク—滞日ムスリムの社会的活動, Yamakawa shuppansha 山川出版社, 2015, p. 14–16.

⁷ An Imam in Osaka observed that “600 Japanese citizens converting to Islam” during the past decade and every month 5 Japanese enter Islamic faith in Tokyo Camii.

“The Osaka imam who represents Islam’s growth in Japan”, *The Japan Times*, 26 November 2014, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/11/26/national/the-osaka-imam-who-represents-islams-growth-in-japan/>

“The Japanese Teacher of Islam: An Interview with Shimoyama Shigeru of Tokyo Camii”, *Nippon.com*, 17 June 2013, <http://www.nippon.com/en/features/c01302/> (both accessed: 17 October 2017).

⁸ Tanada, op. cit., and his interview “Chūko jūtaku, purehabu Nippon no” mosuku” to Isuramu shakai” 中古住宅、プレハブ—日本の「モスク」とイスラム社会, *Yahoo!News*, 12 October 2017, <https://news.yahoo.co.jp/feature/773> (last accessed: 17 October 2017).

⁹ Kudō Masako 工藤 正子, *Ekkyō no jinruigaku zainichi Pakisutanjin musurimu imin no tsumatachi* 越境の人類学—在日パキスタン人ムスリム移民の妻たち, Tōkyōdaigaku shuppankai 東京大学出版会, 2008.

Komura (2015) conducted a comprehensive study concerning Islam in Japan in the past and present.¹⁰ While her study certainly sheds light on the historical attempt of Japanese converts to allow Islam to take root in Japan, it does not pay enough attention to the actual processes of how Japanese people experience conversion to Islam. Hence, little is known about the conversion process of especially spontaneous converts in contemporary Japan.

The question is, then, how do Japanese people who grew up in a secular society traditionally based on Buddhism and Shintoism take on Islam as their own faith? In other words, how has Islam begun to take root in Japan in the form of individual conversions?

To answer this question, mainly two literatures of conversion stories written by 41 Muslim Japanese will be analyzed in this paper. The testimonies are written by converts who embraced Islam in the period between the 1980s and early 2000s, which arguably marked the beginning of the popularization of conversion to Islam in Japan. Firstly, I will describe their religious background. Secondly, I will examine their actual conversion process, which consists of their first encounter with Islam and development of understanding. Then their “conversion motifs” based on six motifs advocated by Lofland and Skonovd which have often been referred to in previous research and the key factors of conversion will be analyzed.¹¹ Focusing on various types of conversion processes will challenge the stereotype of the homogeneous Japanese as well as the monolithic image of Islam.

2. Existing Research on Muslim Converts in Japan

As mentioned above, the conversion process in the present age had never been a central topic of study in the Japanese context. However, two monographs have partly discussed the conversion process of Muslim Japanese.

i) Conversion to Islam in Japan

Komura (2015) studied how Japanese people have interacted with Muslims in the past and present. She divides the development of Islam in Japan into five periods.¹² She describes

¹⁰ Komura Akiko 小村 明子, *Nihon to Isura-Mu ga deau toki: sono rekishi to kanōsei* 日本とイスラームが出会うとき—その歴史と可能性, Gendaishokan 現代書館, 2015.

¹¹ John Lofland and Norman Skonovd, “Conversion Motifs”, *Journal for the scientific study of religion*, Vol. 20, No.4, pp. 373–385, 1981.

¹² Komura, op. cit., pp. 39–88.

the features of each period as follows.

During the first period (from 1890 to the end of the Second World War), Shōtaro Noda became the first Japanese convert to Islam in 1893 after spending some time in Ottoman Empire. In Japan, the first mosque was built in Kobe in 1935. As the global situation began to shift, the Japanese government started to investigate Islam as a political and military strategy in Southeast Asia. During the second period (from 1945 to around 1974), the first Muslim organization, Japan Muslim Association, was established, and in the third period (from 1975 to early 1980), Japan Muslim Order (*Nihon Isuramu Kyōdan*) started their activity, and attempted to spread Islam in Japan but failed. The prominent feature of the fourth period (from late 1980s to early 1990s) was a massive inflow of foreign Muslim workers to Japan. Most recently, during the fifth period (from the late 1990s to today), marriage between foreign Muslims and Japanese has been increasing in number. In addition, instead of workers, more trainees and students from Islamic societies have started living in Japan.

Komura points out that Islam has not really taken root in Japan so far because of the strictness of Islamic practice, which does not mesh well with Japanese religious views, and insists on the necessity of “indigenization”,¹³ or syncretism of Islam with Japanese customs and culture. In addition, she cites the lack of Islamic community, leaders, and organizations in Japan as the reason why Islam has not spread.

For these reasons, she evaluates rather positively the historical attempt to popularize Islam in Japan with the notion of “Japanese Islam (*Nihon Isuramu Kyō*)” before the Second World War by Aruga Fumihachirō and “Mahayana Islam (*Daizyō Isuramu*)”¹⁴ by Japan Muslim Order during the 1970s and 1980s. However, such modifications on Islam were problematic. She herself is conscious of the contradiction that “changing the Islamic doctrine would make it another religion”,¹⁵ but she did not explain how to solve this problem.

Komura’s monograph covers widely the history of Islam in Japan, but, it lacks the examination of viewpoints of converts themselves on how they have been accepted Islam, which is not the Japanese version of Islam that Komura touches on. Although she interviewed some converts, she only points out the importance of marriage and the interaction with

¹³ Komura op. cit., p. 244.

¹⁴ Komura, op. cit., pp. 189–190, pp. 203–205.

¹⁵ Komura, op. cit., p. 244.

Muslims during the conversion process.¹⁶ Focusing more on the conversion process will shed light on how Islam has, in fact, already taken root in Japan.

ii) Second Conversion after Marriage

Kudo (2008) conducted anthropological research on Japanese wives of Pakistanis who immigrated to Japan from the 1980s to the 1990s. Although most of her interviewees converted upon marriage at first, she observes that they often experienced a “second conversion (Daini no nyūshin 第二の入信)” after their nominal conversion. After marriage, they often participated in study groups to learn more about Islam and met Muslims there. The second conversion is likely to occur when converts find a role model. The most obvious sign of the second conversion is when the converts develop their own will to wear the hijab.¹⁷ Although Kudo’s study is illuminating, it does not cover the conversion process of spontaneous converts in Japan today.

