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# Rethinking Japan's *Tabunka Kyōsei* Policy : A Study on Muslim Prayer Space Availability in Sendai

ANDI HOLIK RAMDANI\*

## 1. Introduction

With the largest population and expanding group of foreign workers, international married couples, and international students in the Tohoku area; Sendai began its *tabunka kyōsei* movement in 2009. Shortly thereafter, the 2011 Great East Japan Tsunami and Earthquake in combination with issues of domestic violence among international married couples encouraged the Miyagi government to develop this program earnestly to educate foreigners about disaster preparedness and deal with language barriers.

Following an increase of Muslim students and workers from Islamic countries within Miyagi prefecture, this article will explore trends in social change, focusing on religious minorities and its correlation with countries policies named *tabunka kyōsei* where they live.<sup>1</sup>

The *tabunka kyōsei* policy, which is known for having programs and activities to assist newcomer immigrants with their lives, has been common in arenas where *tabunka* (多文化 multicultural) is featured as a slogan. This is in accordance with the development of *tabunka kyōsei* as a keyword for provision of multilingual information and consultation services. Migrants from abroad face a number of problems as they settle in Japan ranging from issues concerning housing, work, social security and welfare, child rearing, education of children, and the maintenance of ethnic culture. Volunteer groups, NPOs, and local governments have organized services such as multicultural child-rearing spaces or free multicultural schools. *Tabunka kyōsei*, or either *tabunka* (多文化 multicultural) or *kyōsei* (共生 coexistence) alone, has also appeared as a title or slogan of events and festivals.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This social change is the manifestation of the increase in various activities across national borders in the economy, social, and cultural realms together with the movement of labor and increased immigration that generates problems caused by cultural friction. Hasegawa Koichi, "Globalization, Minorities, and Civil Society: Perspectives from Asian and Western Cities," *The Center for the Study of Social Stratification and Inequality*, Tohoku University, 2008, Volume 8, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Kashiwazaki Chikako, "Multicultural Discourse and Policies in Japan: An Assessment of Tabunka

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This article will focus on highlighting problems faced by Tohoku University Muslim students in Sendai while performing their prayers in the midst of Japan's *tabunka kyōsei*<sup>3</sup> policy as a strategy to create mutual understanding between Japanese society and foreigners in a heterogeneous environment.

Focusing on Tohoku University Muslim students, this article attempts to explore the problems they face while they perform prayers in the framework of either a national university or a local government and how Japanese people react even though *seikyō bunri*<sup>4</sup> binds their social structure.

Finally, it is important to note that this article is not meant to defend or discard the program enacted by Miyagi prefecture and Sendai's city government. This article only aims to describe the current social realities from a religious studies based on perspective research findings and provide new perspectives to the government. Furthermore, this research aims to encourage organizations to rethink improvements regarding *tabunka kyōsei* movements in the future.

## 2. Historical and Social Background of *Tabunka Kyōsei* Movement in Japan

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, foreigners were allowed to enter Japan for trade and political cooperation. Even though a new sense of pluralism emerged for Japanese regarding their foreign

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Kyōsei," *The Gakushuin Journal of International Studies*, Keio University, 2016, Vol. 3, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Derived from *tabunka* 多文化 which means multicultural and *kyōsei* 共生 which means coexistence, or living together. Based on Japan Research Meeting Report on the Promotion of Multicultural Coexistence which has published in March 2006, "tabunka kyōsei refers to people of different cultures and ethnic backgrounds living alongside one another as contributors to civil society, and the building of bridges between each other through the acceptance of each other's culture." (*kokuseki ya minzoku nado no kotonaru hito-bito ga, tagai no bunka-teki chigai wo mitome-ai, taitō na kankei wo kidzukō to shinagara, chiiki shakai no kōsei-in toshite tomo ni ikite iku koto* 国籍や民族等の異なる人々が互いの文化的違いを認め合い、対等な関係を気付こうとしながら、地域社会の構成員としてともに生きていくこと). *Tabunka Kyōsei no Suishin ni Kansuru Kenkyūkai Hōkokusho* 多文化共生の推進に関する研究報告書, Sōmushō 総務省, 2006.

[www.soumu.go.jp/kokusai/pdf/sonota\\_b5.pdf](http://www.soumu.go.jp/kokusai/pdf/sonota_b5.pdf) (Accessed 27 December 2018)

<sup>4</sup> *Seikyō bunri* (政教分離) means separation between state and religion. The General Headquarters of the Allied Powers had issued a directive instructing the Japanese government to stop providing special support and supervision to Shintoism in 1945. Paragraph 1 of Article 20 states the basic principle that no religious organization shall receive any privilege from the state nor exercise any political authority, and the following paragraph specifies that no person shall be compelled to take part in any "religious act, celebration, rite or practice". Paragraph 3 of Article 20 draws a corollary therefrom and sets a limit on governmental conduct: "The State and its organ shall refrain from religious education or any other religious activity". Article 89, "no public money or other property shall be expended or appropriated for the use, benefit or maintenance of any religious institution or association, or for any charitable, educational or benevolent enterprises not under the control of public authority." Keisuke Mark Abe, "Separation of Church and State in Japan: What Happened to the Conservative Supreme Court?," *St. John's Law Review*, 2011, Vol. 85, No. 2, Article 2, p. 451.

