Introduction:
Islam and Cultural Diversity in Southeast Asia

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Islam in Southeast Asia

The main purpose of this volume is to explore various socio-cultural, historical, and political or public aspects of Islam and Muslim society in the context of quite diverse multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-religious situations among Southeast Asian countries. Please let me explain why we treat this subject. Firstly, I will outline the socio-cultural relevance of Islam as one of the dominant religions in the region.

In the popular perception and conventional mainstream media coverage in many western countries (including Japan), Islam is often conceived and described as a "religion of the Middle East" or "religion of the Arabs". This popular stereotype is not entirely baseless in terms of the religion's historical background. For example, Islam was originally derived - and propagated - in the Arabian Peninsula by Prophet Muhammad, an Arab. And its holiest text, namely the *Quran,* is written in classic Arabic. Historically, Islam was first consolidated among the Arabs in the seventh century, then rapidly developed into one of the most viable, great traditions. Additionally, the religious significance and centrality of Mecca in Saudi Arabia is without doubt for Muslims all over the world.

However, in terms of the religion's contemporary social reality, Islam can no longer be described simply as a "religion of the Middle East" or "religion of the Arabs". For example, let's consider the demographic reality of Muslims globally.

Arabian Muslims in the Middle East are a minority bloc in the "*Ummah*" (global Muslim community). For example, Muslim communities in South Asia (Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, etc.) are much larger in terms of demographic concentration. And of course we cannot ignore the importance of Southeast

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Asia as a significant region in this context. As is well known, the largest Muslim country in the world today is Indonesia. This country alone has around 200 million Muslims. In fact, Islam is the largest religion in Southeast Asia. Approximately 250 million Muslims make up around 40% of the region's total population. Therefore, the simple facts of demography, lend undeniable relevance to Islam in the contemporary social reality of Southeast Asia.

Secondly, the social relevance of Islam in the region does not only come from its demographic dimension. Islam has historically been an important basis of cultural identity in the region, alongside other major world religions or "great traditions" like Buddhism, Hinduism, and Christianity, blending often with "little traditions" of minor local beliefs or folk traditions in the region. Besides, Islam has also provided a source of cultural/social codes or moral or ethical values and norms for believers, including what one should or shouldn't eat, and so on.

Thirdly, Islam is relevant in Southeast Asia not only in the "cultural" or "religious" domain (especially in the conventional western sense of "religion" as a domain of individualistic "private" belief), but also in the more "public" sphere. By "public sphere" I mean collective social domains including politics, jurisprudence, education, economy and business, and so on. In some cases, Islam has been given a more official position prescribed by state laws or constitutions, as in the case of Malaysia and Brunei. In Muslim majority countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia, public discourses on Muslim consciousness or identity has become more visible and assertive in recent years. Active and intense debate continues in some Muslim majority countries in the region about the role and status of Islam in the public sphere; what kind of role Islam should (or should not) play. Related debates are also taking place on how Islam and modernity (e.g. democracy, economic development, civil society, globalization, etc.) could co-exist, adjust, coordinate, and so on.

The growing public relevance of Islam is exemplified by Islamic parties or political parties claiming Islam as an ideological principle becoming more active in some Muslim majority countries in the region, including Indonesia and Ma-

laysia.

Even in countries where Muslims constitute small minorities, like the Philippines and Thailand, the social and public relevance of Islam is still undeniable. In both countries, for example, Islam has established a long history of its own, and Islam in these countries maintains its own unique distinctive cultures, traditions, and identities.

Especially in the context of identity politics, Islam has been an important cultural base for identity formation of marginalized minority Muslims. For example, as I explain in my own chapter on the Moros (Muslims in the Philippines) in this volume, Islam has often provided a socio-political and ideological framework in the context of the Muslim secessionism struggle of the Moros, who are marginalized in the Christian-dominated mainstream society of the Philippines. In this sense, Islam has been quite relevant in the context of conflict and peace-building, even in some countries where Muslims are a small minority. Therefore, in this volume we include not only chapters on Muslim majority countries like Indonesia and Malaysia, but also several chapters on the Philippines and Thailand as well.