3. Analysis of the Conversion Process through “Conversion Stories”

Below, I will examine two collections of conversion stories written by converts who embraced Islam during the 1980s to early 2000s. According to Komura’s division, these years correspond to the fourth to fifth periods, when the popularization of Islam in Japan began as the number of foreign Muslim workers and students increased.

Firstly, the religious background and converts’ own religious view before conversion will be examined, and then secondly, their actual conversion processes will be analyzed. Thirdly, their “conversion motifs”¹⁸ will be examined according to the six motif patterns advocated by Lofland and Skonovd.

3.1 Materials and Backgrounds of Converts

This section will begin by describing the details of the materials used in this research. Then, the backgrounds of converts—such as their family religion, belief in God, attitude

¹⁶ Komura, op. cit., pp. 114–121.

¹⁷ Kudō, op. cit., pp. 121–130.

¹⁸ “conversion motifs”, also regarded as “conversion careers” or major “types” of conversion, were suggested to attempt to isolate as key, critical orienting, or defining experiences during conversion process. John Lofland and Norman Skonovd, op. cit. p. 374.

towards religion, images and interpretations of Islam, etc. —before their conversion process will be presented.

3.1.1 Material

The books I have chosen for analysis are the only two collected conversion stories of Muslim Japanese published so far.

Book 1: *Thus I was guided to Islam: Japanese Muslimas' stories of conversion* (3rd edition), Japan Muslim News Publisher, 2005¹⁹ (*Watashi no nyūshinki – Isuraamu no shinkō ni michibikareru made dai 3 ban* 私の入信記—イスラームの信仰に導かれるまで 第3版, *Muslim Shinbunsha* ムスリム新聞社)

Number of Accounts=20, Female=20 (100%)

Book 2: *Conversion stories*, a youth group of Japan Muslim Association, 2006 (*Nyūshinki* 入信記, *Nihon Muslim Kyōkai Seinenbu* 日本ムスリム協会 青年部)

Number of Accounts=21, Female=9 (45%), Male=12 (55%)²⁰

(All the quoted parts have been translated by the author.)

Neither of these books are distributed on the market.²¹ They exhibit both differences and similarities. Book 2 consists only of conversion stories, while Book 1 consists of 12 accounts and 8 questionnaires with open-ended questions by the publisher, which ask about their first contact with Islam, how their image of Islam shifted, their religious background, and so forth. The stories and responses vary in literary style and also in length, from 1 to 15 pages. Naturally, the content of each account is diverse, but they all reveal the crucial factors of conversion and important information concerning the potential converts' background. Total number of accounts is 41, comprised of 29 females (71%) and 12 males (29%). 3 converted in the 1980s, 21 in the 1990s, 10 in the early to mid-2000s, and remaining 6 does not indicate

¹⁹ The first edition was published in 1997.

²⁰ Although Book 2 contains 24 accounts but two accounts are the same with Book 1. One anonymous account in Book 2 seemingly corresponds with a response of a questionnaire in Book 1 by the contents and its literary style. I chose the response in Book 1 here since it contains more concrete information than Book 1.

²¹ Both are available from the website of Japan Muslim Association; but Book 2 is currently out of order: <http://www.muslim.or.jp> (last accessed: 19 January 2018).

their specific time of conversion. 17 (41%) converted upon marriage, although 4 of them had already interacted with Muslims, read books on Islam, or been to a Muslim country before marriage.

Although it is difficult to specify its exact term, the conversion process in this study is defined as from the first encounter to Islam to *shahada*²² for the spontaneous converts (not upon marriage) and to the “second conversion” for the converts upon marriage.

As Zebiri points out, most scholars agree on the importance of using testimonies for academic study. However, caution is needed, since the conversion stories are written from post-conversion points of view, and thus the conversion process is likely to be reconstructed according to current understanding. She also notes that there are “various functions” of conversion stories, such as expressing their faith, encouraging others to convert, and so on.²³ Nonetheless, tracking their processes of conversion helps understanding their way of (re)interpreting Islam more concretely.

3.1.2 Religious Background of Japanese Converts

How do converts describe their own religious background in these testimonies? Here, we will examine their familial religious background and their own religious views before conversion.

i) Family Religion

The familial religious backgrounds of converts are diverse. In Books 1 and 2, half (20) of all accounts mention the religion of the converts’ families. 10 out of the 20 accounts say that the converts’ familial or parents’ religion is Buddhism. Only a few mention their specific sects, which include Sōtōshū and Jōdo Shinshū. 7 out of 20 had grown up in a non-religious family. “Non-religious” varies in degree, from atheist to just indifferent or participating in plural religious ceremonies without following a particular faith. One account mentions such plural religious practice of her parents:

Both of my parents have the general Japanese religious view. They visit a Shinto shrine

²² *Shahada* is an Islamic creed declaring belief, which consists of two lines, “There is no god but God” and “Muhammad is the messenger of God”, to be delivered in front of at least two Muslims.

²³ Zebiri, op. cit., Chapter 2, Section 1: Conversion as social protest?, Paragraph 6 [Kobo Edition].

on New Year's, celebrate Christmas, and hold funerals with Buddhist rites, without feeling uncomfortable. (Book 2, p.49)

Just as she describes this practice as “general”, this type of familial religious background seems to be shared by non-religious potential converts, implicitly or explicitly. For them, these practices could be cultural rather than religious, therefore, they are counted as non-religious group. More concretely, a convert was taught to avoid religion with the phrase, “Religion is the opium of the people”, by her father. 4 out of 20 indicated they have Christian parents or a parent (1 Catholic, 1 Protestant, and 2 uncertain).