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relations, migrants were still isolated from the Japanese public and were rarely found outside established ethnic enclaves. Followed by strong developments of the Japanese military, Japan colonized Taiwan, Korea, and parts of China in the first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Citizens of those countries were sent to Japan and were employed in construction, mines, and steel factories.<sup>5</sup>

During the post-war era, Japan also struggled with an overpopulation problem between 1945 to 1950, when 6.25 million Japanese who were living abroad during the war returned to Japan, and another 6.4 million children were born in Japan. This social condition prompted the Japanese government to promote emigration policies to South America as a counter-measure.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, because of the sufficient amount of labor, Japan faced the fact that foreign labor was no longer needed to support its own working population. The Japanese government attempted sending most Koreans home or provided new legal status to those who chose to live in Japan as *tokubetsu eijūsha* (特別永住者 special permanent resident).<sup>7</sup>

The “economic miracle” of the late 1970s created a new social phenomenon. It began a flood of Asian migrants and refugees to Japan. Large numbers of Filipino, Thai, Chinese, and Korean women followed by women from Western and Eastern Europe and South Africa have legally and illegally worked in Japan's entertainment district.<sup>8</sup> In the same period, Japan accepted some Vietnamese refugees that exceeded the limited quota of 10,000 refugees.

More recently, oldcomer and newcomer terms appear in scientific fields related to Japanese migrants. The phenomenon possibly arose after the Sino-Japanese diplomatic relations were established in 1972 and a large increase in foreign migrants that followed in the 1980s. Japanese left behind in China after the war were allowed to “repatriate” back to Japan and bring their spouses, children, and even grandchildren as foreign migrants.<sup>9</sup> The oldcomer term was also used to refer to Koreans who received special permanent residency in Japan.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> H. Komai, *Foreign Migrants in Contemporary Japan*, Trans Pacific Press, 2001.

<sup>6</sup> Apichai W. Shipper, *Fighting for Foreigners*, Cornell University Press, 2008, p. 39.

<sup>7</sup> Glenda S. Roberts, “Immigration policy,” In Florian Coulmas et al., ed., *The Demographic Challenge: A Handbook about Japan*, 2008, pp. 765–779.

<sup>8</sup> This “economic miracle” created a surplus of capital and brought forth a more leisurely way of life at home and increased travel abroad. At this time, Asian entertainer, bar, and club hostesses were brought into Japan's large *mizu shōbai* (literally meaning “water trade” in entertainment districts or the sex industry). Robert Stuart Yoder, *Deviance and Inequality in Japan: Japanese Youth and Foreign Migrants*, University of Bristol, 2011, p. 61.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p. 61.

<sup>10</sup> Special permanent residency status did not qualify them for governmental jobs or voting rights, and they were still subject to discrimination from Japanese companies who refused to hire anyone but Japanese citizens. Ibid. p. 61.

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The newcomer boom started in the 1980s as an impact of the need for low-wage labor. Until the Japanese economic bubble in the early 1990s, Chinese, Korean, Filipino, Bangladeshi, Pakistani, and the first and second generations of Latin America *Nikkeijin* (日系人 of Japanese descent) came to Japan. The immigration law treatment applied to Latin America *Nikkeijin* as *teijusha* (定住者 permanent resident) that affected the numerous migrant populations mainly from South America who moved to Japan. However, this means that Latin America *Nikkeijin* are treated as newcomers with the same status as other laborers from Southeast Asia and the Middle East.<sup>11</sup>

### 3. *Tabunka Kyōsei* in Japan: National and Regional Level

#### 3.1 *Tabunka Kyōsei* on the National Level

In January 1995, the Great Hanshin Awaji Earthquake occurred in the Kansai area. The disaster left problems of not only fundamental reconstruction efforts but also of foreigners who needed help and support in the recovery. Many foreigners were equally victims, most of them who could not access information on earthquake disasters and relief because they could not understand Japanese. In order to support these people, local Japanese volunteers immediately built a “Foreigners Earthquake Information Center,” founded in Osaka. In October of the same year, this center was renamed the “*Tabunka Kyōsei* Center.”<sup>12</sup>

As explained above, *tabunka kyōsei* movements were first a local Japanese group initiative to raise awareness about the presence of immigrants in local communities. It was in 2005 that the Japanese government officially took up the concept of *tabunka kyōsei*. In the same year, the Japan Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication (MIAC) established a “Research Group on the Promotion of *Tabunka Kyōsei*.” In the following year this research group published its first bulletin report titled “To Promote Multicultural Symbiosis in the Regional Level.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Kajita Takamichi 梶田孝道, Tanno Kiyoto 埴能清俊, Higuchi Naoto 樋口直人, *Kao no Mienai Teijūka: Nikkei Burajiru-jin to Kokka, Shijō, Imin Nettowāku* 顔の见えない定住化—日系ブラジル人と国家・市場・移民ネットワーク, Nagoya Daigaku Shuppankai 名古屋大学出版会, 2011, p. 118–119.