The public relevance of Islam is not limited to the domain of politics in Southeast Asia. Islam also plays notable roles in the realms of jurisprudence, education, and economy or business. Jurisprudence based on *Shariah* (Islamic law) has become more visible not only in Muslim majority countries like Malaysia, but also in Thailand and the Philippines, as shown in the chapters by Mori in this volume. In the context of education, the system of *Madrasah* (Islamic schools) is expanding in many areas in the region. Finally, the relation between Islam and business activity has become one of the most popular and relevant topics in recent days, not only among academic researchers but also among business sectors in many countries, including Japan. For example, it is not uncommon nowadays for Japanese companies, including those in finance and tourism, to discuss creating Islamic financial systems for the ASEAN market, or to promote "*halal* tourism" to Muslim tourists visiting Japan from Southeast Asian countries.

Cultural Diversity in Southeast Asia

The second important subject of this volume is the issue of cultural diversity in Southeast Asia. I already pointed out that Islam is the largest religion in the region in terms of population. However, Southeast Asia is far from a monolithic region. As a matter of fact, Southeast Asia is one of the most culturally diverse areas in the world. In terms of linguistic diversity, for example, it is quite easy to discern this. We can count tens, if not hundreds, of local dialects in most ASEAN countries despite state policies of linguistic standardization and promoting official (national) languages by respective governments.

In the context of religious diversity, the situation is quite similar. For example, although Muslims are the dominant majority in several countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia, most countries in the region include vast populations who adhere to other various religions and beliefs. Most major world - or dominant - religions (so-called "great traditions" in anthropology) are visible in Southeast Asia, namely Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, etc. In addition, numerous "small traditions" or indigenous beliefs have been blended with major world religions. For example, anthropologists point out the existence of so-called "folk Catholicism" in the Philippines, animistic beliefs of spirits among Buddhists in Thailand, and so on. Even among the Muslim community, some observers point out the existence of so-called "folk Islam", which is a kind of syncretic amalgam of Islamic monotheistic doctrine and indigenous (pre-Islamic) belief in various super-natural beings and/or spirits, etc.

Diversity is also obvious in the context of ethnicity or ethnic-identity in the region. No single nation in Southeast Asia is a monolithic country in terms of its composition of ethnic-groups. In some countries, a certain ethnic group may occupy the position of dominant majority in terms of population or socio-political hegemony, for example, the Javanese in Indonesia, the Malays in Malaysia and Brunei, the Thais in Thailand, the Tagalog in the Philippines, and so on. However, all of these countries are multi-ethnic countries, which contain more than at least several different major ethnic (cultural-religious) groups. In a nutshell,

diversity is a norm, not an exception in most Southeast Asian countries.

In each country in the region, even majority dominant groups cannot ignore the simple fact of the multi-ethnic nature of their society. For governments of the region, important goals following independence are to promote nation-building sustainably, to maintain social order, and to promote economic development in spite of highly diverse, multi-ethnic populations. Some countries have been relatively successful in preserving multi-ethnic relations. For example, we could raise the cases of Malaysia and Singapore. Both countries could be described as highly multi-ethnic (or multi-cultural) societies even by Southeast Asian standards. Though they are not without tensions and challenges, both countries can vividly demonstrate to the world that ethno-cultural diversity itself is not an anathema to stable social order and sound economic development.

For some other countries, however, the situation is not so rosy. In the worst cases, failure to maintain harmonious relationships between majority and minority ethnic-groups has resulted in violent confrontations or even civil war. The Muslim secessionist conflict in Southern Philippines and social unrest in Southern Thailand are typical examples. Even in Indonesia, where "Unity in Diversity" has been an important national ideology for long time, ethnic-tensions and ethnic-violence have often become apparent in some areas, including Sulawesi, West Kalimantan, or even Jakarta just after the fall of Suharto regime.