Family Religion	n=41	Pre-conversion awareness	n=41
Buddhism	8 (20%)	Non-religious	13 (32%)
Buddhism and Christianity	1 (2%)	Christianity (Educational ²⁴)	10 (24%)
Buddhism and Atheism	1 (2%)	Christianity (Faith)	5 (12%)
Non-religious	7 (17%)	Seeking a religion or truth	6 (15%)
Christianity	3 (7%)	Unnamed monotheism	4 (10%)
Uncertain	21 (51%)	Uncertain	3 (7%)
Table 1. Religious backgrounds of Japanese Converts			

ii) Converts' Own Awareness of Religion Before Conversion

Compared to the familial religious background, Buddhism is much less visible in the descriptions of converts' own awareness of religion before conversion. None out of 10 clearly stated that they were a Buddhist before their conversion. They might have answered that they were Buddhist if they had been asked in an interview, but these accounts mention that they had no specific religion on one hand, and on the other, a “seeker” of religion, truth, or way of life. Although some of them indicated their interest toward Buddhism, for them, Buddhism was just one of various ways of pursuing spirituality, and they did not always identify themselves as Buddhists. For example, one convert states that he was once thinking of leaving his home to become a Buddhist monk when he was fourteen years old, but gave up that idea after a while and started comparing several religions by reading books before the first encounter with a

²⁴ Christianity (Educational) means that they have received a Christian education, but not received baptism or had faith as Christian.

Muslim. He also says “I did not like to have faith in only one religion for a long time because it was as if I was fettered”. (Book 2, p.4-11)

In contrast to the converts with Buddhist backgrounds, converts with Christian backgrounds are more likely to identify and state themselves as a former Christian. The percentage of converts with Christian backgrounds (12%) is quite small comparing to previous studies on converts to Islam in Western contexts, where majority of converts are former Christians, but the percentage is quite high compared to the general percentage of Christians in Japan, which is approximately 1–2%.²⁵

The particular feature of Japanese converts is that many state that they received a Christian education even though they do not believe in the Christian faith. 10 (24%) non-Christians out of all 41 accounts, including 6 with Buddhist backgrounds, mention that they attended Sunday school in church or/and Christian institutions from kinder garden to junior college or university. They often learn about the Bible and Christian theological concepts through singing, reading, and praying. However, none of these accounts state the faith as Christian.

Although religious education is strictly regulated in Japanese public education, it is widely admitted in the private schools. According to the demographic data, the recent rate of students who attend schools founded by Christians tends to increase as they get older. The rate of students attending Christian schools is 0.12% in elementary schools, 0.78% in junior high schools, 1.9% of high schools, 6.4% in junior colleges, and 8.2% in colleges/universities.²⁶

4 (10%) accounts state that the potential converts had believed in the existence of one God, but did not know what their faith was. Hence, their religious background can be called “unnamed monotheism”.

These backgrounds of Japanese converts are quite different from most of the cases of

²⁵ Okuyama Michiaki, 奥山倫明, “2000 nendai Nippon niokeru Kirisuto kyō shinja no kyū zōgen shūmuka shūkyō tōkei chōsa kara kangaeru” 2000 年代日本におけるキリスト教信者の急増減——宗務課『宗教統計調査』から考える, *Kenkyūjohō* 研究所報, Vol.25, pp. 16–25, Nanzan shūkyō bunka kenkyūjo 南山宗教文化研究所, 2015.

²⁶ The rate was calculated from the following data. Monbu kagaku tōkei yōran: 1. gakkō kyōiku sōkatsu (2015) 文部科学統計要覧 1.学校教育総括 (平成 27 年版), http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/toukei/002/002b/1356065.htm and Ippan shadan hōjin kirisutokyō gakkō kyōiku dōmei no gaiyō: gakusei seito jidōsū 一般社団法人キリスト教学校教育同盟の概要 学生生徒児童数, <http://www.k-doumei.or.jp/gaiyo/2017Tokei-S.pdf> (last accessed: 17 October 2017).

Britain in which converts' religion of origin is, nominal or not, Christian.²⁷

3.1.3 Belief in God and Attitude Toward Religion at the Beginning of Conversion Process

In this passage, we will examine how many of the potential converts had faith in God and their overall attitude toward religion. Most of the accounts indicate their belief in God with expressions such as “I have believed in God since I was a child” or “I did not believe in God”, and indicate their attitude towards religion in general with expressions such as “I felt a yearning for a life of faith” or “I had despised religion”.

	n=41
Believed in God	17 (41%)
Yearning for faith or positive attitude toward religion	10 (24%)
Indifference, avoidance of religion, or atheism	11 (27%)
Uncertain	3 (7%)
Table 2. Belief in God and attitude towards religion	

i) Believed in God or Yearning for Faith prior to Conversion

17 (41%) including Christians, graduates of Christian schools, unnamed monotheists, and the “Seekers” had already believed in God prior to conversion. 10 among 17 clearly say and 3 imply that they believed in the existence of God since their childhood. Many of them attended Christian schools and some seized the existence by intuition. The others realized God’s existence as they became adults through their experience such as working in medical services, interacting with Christians, or investigating this world and reasoning by themselves.

The percentage 41% in this study is close to the average percentage in a general survey conducted in Japan at that time (43.5% in 1995).²⁸ In addition to 17 potential converts who believed in God, 10 (24%) mentioned their yearning for faith or positive attitude toward religion before conversion. In total, 27 (66%) out of 41 converts believed, wanted to believe or

²⁷ For example, in the study by Köse, 94% of the converts had Christian backgrounds and the rest is Jewish. Köse, op. cit., Chapter 3, Section A: Background Analysis [Kobo Edition]. The background of the interviewees in studies of Al-Qwidi and Zebiri also indicate the majority of the converts had a Christian background to greater or lesser degrees of practice. Al-Qwidi, op. cit., p. 111. Zebiri, op. cit., Chapter 1, Section 4: A Profile of British Converts [Kobo Edition].

²⁸ Dentsū sōken 電通総研 and Yoka kaihatsu senta 余暇開発センター, *Sekai 23 kakoku kachikan de-ta bukku* 世界 23 カ国 価値観データブック, Dōyūkan 同友館, 1999.

became interested in believing the existence of God, which suggests that they were somehow ready for accepting Islam.

ii) Indifference, Avoidance of Religion, and Atheism.

As opposed to those who had already believed in God or been yearning for faith, 11 (27%) of converts mention that they were not interested in religion at all before the conversion. Among them, 5 (12% out of all) state clearly their avoidance toward religion. The following account suggests their feeling toward religion in general.