<sup>12</sup> Building on its expertise in the provision of multilingual information and consultation services, the Center gradually expanded its operations by opening several branch offices in areas such as Kyoto, Osaka, Hyogo, and Tokyo. These community building and support activities after the Hanshin Awaji Earthquake helped raise awareness of the presence of immigrants or foreign residents in local communities. At the same time, they had the effect of strengthening the connotation of *tabunka kyōsei* with issues concerning non-native Japanese speakers. Kashiwazaki Chikako, “Multicultural Discourse and Policies in Japan: An Assessment of *Tabunka Kyōsei*,” *The Gakushuin Journal of International Studies*, Keio University, 2016, Vol.3, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> In Japanese, this bulletin report is named *Chiiki ni okeru Tabunka Kyōsei no Suishin ni Mukete* 地域における多文化共生の推進に向けて [www.soumu.go.jp/kokusai/pdf/sonota\\_b5.pdf](http://www.soumu.go.jp/kokusai/pdf/sonota_b5.pdf) (Accessed 27 December

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The report states that local governments need to address the issues of promoting *tabunka kyōsei* from three main points: communication support, living support, and creating communities based on multicultural coexistence. Along with this, to promote *tabunka kyōsei* activities in every area, this bulletin report also gives an overview of the improvement system to manage and measure the *tabunka kyōsei* activities by focusing on the local government as the driving wheel. With the momentum of the Great East Japan Tsunami and Earthquake in 2011, the bulletin report published in 2013 emphasized the importance of responding to foreign residents in the event of a disaster.<sup>14</sup>

Since the 2000s, study courses and research groups related to *tabunka kyōsei* formed not only the MIAC but also at national universities around Japan. Nagasaki University established the Faculty of Multicultural Society and *Kyōsei Bunka* Course.<sup>15</sup> Tokyo Gakugei University also began its *tabunka kyōsei* education course; which was followed by other universities with similar courses and teaching patterns. It shows that the Japanese Ministry of Education realized the importance of education related to *tabunka kyōsei*.

### 3.2 *Tabunka Kyōsei* on the Regional Level: Miyagi *Tabunka Kyōsei* Program

#### 3.2.1 Miyagi *Tabunka Kyōsei* Background and General Purposes

When this program was first formed in 2009, the foreigner population in Miyagi was 15,976, or 0.68% of the total population. Despite the number of foreigners increasing by 491 within five years, the number of the Japanese population decreased by 22,088 since 2004. Regarding the nationalities of foreign residents, in 2009, Korean oldcomers were the largest population in Miyagi. This is followed by Chinese, Philipinos, and others from Asian countries. Almost 34% of them have legal status as a special permanent resident and the rest are international students, international married spouses, or expatriates.<sup>16</sup>

There are continuing misunderstandings and anxieties towards foreigners. Common comments include “we do not need foreigners,” “before you support foreigners, you have to support Japanese first,” or “I am worried about our environment’s safety because of the increase

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2018).

<sup>14</sup> In Japanese, this bulletin report is named *Hisaiji no yori Enkatsu na Gaikokujin Jūmin Taiō ni Mukete* 被災時のより円滑な外国人住民対応に向けて [www.soumu.go.jp/main\\_content/000194572.pdf](http://www.soumu.go.jp/main_content/000194572.pdf) (Accessed 2 January 2019).

<sup>15</sup> *Kyōsei Bunka* 共生文化 here means the mutually symbiotic culture.

<sup>16</sup> Miyagi Prefecture. *Miyagi Tabunka Kyōsei Shakai Suishin Keikaku* 宮城多文化共生社会推進計画, 2009, p. 3. <https://www.pref.miyagi.jp/soshiki/ftp-kokusai/plan-multi.html> (Accessed 2 January 2019).

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of foreigners.” Even more foreign residents complained mostly about discrimination, prejudice, and indifference from the environment.<sup>17</sup>

Moreover, problems arising from foreign residents are not only related to their social environments. The language barrier is a serious concern for foreigners in Japanese society. Although oral communication is not a serious problem, the foreign residents are worried because they cannot read and write Japanese characters. The possible main cause of this language problem is because foreign residents do not have sufficient language education. This language barrier problem happens to international marriage couple and foreign workers, as well. Most of them are from South East Asian Countries or countries who do not have Kanji as their language background.