In any case, no one can deny the social relevance of cultural and/or ethnic diversity in the region. Even when engaging in research on Islam, we should not ignore the undeniable fact that Muslims in Southeast Asia live in this highly diversified socio-cultural setting.

So far, by "cultural (or religious) diversity", I mean it mainly in the inter-cultural or inter-religious sense: Muslim and Non-Muslim relations and so on. "Inter-religious" diversity, if you want to call it that. This is, as previously mentioned, an important topic for scholars of Islam and Muslim society in the context of highly diversified socio-cultural situations.

However, the term "cultural diversity" is not limited to that connotation in

this volume. Additionally, we should not omit another important implication of the term, namely "intra-religious (cultural)" diversity. In the case of Islam in Southeast Asia, "intra-religious (cultural)" diversity means an existence of various orientations, values, cultural elements, trends, and sects among the actual beliefs, practices, identities, and groupings of Muslims within Islam itself. Though the overwhelming majority of Muslims are Sunnis (Shia Muslims are a tiny minority) in Southeast Asia, various different orientations and sub-groupings are still noticeable among Muslims in the region.

In Indonesia, the dichotomy of traditionalist/modernist is a popular example. Roughly speaking, those called "traditionalist" are Muslims who are relatively tolerant to traditional, folk, or even "pre-Islamic" elements among various Islamic practices and creeds. In contrast, "modernists" are stricter in rejecting those "traditional" and/or "pre-Islamic" elements. Sometimes, modernists are more "modern"-oriented, promoting a more "modern", "authentic" or "reformed" version of Islam in each area.

In connection to this, so called "*dawwah*" ("*dakwah*", "*da'wa*") or Islamic resurgence movements have become quite active in Southeast Asia, not only in Muslim majority countries but also in Muslim minority countries. Some of these movements have strong transnational connections to Middle Eastern, or South Asian Muslim groups and organizations. Generally speaking, they try to promote a more "authentic" or "correct" version of Islam, and criticize local, more syncretic folk-Islamic traditions in rural areas.

Secondly, "intra-religious diversity" is not limited to differences between cultural-religious orientations among believers of the same religion. Differences in historical background, socio-political position, and/or ethnicity are other important criteria. Thus, for example, the Aceh people in northern Sumatra have fought a severe battle of resistance against the central government dominated by the Javanese - the same Muslims - because of different historical backgrounds and socio-political positions within Indonesia. In the case of the Philippines, among the "Moros" or Philippine Muslims, one can still discern the existence of

at least 13 different ethno-linguistic groups. Often, this kind of ethnic diversity has significant socio-political relevance even among the same nationality, not to mention migrants or refugees from other countries.

Composition of this volume

As stated, this volume tries to focus on the complex social dynamics surrounding Islam and Muslim society in Southeast Asia. We will consider different aspects and facets of the social reality relating to Islam and the life of Muslims, including historical, political, social, and economic dimensions.

For this purpose, we have invited specialists of different disciplinary backgrounds. Most of the authors concentrate on each of four particular nation-states: Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines. However, some chapters also argue not just in the context of one specific country but in a more comparative or transnational context. We have invited specialists on Thailand and the Philippines in addition to Indonesian and Malaysian specialists, because we believe that studies on situations in Muslim minority countries are significant and indispensable for understanding a more precise picture of the contemporary reality of Islam and Muslim society in the region.

Secondly, to focus on socio-cultural diversity in both the "inter-religious" and "intra-religious" sense, we have invited not only specialists on Muslims, but also several authors who have actively studied Non-Muslim communities. For example, the chapter by Tsuda focuses on the Chinese in Indonesia and the chapter by Pugh-Kitingan explores the unique situation concerning the East Malaysian state of Sabah. We believe that the complex multi-cultural reality surrounding Muslim society can be understood better by expanding one's perspective to include points of view from Non-Muslim studies. In any case, as mentioned, Muslims in this region live not in a social vacuum, but in highly multi-cultural and ethnically diversified socio-cultural contexts.