Originally, I was thinking that religion gives support to those who are mentally weak, and that religion makes people blind. So, it was unbearable that I had a religion, whether it was Islam or not. I was thinking I could live without religion. I *wanted* to live without it. (Book 2, p. 45 emphasis mine)

The expressions such as “mentally weak”, “allergic to religion” and more strongly, “brainwashed” can be seen in other accounts, too. These kinds of avoidance or negative bias are reflected in the words that converts received from their friends after conversion, such as “running away from reality” or “gone crazy”.

It has been shown that this kind of avoidance toward religion have deep roots in Japan. For example, comparative religions scholar Hosaka discusses how the “distorted” perception on religion formed in Japan.²⁹ He points out not only Marxism and the crimes committed by the new religious cult “Aum Shinrikyō” in the 1990s, but also historical policy of “State Shinto (*Kokka Shintō*)” by the Meiji Government which led Japan to participate in World War II and regret about the War became associated with distrust of religion. Hence, avoidance of religion is not a personal matter, but is tied strongly to Japanese history. Although we cannot examine this kind of “distorted perception” in further detail here, it is important to keep this strong general aversion of religion in mind.

As we have seen here, the converts’ religious background can be divided in two main types: seeking faith and avoiding religion. This distinction will be important when we will

²⁹ Hosaka Shunji 保坂俊司, “Yuganda nihonjin no shūkyōkan wa ikani keiseisareta ka” 歪んだ日本人の宗教観はいかに形成されたか, *Sekai heiwa kenkyū* 世界平和研究 Vol. 38 No.1, pp. 44–53, Sekai heiwa kyōju akademi 世界平和教授アカデミー, 2012.

investigate how they come to grips with the authenticity of Islam during their conversion processes.

3.1.4 Images and Interpretations of Islam before the Conversion Process

Unlike European countries where Christianity is deeply rooted, Japan has had no direct conflict with the Islamic world throughout history. Then, how did potential converts interpret Islam, and what was their impression of Islam before they embarked on the conversion process?

	n=41	n=26, except for 15 uncertain
Positive	2 (5%)	2 (7%)
Negative	12 (37%)	15 (54%)
Neutral	4 (10%)	4 (14%)
Indifferent	5 (12%)	5 (18%)
Uncertain	15 (37%)	
Table 3. Images and interpretations of Islam before the conversion process		

Whether they believed in God or avoided religion, their impression of Islam had been fairly negative for many of the potential converts. 37% of all, or 54% among 26 potential converts who described their original impression of Islam in concrete terms, described how negative it was. The typical negative images are expressed with the words such as “backwardness”, “terrorism”, and “fanaticism”. There is even a convert who expressed his strong antipathy toward Islam and he was thinking that Japanese people should “enlighten” Muslims (Book 2, p.19). Three of them attribute their negative image to the media, and other three mention Orientalism or Western values which they had internalized.

On the contrary, two converts mention positive images they came hold after their negative first impressions. One of the two said that the Iranian Islamic revolution allowed him to feel that Islam had “vital energy” from Islam through. He also says he had already learned from reading books that Islam emerged following the emergence of Judaism and Christianity. (Book 2, p.1) Another convert got a positive impression through reading books on life in Islamic societies. She also had an Algerian pen pal when she was a high-school student, several years before the beginning of her conversion process. (Book1 p.22)

Among those whom I categorized as “neutral”, 5 described their initial image of Islam as the “religion of Arabs”, “a religion of faraway countries”, and “seems strict”. Some of these impressions could contain slightly negative connotations, but their expressions seem to be rather descriptive than evaluative. In any case, they had not been interested in Islam because they felt it was unrelated to them.

Because of these rather negative images and indifference, Islam did not appeal to most of the potential converts, even for though some had been comparing several religions and seeking the truth or way of life. There is only one potential convert among such truth-seeking types who thought of converting to Islam before the beginning of the actual conversion process. Other than that, for most converts, “it was as if it [Islam] did not exist”, and they “never thought about learning more about it”, even while they learned about a wide variety of religions and philosophy, from Hinduism to Shintoism, and from Western philosophy to primitive Buddhism.

3.2 The Conversion Process

Despite their being rather negative images or a general indifference toward Islam, how does the actual conversion process take place? In this section, we will examine the origins and development in the conversion process.

3.2.1 First Contact with Islam

It is not always clear from their accounts what exactly was their first occasion to get to know Islam, because they may have already known about Islam from watching TV or learning at school. However, the converts often say that their first encounter with Islam took place when they became aware that Islam has something to do with themselves. That awareness can be regarded here as the “first contact”, or the beginning of the conversion process.

The biggest group 12 (29%) encountered Islam while studying or traveling abroad. However, for many (8 out of 12) of the converts in this paper, it was not a Muslim country but non-Muslim country such as Britain, United States, Australia, France, and China (Shanghai). They met Muslims originally from Syria, Malaysia, Egypt, Mauritius, Algeria, and so on. The potential converts met them by chance, as roommates, classmates, or employees of the hotel they stayed, and so forth.

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	n=41
Living or Traveling abroad	12(29%)
Personal contact in Japan	11(27%)
Marriage or Romance	9 (22%)
Reading books on Islam	6 (15%)
University education	2(5%)
Internet	1 (2%)
Table 4. First contact with Islam	

The other three were first introduced to Islam when they travelled to a Muslim country such as Sri Lanka, Egypt, or Uighur Autonomous Region (China), and one visited Singapore, Maldives, Egypt, Morocco, Israel/Palestine during her round-the-world trip. However, their journey was not precisely focused on the Islamic religion itself. For example, for the convert who visited to Sri Lanka, it was in the airplane on her *way back* to Japan that she heard about Islam for the first time from a Sri Lankan passenger seated next to her. For others, the reasons to visit the Islamic areas were for travelling as much as far from Japan, for business, and for experiencing other cultures. In short, the primary goal of traveling or staying abroad, regardless of the destination, was not to explore Islam, and the converts encountered Muslims by chance.

The second largest number, 11 (27%) out of the 41 converts, encountered Islam through personal contact with Muslims in Japan. In the earlier conversion accounts up until the mid-1990s, all of these Muslims came from foreign countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Pakistan, and Arabic countries, as students, teachers, and workers. However, the later conversion accounts after the late 1990s indicate that the role of Muslim Japanese also became important. Three potential converts were introduced Islam by encountering Muslim Japanese at university or at social gatherings.