Another problem that is seriously concerning is domestic violence and the increase of divorce rates among international marriage couples. *Miyagi Gaikokujin Sōdan Senta* (宮城外国人相談センター Miyagi Foreigner Discussion Center) often receives many calls and discussions from foreign residents who were married to Japanese. Most of them are women.<sup>18</sup>

With these various problems and considering the globalization that affected Miyagi prefecture's socio-economic sectors among the advancing aging population of Japan and declining birthrate, Miyagi prefecture started to realize a multicultural society through its *tabunka kyōsei* program with the aim to enrich and create a vibrant region, regardless of people's nationality or ethnic differences.

### 3.2.2 Miyagi *Tabunka Kyōsei* Program Implementation

Based on the aforementioned social issues, Miyagi Prefecture divided its program into three main strategic focuses. First, to enhance mutual understanding between local Japanese and foreign residents through symposium and mutual activities with *Ishiki no Kabe* (意識の壁 Consciousness Barrier) strategy. Second, the *Kotoba no Kabe* (言葉の壁 Language Barrier) strategy to fulfill the lack of language education for foreign resident through Japanese language course activities. Third, through the *Seikatsu no Kabe* (生活の壁 Life Barrier) strategy, the government will provide skill acquisition activities mainly for maintaining family life for those foreign residents who are married

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<sup>17</sup> This is based on a survey conducted by Miyagi Prefecture before creating *tabunka kyōsei* program as written in *Miyagi Tabunka Kyōsei Shakai Suishin Keikaku* 宮城多文化共生社会推進計画. Ibid, p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> Miyagi Prefecture. *Miyagi Tabunka Kyōsei Shakai Suishin Keikaku* 宮城多文化共生社会推進計画, 2009, p. 10. <https://www.pref.miyagi.jp/soshiki/ftp-kokusai/plan-multi.html> (Accessed 2 January 2019).

to Japanese.<sup>19</sup>

Representatives from various institutions are chosen to monitor the implementation of each strategy,<sup>20</sup> and the government forms a task force for each division to monitor every activity.<sup>21</sup> Based on the 2016 *tabunka kyōsei* activity report,<sup>22</sup> *Ishiki no Kabe* (Consciousness Barrier) activities include *tabunka kyōsei* symposium, raising *tabunka kyōsei* awareness to school teachers and local Japanese through the distribution of posters and pamphlets, holding training of citizen center workers, and making networks within society to spread and strengthen *tabunka kyōsei* awareness.

Regarding the *Kotoba no Kabe* (Language Barrier) strategy, Miyagi Prefecture is concerned with strengthening knowledge of disaster awareness by gathering interpreters and translators to create multilanguage support.

The *Miyagi Gaikokujin Sōdan Senta* (Miyagi Discussion Center for Foreign Residents) plays a role in providing multilanguage discussion regarding life problems and holds a *kenshukai* (研修会 training) for local Japanese to enhance awareness regarding common issues related to foreign residents. This program was a part of the *Seikatsu no Kabe* (Life Barrier) strategy.

#### 4. *Ikyō* Newcomer and Their Religious Practices

Recently, the socio-religious study scholar, Miki Hizuru<sup>23</sup> has raised new migrant issue awareness from a social and religious studies point of view. In the mid-1980s, when newcomers from Asia and the Middle East arrived in Japan, coupled with the arrival of international students from Islamic countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia among them, many people who are

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid. (Accessed 2 January 2019).

<sup>20</sup> The monitoring committee called *shingikai* consists of a university professor, school teacher, and worker from the discussion center for foreign residents in Miyagi, a company who has international relations or international branches, and person in charge from Miyagi Prefecture labor department. The committee term limit is 2 years. See <https://www.pref.miyagi.jp/soshiki/ftp-kokusai/advisory-committee.html> (Accessed on 9 January 2019).

<sup>21</sup> Based on *Tabunka Kyōsei Shakai Suishin Keikaku* 宮城多文化共生社会推進計画, the divisions are including municipal, Miyagi Prefecture, Miyagi International Exchange Association, NPOs, and Tabunka Kyōsei Projects staff (Accessed 2 January 2019).

<sup>22</sup> Miyagi Prefecture. *Heisei 28 Nen-do Tabunka Kyōsei Suishin Jigyō ni tsuite* 平成 28 年度多文化共生推進事業について, 2017, p. 2. [www.pref.miyagi.jp/uploaded/attachment/634431.pdf](http://www.pref.miyagi.jp/uploaded/attachment/634431.pdf) (Accessed 3 January 2019).

<sup>23</sup> Miki Hizuru 三木英, *Ikyō no Nyūkama-tachi: Nihon ni okeru Imin to Shūkyō* 異教のニューカマーたち—日本における移民と宗教, Shinwasha 森話社, 2017, p. 15.



