# Educational Issues for Muslim Children in Japan

1. Motives and objectives of research

Now 100,000 to 200,000 Muslims live in Japan. However, Japan has not provided their children with an educational environment suitable to Muslims' culture and religion, making them difficult to attend school. I visited a mosque in Osaka to do fieldwork and asked questions to the mosque staff, "What troubles do Muslims have about life in Japan?" They answered that because Japanese schools do not consider Muslims lifestyle, their children cannot attend school, so they must return their children to home country to receive education.

Because education has a large impact on career development, these children will be left out of their career formation, and as a result they may face difficulty in employment and social adaptability. "The right to receive education" stipulated in Article 26 (1) in the Constitution of Japan is needed for all people to be active in society. But the Constitution does not mention specifically about the foreign children's right to receive education. This is against fundamental human rights to be guaranteed for people regardless of their nationality.

Another problem in Japan is decreasing birthrates and aging population. The elderly aged 65 or over account for about 30% of the population (Fig. 1), and the number of children aged 15 or under are decreasing year by year. This is causing concerns about a future labor shortage. Although some measures are being taken to support the employment of women, the elderly and the youth, it is not enough to solve a labor shortage. Anticipating such a serious situation, the necessity of accepting foreign workers is being shouted loudly now. So, I think that improving education for Muslim children in Japan would lead to solving a labor shortage since we can expect an increase of Muslim workers. Therefore, I set two objectives for my research: guaranteeing human rights of Muslims in Japan by improving the education environment, and solving a labor shortage.

(Fig. 1)

Demographic pyramid in Japan 2015
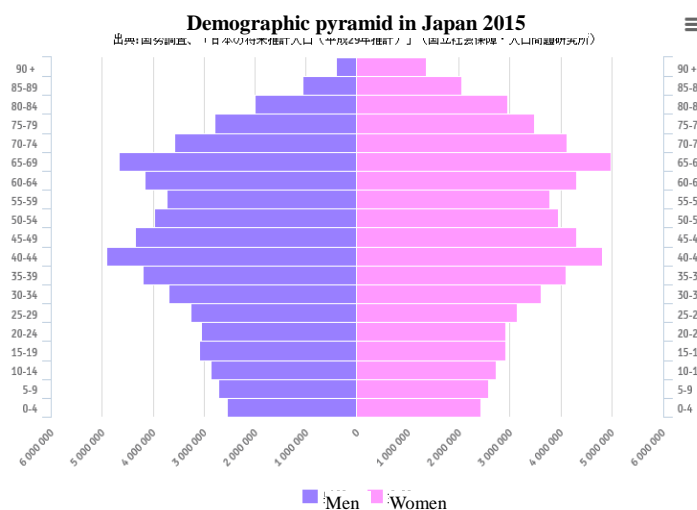
2.　　　Method of research

Aiming at realization of proper education corresponding to Muslims' lifestyle, I decided to do fieldwork by hearing Muslims' opinions and exchanging with Muslim students, to survey and analyze precedent studies and other countries' success stories, then to reconsider an education system to be incorporated into Japan.

3. Detail of research

When considering issues about Islam, an idea of "multiculturalism" is important. Mr. Tsuji (2013) defines this idea as "respecting and supporting minority groups' culture and communities, and integrating them into society as a whole" (p.168). The first half of the idea seems to have been recognized and shared widely, only which is not enough but the second half "Social integration" is important as well.

"Social integration" is a process that individuals accept the differences each other so as to be knitted into one society. For example, in order for Japanese and Muslims in Japan to live together in the same country, both of them need to recognize the basic principles of democracy: i.e., all people are equal; freedom of thought and belief is secured and accepted; and politics is secularism not to be based on religion. If people do not recognize these principles, insist their own culture and thought and push them on others, there might happen disputes and conflicts, making them live in the same society difficult. To live together in the same society, it is important to share these basic principles. This is called "Social integration."

Just respecting minorities' culture and community is not enough for "Social integration," bringing about possible isolation of a community. If the community of a minority group alone is formed, it will be difficult for the members to receive sufficient education or find employment, likely ending up their poverty or deteriorating public security. Therefore, "Social integration" is essential not only for protection of Muslims' human rights but also for peaceful coexistence of both Japanese and Muslims in Japan.

Based on the above view, I think that education based on multiculturalism will be beneficial. By the way, how has Japanese education been implementing?

Currently, Japan has been adopting an "Inclusive education system," in which lessons are conducted at the same place with no separation between Muslims and Japanese. This system has an advantage because intercultural understanding is deepened among students since they can receive education together. On the other hand, drawbacks that are they might suffer from cultural differences and Islamic students cannot receive the same lessons due to religious precepts. For instance, they cannot eat the same lunch as Japanese' or attend a PE/swimming class due to the prohibition of skin exposure. However, because there are differences in the strictness of religious precepts in Islam, not all Muslims can eat the same lunch or attend a PE/swimming class. It means consideration tailored to individuals is

needed.

In addition, there are some students who cannot understand Japanese enough to keep up in class. Poor Japanese ability is a grave problem. They will be isolated and would not be able to adapt to society when grown up. Thus, Japanese-language education is essential for "Social integration."

Currently, consideration to Muslim students has not been given enough due to a manpower shortage and system issues, although schools are making effort as much as possible.

So I would like to propose "separate-class education" to be added. This system has an advantage that students can concentrate on school activities without suffering from cultural difference, although intercultural understanding could be retarded because of no opportunity of exchanges among students. "Separate-class education" is likely better than "Inclusive education" for Muslims who are under strict religious precepts or those who cannot speak Japanese well.

Currently, France has been conducting "Separate-class education" for immigrant students with a poor French ability by providing a special class. Under this system, their ethnic and cultural identity has been kept and the language problem has been solved. I think this strategy might be effective in terms of educating everybody equally and of leading to "Social integration."

4. Results and challenges in research

As mentioned above, both "Inclusive education" and "Separate-class education" have pros and cons. The former can provide students with intercultural understanding while the latter can be helpful for students suffering from different culture. It would be effective to use these systems as needed, by taking advantage of the good points and making up for the shortcomings. Doing so, Muslims' right to receive proper education and their steady career development would be ensured. Also, this may realize multiculturalism, i.e., respect of minority's culture and community, "Social integration," and prevention of isolation of Muslims in Japan, which would consequently lead to solving Japan's labor shortage. This is my conclusion.

By the way, is it possible at all to provide "Inclusive education" and "Separate-class education" depending on circumstances, or to give Muslims in an economically tough situation the same sufficient education as Japanese receive? I will need to study further about these issues.

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