9 (21%) got to know Islam through their spouse or boy/girlfriend.³⁰ Most of them mention they did not know Islam at all before encountering their partner.

³⁰ Those who encountered Islam through their prospect spouse explicitly in foreign country were counted in “Living or Traveling abroad” category so that the geographical situation, where they met Islam, can be visible.

On the other hand, for those who found Islam through reading and education, their first contact was more or less intentional. During their search for political, religious, and ideological knowledge, they took Islam into consideration and tried to read Islamic literatures or learn about Islam at university. One convert mentions that when he was studying at Tokyo University, which is one of the most prestigious educational institutions in Japan, the department of Islamic studies was established for the first time in Japan in 1982, and he chose Islam as his major. A later account mentions Doshisha University, which was founded by Christians, but also started teaching about Islam when the author of the account was studying there.

One convert got to know Islam while he was browsing a website on Christianity, which he had faith in.

From the above, we can conclude that the first contact was quite unintentional and unexpected for most of the prospective converts. It probably reflects the fact that many converts were previously indifferent to Islam or had negative impressions, in contrast to those who were interested in Islam through reading and university education.

3.2.2 Developing an Understanding for Islam

After the potential converts encountered Islam, how did they develop their understanding of Islam? Investigating the conversion process in this mostly pre-Internet period allows us to understand model cases of conversion after their first contact.

	n=41, multiple
Living or Traveling abroad	12 (29%)
Personal contact in Japan	12 (29%)
Marriage or Romance	5 (12%)
Reading books on Islam	12 (29%)
University Education	4 (10%)
Internet	2 (5%)
Table 5. Developing an understanding for Islam	

12 (29%) travelled abroad or kept living in the foreign country where they first

encountered Islam. In contrast to the first contact, travelling to a Muslim country is more intentional in this stage. The potential converts visited Egypt, Turkey, Indonesia, Mauritius, Uyghur Autonomous Region (China), Central Asia, and Kuwait, and experienced firsthand the actual state of Muslims and Islamic societies. Those who were living in Western countries continued to interact with Muslims they had met and developed an understanding for Islam through discussion and by posing questions. This process gave potential converts the opportunity to reflect on their prior image of Islam.

The more I pose questions, the more I realized what I knew about Islam was full of misunderstanding and prejudice. The gap between my previous knowledge of Islam and what a Muslim right in front of me was saying was so different that I had to think about which was false. Soon I realized the impression of Muslims as “living in a backward country in the desert,” or “ignorant and savage people who oppress women” was only fiction created by Western orientalist. (Book 1, p.13)

For her, who was living in the United States, previous negative impressions did not prevent her from developing an understanding of Islam. On the contrary, it helped her to compare her previous “ignorant and savage” image and seriously consider Muslims as actual people. Other potential converts also tell similar stories about developing their understanding. In addition, in Japan, 12 (29%) tried to deepen their understanding through personal contact by attending study groups in mosques or posing questions to their Muslim friends.

The experience of reading books also generally takes on an added significance in this stage than the first contact. In addition to personal contact, they try to gain further knowledge or answer their own questions. However, a convert who embraced Islam in 1995 remarks that she was looking for books on Islam but found only two books at the public library. It suggests the Japanese general public did not pay attention to Islam on a daily basis at that time. Other converts deepened their understanding by reading books on introduction of Islam, Islamic medicine, or females in Islam written by foreign Muslim scholars often in translation, as well as the Quran and Hadith. Similar to the first contact with Islam through personal contact, Muslim Japanese began to make their presence known in publications after the mid-1990s. One convert mentions that he understood *Tawheed* (the Oneness of God) and was deeply

impressed after reading a book *What is Islam?: its religion, society and culture (isuraam towa nanika: sono shūkyō, shakai, bunka, イスラームとは何か—その宗教・社会・文化, Kōdansya 講談社)* published in 1994, written by a Muslim Japanese scholar named Yasushi Kosugi.

For those who encountered Islam through university education kept on learning from the same people as first contact but they also visited mosques to understand the actual religious practice. The converts who converted for marriage often experienced their “second conversion” after living with a Muslim partner and studying Islam. It should be carefully assessed, but 6 converts mention roughly the time for achieving the second conversion. It is around one to three years, and approximately two years on average.

As stated above, personal interaction in Japan (whether upon marriage or not), traveling to a foreign country (whether Islamic country or not), and reading (including university education and the Internet) are three main types of experience in which they encountered and developed their understanding of Islam. 29% of the converts encountered Islam and developed understanding in foreign countries, while the other 71% encountered Islam in Japan at university, workplace or social gathering, and by reading. These personal interactions can be thought of as the natural consequence of globalization, which allowed both potential converts and Muslims to move internationally for studying, visiting, and working. Thus, the occasions for encountering Islam and developing understanding were widely available.

3.3 Conversion Motif Patterns and Key factors

Here, we will examine the “conversion motif” patterns and key factors of conversion so that we can understand the processes more profoundly.

3.3.1 Main Patterns of Motifs for Conversion

Previous research on conversion to Islam often refers to the six motif patterns advocated by Lofland and Skonovd in 1981 for analyzing the conversion process.³¹ The six motif patterns are: Intellectual, Experimental, Affectional, Mystical, Revival, and Coercive.³² It is generally agreed that it is not limited to only one motif exclusively but several motifs are

³¹ Köse, op. cit., Chapter 3 [Kobo Edition]; Al-Qwidi, op. cit., pp. 185–188; Allievi, op. cit., pp. 315–316.

³² John Lofland and Norman Skonovd, op. cit. , pp. 373–385, 1981.

experienced at the same time or at different times during the conversion process.³³ Naturally, for those who converted as a result of marriage, the motif of their conversion would be highly “affectional”. Therefore, I examined their motifs other than the affection toward their partner.

	n=41
Intellectual	35 (85%)
Affectional	33 (80%)
Experimental	18 (44%)
Mystical	4 (10%)
Table 6. Motif patterns	

As a result of the examination of the concrete expression in the accounts, Intellectual and Affectional motifs were most visible, followed by the Experimental motif. Only a few correspond to the Mystical motif and no convert underwent Revival or Coercive processes.³⁴ This order and distribution of motif patterns roughly correspond with Köse’s study.³⁵ The Intellectual motif is the most visible among the six patterns. However, due to its complexity, it will be examined at the end of this section.

i) Affectional Motif

The second most visible motif is the Affectional pattern. As we have already seen, personal interactions with Muslims is important for understanding Islam. In addition, they can be living examples for the potential converts. As following account expresses, during the conversion process, strong attraction occasionally occurs toward Muslims.