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religiously devoted continued to practiced their religion while in Japan. Miki found that many religious facilities were built in Japan by of the respective migrant communities to accommodate their religious practice. Here, Miki Hizuru called them “*Ikyō* newcomer,” a newcomer with different beliefs which is unfamiliar to Japanese society. Miki has given various examples through his research about religious facilities that have used or been built by *Ikyō* newcomers inside Japan.

Sri Lankan migrants who were Theravadan Buddhist arrange their religious activities such as Vesak Day in Nobusadera Temple, which is located in Mount Ikoma, Osaka. Even though this is a Japanese temple, the Vesak Day is celebrated there because the priesthood has a deep interest with Sri Lanka and together with the Sri Lankan community, built *Samaranka Kyōkai* as an expression of togetherness and cultural exchange.<sup>24</sup>

Brought by a migrant from Peru, *Movimiento Misionero Mundial* or abbreviated as MMM is a Christian Pentecostal Cult which is based in Central America and has its headquarters in Puerto Rico. In Japan, MMM has 11 locations for their religious activities, located in places such as Shinagawa and Saitama. Through Miki's observations, MMM activities such as reading the bible and listening to sermons by a priest are held almost every day and the followers are able to choose which day they can participate.<sup>25</sup>

Muslim migrants in Japan are commonly Pakistani and Bangladeshi who came to Japan during the bubble economy era. They brought their families and colleagues to Japan and built restaurants or started used car businesses. Muslim students from Asian Islamic countries, such as Malaysia and Indonesia, often continue their life in Japan as office workers or embassy officers. These devoted Muslim migrants also collect funds among the community and get support from the Islamic foundations inside and outside of Japan to build prayer buildings. Today, there are 80 Mosques of which almost 80% were built by donations and funds collected by the Muslim migrants.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid. p. 157.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. p. 289.

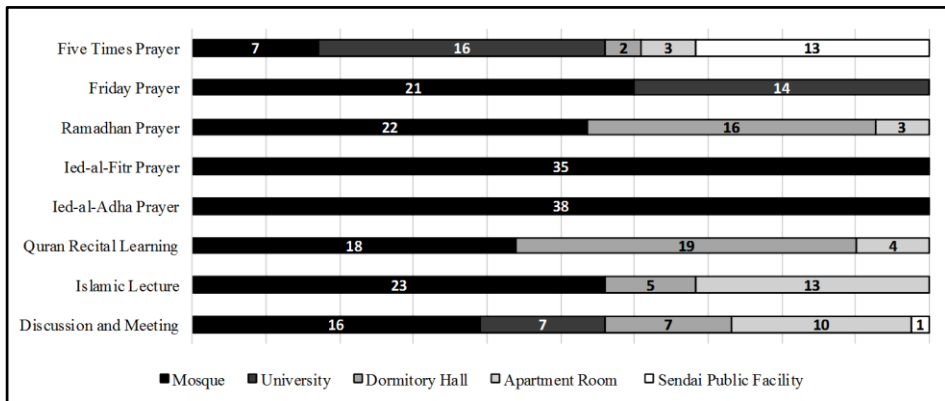
<sup>26</sup> Tanada Hirofumi 店田廣文, *Nihon no Mosuku: Zainichi Musurimu no Shakai-teki Katsudō* 日本のモスクー在日ムスリムの社会的活動, Yamakawa Shuppansha 山川出版社, 2015, pp. 36–37.

## 5. Tohoku University Muslim Prayer Survey and Investigation

### 5.1 Preliminary Survey Findings

Muslim religious practice, however, is different from other religions in several notable ways. Even though in Japan they often use their Mosque for communal prayer, sometimes they did not use a Mosque as prayer space because of daily life or distance from such facilities. Generally, prayer five times per day is an obligation which is a part of five pillars that all observant Muslims must follow. In Islamic countries, *Adzan*, or a call for prayer, can be heard when the prayer times arrive. People are able to use the nearest Mosque or *Mushalla*<sup>27</sup> to perform their five-times-daily prayer.

The situation is different when they are in non-Islamic countries, such as Japan. Based on a preliminary survey through a questionnaire and interviews conducted in 2016 with forty-one Muslim students and workers in Sendai, most of them were using a Sendai mosque just for annual religious communal prayer times, such like Eid-al-Fitr and Eid-al-Adha prayers or performing communal Friday prayers and Ramadhan prayers. For their five-times-daily prayers, they often used university facilities or Sendai public facilities in the middle of their daily activities.



**Figure 1:** Preliminary survey result about the use of Sendai Mosque.

A student from Afghanistan commented that “it is too far to go to the mosque, I have class, and am busy with research activities.” Other survey participants from Pakistan argued that “because the Sendai mosque is far, I just go to Sendai mosque for Eid Prayer.” A Tohoku University

<sup>27</sup> A little space for performing five-times-daily prayer. In Islamic countries, this space is often found in department stores, malls, or other public facilities.

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student from Indonesia also gives the same thought about the difficulties to perform prayer in Sendai Mosque because of its distance. He said, “almost always because it is too far and I go there by purpose.”

	Prayer Time	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
Fajr Prayer	3:00 am - 4:30 am							
Dzuhur Prayer	11:45 am - 12:45 pm							
Asr Prayer	2:45 pm - 4:00 pm							
Maghrib Prayer	5:15 pm - 6:15 pm							
Isya' Prayer	7:00 pm - midnight							

**Figure 2:** Respondent fill-in sheet about the location where prayer is performed in one

Based on these facts, the author tried to find out more evidence about how they perform prayer in universities and Sendai public facilities. In 2017, 21 Tohoku University Muslim student respondents from different departments and nationalities completed a questionnaire survey and interview. The questionnaire was divided into three questions. For the first question, the respondents had to fill in the blank column about where they perform their five-times-daily prayer during the week. For the second and third questions, they have to give a reason why they choose that place and describe any comments about performing prayer in Japan.

1	<b>Mosque</b>
	Masjid, Mosque, Sendai Mosque
2	<b>Dormitory</b>
	Apartment, Dormitory, Friends Apartment, Friends House, Home, IH Common Room, My Room IH 1, My Room IH 2, Sanjo IH 1, Jamak (My Room IH 1)
3	<b>Tohoku University</b>
	Agriculture Praying Room, AMC Building Katahira 3rd Floor, Aobayama Taiikukan, Campus, ECO Lab, Empty Class Room, Engineering Dept 5th Floor, Global Exchange, Global Learning Kawauchi Library, Global Learning Room, Graduate School of Agriculture, GSIS Building Aobayama, Hazaka Plant Laboratory, International Center, International Support Room Agricultural Building 2nd Floor, Kawauchi Campus, Kawauchi Campus Library Corner, Kawauchi Library, Kawauchi Library 2nd Building, Kawauchi Multimedia Building, Lab, Lab building, Lab building stairs to rooftop, Laboratory, Mechanical Engineering Praying Room, Relaxation room same floor of my lab, Seiryō Campus Archive Room, University
4	<b>Sendai City</b>
	AEON 8th floor near the stairs, AEON fitting room 2nd floor, Changing Room FUJISAKI 2nd floor, Disable toilet in public space, Elpark Mitsukoshi, Fitting room of FUJISAKI Store Clissroad, Fitting room UNIQLO, Harakara Welfare Funaoka, In my friends car, Kitayama Shimin Center, Ogawara Park, Part time work place empty room, UNIQLO fitting room.
5	<b>Other</b>
	JAMAK (attend the party), Menstruation

**Figure 3:** Categorization based on prayer space survey results.

After processing the results of data from the survey, the author divided it into five categories based on places where they performed their daily prayers: in a Mosque, a dormitory room, inside Tohoku University, within a Sendai city public facility, and other, for a respondent who answered as menstruation<sup>28</sup> and *Jamak*<sup>29</sup> that prevented that person from performing prayers.

A follow-up investigated was held regarding how prayer were performed in university libraries, lab buildings, inside UNIQLO fitting rooms, and within toilets for the disabled because there were many interesting answers revealed from the second and third questions regarding the difficulty and challenges of choosing places to perform their five-times-daily prayers in Tohoku University facilities and Sendai City public facilities. Furthermore, Japanese employees and professors were interviewed about how they accommodate prayer activities.

## 5.2 Direct Investigation: Tohoku University and Sendai City Public Facility

### 5.2.1 Tohoku University Investigation

Inside the university, Muslim students can freely perform their five daily prayers where professors in each lab try to provide a place of worship in the empty room beside the lab or inside the faculty building. However, how each professor handles this situation is different in every lab. For example, the Department of Science in Tohoku University's Aoba Campus is known to have many international students and a room is provided with usage limited only to students who are a part of that lab. Different rules were found in Seiryō Campus's Faculty of Dentistry where people can freely use the prayer room from 09:00 am to 05:00 pm. In regards to this one respondent said that "there are places which are open to the public and I can use it for a minute without bothering many people. So I can comfortably pray and its clean and quiet."

Another respondent provided their impression: "I know that place from my senior classmate. The reason it is good, is that it is clean, and has facilities like *Sejadah* (carpet for prayer). It's clean, even if many people are passing by. I think it is a proper place to pray."