One of my university friends was a devout Muslima from Malaysia. For me who was not good at history class in school, she was not only the first Muslim but also my first contact with Islam (I was 18 at that time). (...) She was a model Muslima in every way. I was

³³ Köse, op. cit., Chapter 3, Section C: Conversion Motifs [Kobo Edition].

³⁴ Lofland and Skonovd state they themselves “become cynical about the existence of the true revivalist conversions in modern societies” and mentioned coercive motif as “extremely rare”. Lofland and Skonovd, op. cit., pp. 380–381.

³⁵ Köse, op. cit., Chapter 3, Section C: Conversion Motifs [Kobo Edition]. Although Al-Qwidi gives less importance on Affectional motif and reports none of her interviewees underwent Mystical motif. Al-Qwidi, op. cit., p.185, p. 258.

embarrassed by her perfection and healthy beauty. I think her way of life itself embodied the essence of Islam. It is thanks to the experience of spending time with her that I can absorb Islam naturally now. (Book 1, p. 88)

Like her case, even though it was only one person, the affection to a Muslim can have a big impact on potential converts. Many accounts of conversion through marriage also show the importance of attraction toward Muslims other than their partner for their internalization of Islamic values, or their “second conversion”. Just as Kudo pointed out in her study on the Japanese wives of Pakistani immigrants, the accounts often mention ideal Muslima in a study group or another place.

Interestingly, not only affection toward a devout Muslim, but also affection toward a non-practicing Muslim can also motivate conversion. Another convert describes his experience of that kind.

I got over my prejudice and understood religious precepts step by step by meeting many Muslims. The last and decisive encounter was with a Muslim who ran a bar and did not follow precepts at all. Nonetheless, he had strong self-awareness as a Muslim and he was proud of it. I was moved by him. At the same time, I thought, “One cannot be perfect from the very start. I’m standing at the same start line with him. It might be enough to convert now and then I will learn and make effort little by little. It’s not the time to think whether it’s possible or not. It’s enough to decide to believe and accept. Let’s go for it.” (Book 2, p. 35)

For him, it was interaction with Muslims and books which enabled him to develop a better understanding and relativize negative images of Islam, but the last and conclusive decision for conversion was brought about by his strong feeling toward a non-practicing Muslim.

ii) Experimental Motif

18 (44%) converts mention their trial of the Islamic practice during their conversion process. It is likely to be experienced from the middle to later stages of conversion process

after gaining some knowledge through interaction with Muslims or reading books. Potential converts are “ready to give the process a try” when they undergo this experimental pattern.³⁶ A convert’s account expresses clearly such a state of mind.

I participated in the study circle on Sunday, wearing a head scarf. Before entering the library (in the mosque), I stopped by the bathroom to make *wudu* (ablutions). It was not because somebody had told me to, but I just wanted to do so out of respect for the sisters and the mosque. After the study circle, I prayed following the others and I left still wearing the scarf. I didn’t want to take it off because of the pleasure I was feeling from it. (Book 1, p. 41)

Although she had not taken *shahada* at that time, she behaved as if she were already one of the members. Not only wearing the head scarf and praying, but also fasting during the month of Ramadan, avoiding pork and alcohol, and wearing decent clothes are mentioned in the other accounts. Especially for the nominal converts through marriage, living with a Muslim spouse directly brings about this experimental phase and it helps them reach the “second conversion”.

iii) Mystical Motif

4 (10%) out of all converts experienced mystical incidents, such as dreaming, calling from a baby in the womb, receiving sudden inspiration and feeling “a shock like light toward Heaven”. All the four converts remark these experiences were crucial and gave them a final push for their decision to convert. 3 out of 4 converts had researched on Islam for quite a long time before these events took place. The other convert felt sudden inspiration when she received a FAX message from her Muslim friend.

iv) Intellectual Motif

Scholars on conversion to Islam have pointed out the importance of intellectual activities during the conversion process.³⁷ As we have seen above, discussion, posing questions, and

³⁶ Lofland and Skonovd, op. cit., pp. 378–379.

³⁷ For Köse, the biggest number, 71% of his interviewee, experienced this intellectual motif pattern. Köse, op. cit., Chapter 3, Section C: Conversion Motifs [Kobo Edition]. Al-Qwidi emphasizes the

reading books are quite important for understanding Islam. 35 accounts (85%) indicate that converts underwent such rational reflection during the conversion process. For example, a convert who was studying social sciences and women's studies in the United States at that time met a Muslim from Iran and found logical answer to her queries about Islam.

Posing question [to a Muslim friend] one after another, I daily challenged Islam for four months. One day, I thought "I give up. There must be a proper answer to any question." This feeling could have been the first step to the "surrender," which is one of the meanings of Islam. (Book 1, p. 14)

Her account shows even during personal interaction with Muslims, the potential converts go through highly intellectual reflections apart from developing an affectional bond.

Thus far, we have seen empirical aspects of conversion process, and now, we will focus more on its speculative aspects. I categorized this intellectual pattern into four types taking note of their method of reasoning which are: Theological, Philosophical, Scientific, and Social/Political. Although further discussion is needed about these categorizations, they might help in understanding the deeper implications of this intellectual motif.

a. Theological Reasoning (Islam as a Religion)

The first type is theological reasoning. The author of the following testimony was formerly a devout Christian and once thought about choosing to live a monastic life. She was learning Arabic and met several Muslims at that time. Gradually, she was attracted to Islam owing to their tolerant attitude and started to attend the class for reciting the Quran. Then a chapter of the Quran answered her previous question.