Different from the situation in the lab, Tohoku University Kawauchi Campus Library provides free space in which Muslims can perform prayer freely without bothering other students. Here, Muslim students are often performing their prayer in the corner of the library or making a

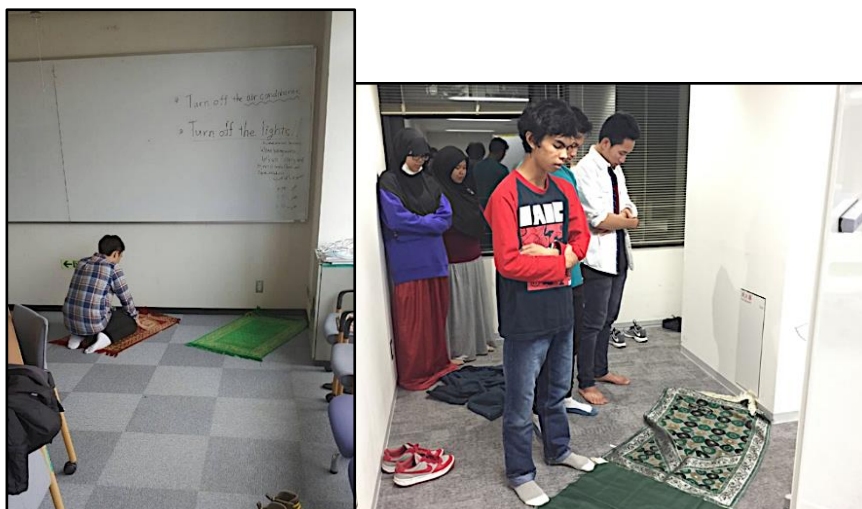
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<sup>28</sup> In Islam, women are not allowed to perform prayer or enter mosque during their menstrual period.

<sup>29</sup> *Jamak* or *Jama'* is combining *Dzuhr* with *Asr* prayer (*Jama' Taqdim*) and *Maghrib* with *Isya'* prayer (*Jama' Ta'khir*). It is not applicable to *Fajr*. A *Musafir*, or traveler, is allowed to *Jama'* his or her prayer, regardless of whether he or she is on the move or during a stopover.

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barrier with a movable whiteboard in the Global Learning Room so that they do not draw attention from other people.



**Photograph 1:** Actual condition of performing prayer in the empty room provided by the lab (left) and in the corner of the library building (right).

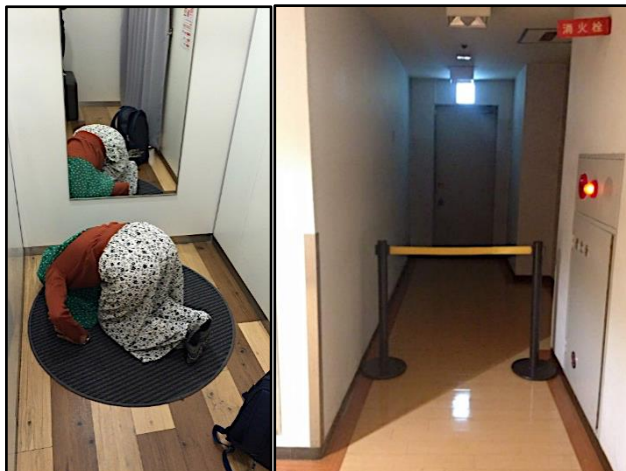
In an interview with a Seiryō Campus Faculty of Dentistry International Exchange professor, the increase in Muslim students in Seiryō Campus has encouraged herself and several other employees to provide a prayer space inside the building. Before the prayer space was built, many employees had seen Muslims performing their prayer in the hallway or near dirty toilets. The Tohoku University Kawauchi Library employee said that after seeing many students performing prayers inside the library building, along with the other employees, they decided to provide a common room in the building. However, this idea was ultimately disallowed because of the rules of *seikyō bunri* that bind Tohoku University as a national university.

In line with the opinion from the library employee, a Tohoku University Advanced Liberal Arts Education and Global Learning Center Student Support professor said that, due to *seikyō bunri* regulations, the national university is not allowed to build a permanent religious facility. However, every lab which has Muslim students is allowed to build nonpermanent spaces to enhance their understanding of Islamic rituals and knowledge.

### 5.2.2 Sendai City Public Facility Investigation

The questionnaire survey responses are different regarding where prayers were performed while the respondents were in Sendai city. For example, one respondent stated that “when we are in the middle of the city, and its hard to find empty or proper spaces, the emergency exit is a good choice, but sometimes I feel insecure about if people are *gonna* come in. My experience when doing prayer in the emergency exit was that a security man came in and asked to have a conversation. Lol.”

One day, the author had an opportunity to see an actual prayer being performed by a respondent during the *Dzuhur* prayer, which she had to perform at around 12 to 1 pm. She decided to pray inside a Uniqlo fitting room. She said, “I feel inconvenienced whenever I spend much time outside the dorm and campus. It is hard to find a place to pray. I heard that once my friend was warned by the security because he performed prayer in the emergency exit. So, because of that experience, I prefer to pray in the fitting room. It is not spacious, so that is an inconvenience. Besides that, I have to wudhu in a toilet sink, and people will stare at me.”



**Photograph 2:** Actual condition of performing prayer inside Uniqlo fitting room (left) and prohibited line at Sendai LOFT 5<sup>th</sup> floor after security found someone performing prayer

A Turkish Muslim student explained her experiences. On the questionnaire she wrote that she had to perform prayer inside the toilet for the disabled. She said that “praying in public spaces is a little bit of a problem. Taking *Vudu* (ablution) in a public toilet is even a bigger problem. I prefer

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a place where people cannot see me since Japanese people might not know and understand what I am doing. They might disturb me or get disturbed by my actions. My Turkish friends recommended toilets for disabled to me, which are roomy, provide plenty of privacy and I can take *Vudu* there as well. Even if they are relatively clean and have plenty of space, they are still toilets, and a praying place must be very clean and nice, so a toilet is not that place. However, on many occasions when I am in public, I have to use that way.”

To draw some conclusions from some of the survey comments above, most of the respondents preferred to choose a hidden place because they felt insecure about how Japanese people will react. The worst thing is, in some places, when the security or workers find Muslims performing prayer in the building, they will try to close the area by putting up a line barrier or warning individuals not to perform prayer (see **Photograph 2**).

In December 2017, the author had a chance to meet with the Vice Governor and Sendai City Mayor regarding problems associated with the increased Muslim population. On that occasion, a discussion was held regarding the fact that there are hurdles and problem faced by Muslims when they perform prayers in Sendai because of the lack of proper spaces to perform prayer. From the discussion, both vice governor and Sendai's Mayor expressed their thought that as a *seikyō bunri* nation, it would be hard to build prayer space in every public facility. However, they said that they would welcome Muslim migrants and international students to Miyagi and Sendai to live safely, and they promised to guarantee the freedom to practice religion.

## 6. Conclusion

For Muslims, prayer five times per day is an important religious practice. Moreover, as part of fundamental faith, it is an act based on Islamic doctrine. On performing prayer five times, each practitioner believes they are in direct contact with God. To perform prayer, there is no need for a priest as an intermediary, and it is necessary to perform it everywhere when it is still on time. There is no exception to perform the five-times-daily prayer for those who come to Japan as employees, for training, or as international students. In other words, the five-times-daily prayer in Muslim life is a custom required in their daily life no matter the culture where they reside.

Based on the direct investigation in Tohoku University, even though there are no official prayer facilities because of *seikyō bunri* rules inside a national university, professors from each laboratory, the faculty member, and library staff are considering the needs of Muslim international

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students. Furthermore, they are trying to provide opportunities for their religious practice by offering empty rooms or just understanding the custom. These considerations are probably because of the increase of Muslim students from Islamic countries.

Very different from within Tohoku University, Muslims must find hidden places to perform five-times-daily prayers when they were elsewhere in Sendai. This condition has developed because of many bad experiences that Muslims faced while performing their prayers. Lack of knowledge and unfamiliarity with Muslim religious practice led some workers in Japanese society within Sendai to offer warnings and not provide the opportunities for Muslims to perform their religious obligation. Moreover, skepticism is more often directed at Muslim women who wear hijab.<sup>30</sup> So, such Muslims prefer to choose a place where they are shielded from other Japanese.

In Japanese society, Islam is not yet a familiar religion. In the middle of terrorism by Islamic extremists which often appears in Japanese news, understanding and consideration from Japanese society towards Islam and Muslims is not easy. On the other hand, the reality is that international students and workers from Islamic countries are increasing every year, and Japanese society is expected to provide equitable support to students and workers.

By reviewing the *tabunka kyōsei* program in Miyagi Prefecture and considering the increase of *Ikyō* newcomers in Japanese society, the author invites the readers to rethink its implications. The author, moreover, asserts that it is time for Japan to consider a taskforce regarding its *tabunka kyōsei* program which will aim for a mutual understanding with various constituents through discourse about foreign religions and their practices to break through misconceptions.

Activities involving both Muslims and non-Muslim Japanese are still an effective way to improve and deepen mutual understanding. Intercultural discussions, seminars, or interfaith dialogue would also be an effective way for Japanese educational institutions and local authorities under *seikyō bunri* rule which cannot provide official prayer space in the public facilities. Creating a society with a greater understanding of foreign cultures and religious practices amidst secular rules will provide comfort to foreigners, including Muslims trying to perform their prayer without causing anxiety. Of course, cooperation by intellectuals and researchers with local governments should be expected and fruitful to the continued dialogue.

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<sup>30</sup> This is a common situation occurring in America after 9.11. As many as 35 of the 40 female Muslim students expressed some form of anxiety regarding wearing hijab. Muslim female college students also reported to consistently hear the phrase “Go back to your country!” which is consistent with xenophobic ideologies which promote intolerance, hatred, and disgust for groups perceived to be of immigrant origin. Yoruba T. Mutakabir, *Religious Minority Students in Higher Education*. Routledge, 2016, p. 30.