Although I was a Christian, I could not fully realize the meaning of Jesus's redemption and had questions about the Trinity. I was thinking it was because of my weak faith and often prayed to God, "Please deepen my faith. Let me realize the truth". It was under

importance of intellectual activities, saying "Reasoning was far more important than affectional considerations for all of them (p. 258)". Al-Qwidi, op. cit., p. 186, pp. 256-259. Similarly, Allievi states that "rational" conversion is "very Islamic (*très islamique*)" comparing to that "relational" conversion is "less specifically Islamic (*moins spécifiquement islamique*)". Allievi, op. cit., pp.120-123.

such conditions when I read the 112th chapter (Al-Ikhlaas) of the Quran. It says, “He is Allah, the One, Allah, the Independent and Besought of all. He begets not, nor is He begotten. And there is none like unto Him.” It made my head clear. I felt that it was my faith and the truth. I thank for the guidance of Allah. (Book 1, p. 54)

After this experience, she converted and married a Muslim. Her account indicates that her theological or religious questions were answered by reading the Quran. Other former Christians, Christian educated people, and unnamed monotheists also explain how their faith got stronger or their understanding of God became clearer as they came to know Islam. Hence this type of reasoning occurs mainly to those who have already faith in, or theological knowledge on, the one God.

b. Philosophical Reasoning (Islam as a Contemporary Thought)

The second type of intellectual motif is philosophical reasoning. The converts of this type examine the world itself and once tried to deny the existence of God, but finally reach to embrace Islam. Their reflection is profound and naturally the process takes a relatively long time for reasoning and investigation. They are not large in number; only 3 (7% out of all), but 2 of them wrote the longest testimonies among the 41 accounts.

A convert who was inclined to atheism affected by Western philosophy wrote about the contemplative process of her conversion. She gained a scholarship from the French government and went to France for continuing her study focusing on “Nomadism”. She encountered Islam by getting to know a Muslims there and started to read the Quran. Then she started participating in study circles in a mosque and finally converted. She describes her transition as follows.

I myself don’t regard my Islamic faith as an opposition to the philosophy that I was familiar with. It was rather a natural consequence. Basically, I had the impression for a long time that what atheists —be they Sartre, Camus, or Nietzsche— had problematized was nothing but God. The existence of God could be seen in their writings. (Book 1, p. 43)

Usually Islam is not regarded as in the same frame with Western philosophy, but for her, they were intimately linked.

Another former atheist who was also influenced by Nietzsche explains his conversion process using philosophical concepts such as “Cartesian skepticism” and “semantic skepticism”. After encountering a Muslim Japanese scholar, he was trying to doubt not only the existence of God but also everything, including the meaning of “to doubt” itself and the distinction between “truth and falsity”. Then, he reached a certain conclusion.

After such discussions of analytic philosophy, I concluded that the question is not whether there is a possibility to doubt, but whether there is a theory/principle which can explain the world. If a “perspective” which can explain the world is called religion, I had a worldview which consisted of atheism, democracy after World War II, Western modernism, post-modernism, and so forth. That was my religion. The phrase “*la illaha illallah* (There is no god but God)” relentlessly broke my worldview. (Book 2, p. 25)

However, he stated that he hesitated to admit the second line of *shahada* which is “Muhammad was a prophet”, while he was convinced that the first line “There is no god but God” was true. After he became convinced about the existence of God, he went to Egypt. He strongly felt that people there were living very happily and decided to take *shahada* there.

Both accounts indicate that logical and philosophical understanding can lead atheistic people to conversion when it was combined with experiences of staying in an Islamic society and interacting with Muslims.

c. Scientific Reasoning (Islam as Science)

The third intellectual type is accepting Islam through scientific reasoning. The scientific nature of Islam is often emphasized by Islamic organizations as proof of the authenticity of the Quran. Although there are few such examples among the accounts examined in this paper, scientific reasoning can also be a decisive factor for conversion.

The following convert, who clearly avoided any kind of religion before her conversion, experienced such a scientific process of reflection. After she was introduced to the “Scientific miracle of the Quran” by her Muslim friend she started investigating the Quran on the

Internet.

At first, I was thinking that there were some mysterious things, but the more I read the description on the website, the more I was scared and it gave me goose bumps to think that I had encountered something really serious. I couldn't think of anything but that the descriptions (in the Quran) were based on the knowledge that I had learned in school. They became clearer to me when I tried to understand them in terms of leading, cutting-edge technology. The following day, I read the Japanese translation of the Quran and a notion that this is totally beyond human intelligence came to me. (...) I didn't want to be a Muslim at all, and I was desperately trying to find out a way other than becoming a Muslim. However I tried to deny it, the truth was there and there was also myself who noticed the truth. (Book 2, p. 45–46)

She says Islamic doctrine became more important after her conversion than during the conversion process. For her, Islam appealed as science rather than a religion which once she tried strongly to avoid. Two other accounts also stated that the converts studied the natural sciences at university or were interested in it.

In addition, two other converts state that they noticed the similarity of Islamic practice and medical science during their conversion process. One says she was surprised that the way of *Wudu* (ablutions) was similar to the medical technique which she had learned (Book 1, p.3), and another understood the rationality of an Islamic practice—circumcision for her son—from a medical point of view. (Book 1, p.10)

d. Social/Political Reasoning (Islam as a Foundation of the Social System)

In contrast to the previous three types, the last one focuses more on social aspects of Islam than the personal and individual quest for truth. The conversion processes that can be categorized under this type take place as a result of reflections on complex issues with social or political ramifications, often also accompanied by theological or philosophical reasoning. The following account shows the trajectory of the convert's interest before conversion.

When I was in my late teens, I devoted myself to Christian theology, especially to the

mysticism from the medieval-Renaissance times. The university I entered when I was 18 was also founded by Christians. As I learned about religious music, European history, and religious anthropology, I started to think of salvation as my main theme of study. I also read literatures on Marx and the Christian Reformation. I was thinking of how society and politics play a role for human salvation. At that time, my major at university was French literature so I was interested in the philosophy of Foucault too. As I read his reportage on the Islamic revolution in Iran, I started to investigate the potential of Islam in the contemporary world. (Book 2, p. 15)

After his investigation of Islamic literatures, he traveled through the world, and was attracted to Islamic societies, especially in central Asia. After coming back to Japan, he took *shahada* in Tokyo.

Another convert of this type who was previously studying sociology at university and affected by Émile Durkheim states that the Gulf War was one of the triggers that led her to conversion. She felt disappointed toward the United States, Japan, and humanity when she watched images of the victims in Iraq and also a “victory parade”. After that, she started to seek more convincing ideology than the Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution for establishing peace, and she encountered Islam through a Muslim while traveling to the Uighur Autonomous Region in China. (Book 1, p. 24)

As we have seen above, there are several types of reasoning during the conversion process. Those who are in the “faith” group are likely to undergo theological and social/political reasoning, while the converts of “avoidance” group go through philosophical and scientific reasoning. Most of the cases involved affectional experiences in the converts’ interactions with Muslims.

However, as Zebiri has pointed out, researchers should carefully assess the importance of interactions with Muslims, since its evaluation is divided. On one hand, it was estimated as an essential factor, and on the other hand, interpersonal relationships element are not regarded as decisive because they are rather brief.³⁸ Pertaining to this study, personal relationships and interactions with Muslims are highly important. It may have something to do with the situation, as mentioned above, that until the mid-1990s, there was often no other way for understanding

³⁸ Zebiri, op. cit., Chapter 2, section1 Conversion as social protest? [Kobo Edition].

Islam than interacting with Muslims, since there was no Internet, sufficient publications or education on Islam. However, I found no effect of Sufi orders, which is prominent in Western conversion cases, and also of organized missionary, the so-called Da'wah. Thus, it was always purely individual interactions, investigation through reading, or university education which brought about the beginning and developing stages of the conversion process among Japanese Muslims.

3.3.2 Key Factors of Conversion

Finally, we will examine the key factors for conversion which are remarked in the accounts. The converts often mention concretely which factors appealed to them during the conversion process. They compare these factors with their own values, knowledge, and norms that they had acquired through education and socialization.

Key factors of conversion	n=41, Multiple
Moral/ethical standards, social matters, and political ideology	27 (66%)
Gender roles	4 (10%)
Oneness of God, equality, absence of priest	19 (46%)
Discomfort or Continuity with Christianity	11 (27%)
Rationality, logical aspects	11 (27%)
Succession with Asian perspective on nature	1
Witnessing life of a Muslim and attraction to the culture	17 (41%)
Mystical aspect, or Inexplicable religious experience	4 (10%)
The Melody of the Quran, Adhan (calling for prayer)	3 (7%)
Spiritual or Mental satisfaction, Fear of dying	6 (15%)
Table 7. Key factors of conversion	

The most prevalent factor was “Moral ethical standards, social matters, and political ideology”. Komura mentioned that instead of religious norms, there are already established morality and ethics in Japanese culture.³⁹ Nonetheless several converts were attracted to Islam

³⁹ Komura, op. cit., pp. 247–248.

to build a “better society”. As we have seen, serious problems such as Gulf war also made them relativize their own ethics and morals.

“Gender roles” of Islam was important for female converts. A convert mentions that she compared Western feminism and Islamic teachings on women, and chose Islam since it is based on human nature. (Book 1, p. 13)

Although the number is small, the factors “Succession with Asian perspective on nature”, “The Melody of the Quran, Adhan (calling for prayer)”, “Spiritual or Mental satisfaction and Fear of dying” were also important for some converts.

5. Conclusion

So far, we have seen the religious backgrounds, initial impressions of Islam, first contact and development an understanding for Islam, “motifs” and key factors which led them to convert. We can conclude the conversion process of Japanese people in the period between the 1980s to the early 2000s can be described as follows.

The potential converts encountered Islam both in Japan and in foreign countries, which were not limited to Muslim countries, but also included Western countries. In most cases, other than those who found Islam through reading or university education, the first contact with Islam or Muslims was unexpected and unintentional. For them, the encounter was a result of global human mobility of both potential converts and Muslims for studying, working, and travelling. Once they got interested in Islam, they deepened their understanding by asking Muslims questions, participating in a study circle, reading books, or travelling to a Muslim country.

It is in this understanding stage that prior negative images of Islam are relativized. Originally, many of the converts were indifferent or had highly negative images, which were expressed in terms of backwardness, terrorism, and fanaticism. However, they realized such images were merely an orientalist’s fiction through interacting with Muslims. For those who had good impressions from the first, conversion took place more easily.

Japan is often regarded as a traditionally Buddhism and Shintoism-based country and actually many converts mention Buddhism as their familial religious background. However, no convert clearly identified him or herself as a Buddhist before conversion. The potential

converts had already faith or were yearning for it on one hand, including Christians, graduates of Christian schools, unnamed monotheists, and “seekers”, and were indifferent to or avoiding religion on the other hand.

Although religious backgrounds of the Japanese converts are various and different from previous research in Western contexts, “motif” patterns are roughly similar; Intellectual motif came first, then Affectional, Experimental, and Mystical motifs followed. This similarity may be attributed to the fact that many Japanese people somehow share similar values and backgrounds in education.

The intellectual reasoning during the conversion process can be categorized into theological, philosophical, scientific, and social and political types; these categories are interrelated. In other words, Islam had been variously understood in terms of religion, contemporary thought, science, and a foundation of society by the converts.

In the future, more recent cases of conversion will need to be examined based on these findings. Since the mid-2000s, opportunities to interact with Muslims have been increasing continuously. For example, the Internet has made a wealth of information available, for better or for worse. Students, immigrants, and travelers from Islamic societies stimulate Halal businesses and the so-called inbound economy in Japan, and their presence in Japan has greatly increased the likelihood of non-Muslims interacting with Muslims. Conversion may be more likely to occur now, but whether that is actually the case remains to be examined.

Also, Muslim Japanese themselves may now cause other Japanese to convert. Since the late 1990s, Japanese converts have already played an important role in publishing books on Islam, as marriage partners, and university education, but they have become even more active in recent years. They hold events and publish colorful free papers for both Muslims and non-Muslims.⁴⁰ The number of Muslim Japanese scholars on Islamic studies is increasing and they actively publish scholarship and books. For some, events such as 9.11 (September 11 attacks) and 3.11 (the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011) may have relativized their previously held values, and Islam could present a viable alternative way of living.

⁴⁰ Such as *Zamzam: Isuramu bunka jōhō hasshin sasshi* ザムザム—イスラム文化情報発信冊子, Zamu zamu henshubū ザムザム編集部, *Halal Life: more Fruitful. more Quality. more Lively*, vol. 1-5, HALAL LIFE and SALAM SHOP. Both first published in 2016.