Now, let me briefly outline each chapter in this volume. Firstly, the chapters by Kuroda and Suzuki trace the historical background of multi-cultural or

multi-ethnic reality relating to Muslims in Southeast Asia.

The chapter by Kuroda deals with the historical background of the complex multi-ethnic situation between Southern Thailand and the Malay Peninsula, focusing especially on the issue of migrants from South Thailand to Kedah since the nineteenth century. According to Kuroda, the 1911 census shows a large Malay population concentrating on the lowland-like twenty kilometre belt along the seashore. In contrast, inland Kedah is the domain of Thai speakers, both Thai-speaking Muslims (Samsam) and Siamese. For the first half of the twentieth century, they remained close as Thai-speakers, and the Government of Kedah could not control this area completely. Kuroda describes this very complex multi-ethnic composition in Kedah and traces the historical migration trajectories and process of its Thai-speaking Muslim migrants.

The chapter by Suzuki explores the historical trajectory of Muslim society in the Philippines, especially during American colonial times. Focusing on the colonial education of Muslim Filipinos under American rule, he discusses the interplay between the far-reaching effects of the modern public school system and the local development of Muslim identity. Suzuki argues that the American civilizing mission, however, was soon found to be far less benevolent than its intent as the American administrators involved in colonial education, whether explicitly or implicitly hostile to Islam, attempted to eliminate as much Islamic influence as possible when undertaking colonial projects.

Ogawa's chapter also deals with the problem of educating Muslims, but from a more contemporary perspective. He examines the case of Islamic education in Thailand within multi-cultural contexts. With Islamic basic education in Thailand as a case, his chapter describes the multi-cultural policy concerning Islamic basic education in Thailand, how this policy is carried out, how Muslims as stakeholders deal with this policy, what changes occurred in the state of Islamic basic education as a result, and so on. Some multi-cultural outcomes in Thailand based on the above policies are revealed in the chapter.

The chapter by Shioya describes the impact of Islam and modernity on Mus-

lim society in Indonesia from a grass-roots, ethnographic level, focusing on the recent change in Muslim wedding ceremonies and attire in Central Java, where Muslim women wear both Muslim-style veils and modern ethnic dress. According to Shioya, the current styles of wedding ceremonies and dress are more suited to the modern lifestyle of people in cities because it is more efficient than traditional ceremonies. These recent changes exemplify the modern characteristics of Islam and expression of Muslim identity in present day Java.

The chapter by Nishii also examines the issue of closing or veiling, especially the full covering of the face by Muslim women in Mae Sot, Southern Thailand. Veiling is a popular topic concerning Muslim women in general. It has been studied from various perspectives: religious symbolic studies, social women's status, gender studies, semiotic hermeneutics, and so on. However, the main purpose of her chapter is not to analyze the veiling phenomena itself, but to examine the transforming situation of Mae Sot as a living space of various kinds of people through analyzing the Muslim women who decide to cover their faces. By examining various related sub-topics such as the Islamic resurgence movement (*Da'wa*), relations between Thai Muslims and Burmese Muslims and so on, the chapter illuminates the complex dynamics of the multi-cultural situation concerning Muslims in contemporary Thailand.

The chapter by Mori describes the multi-cultural situation in the Philippines from legal perspectives. Being a religious minority, Muslims in the Philippines live in plural legal orders. By analyzing normative orders and practices, the chapter by Mori discusses how particular and universal values interact in the present context, especially on gender related issues. Her chapter focuses on some issues surrounding Muslim women in the Philippines in relation to international human rights discourse and movements, and clarifies the status quo and future prospects of institutionalizing legal pluralism in Muslim society in the Philippines.

The chapter by Tokoro deals with the issue of political relevance and/or implications of religious diversity in the Philippines, focusing on the re-emer-

gence of Islam among the "Moros" (Philippine Muslim) society in the context of the secessionist movement. In pre-colonial times, Islam had a strong influence among the Moros not only in the cultural or religious domains, but also in the broader socio-political and public domains in several ways. However, since the beginning of the twentieth century, the substantial influences and public significance of Islam in the public sphere has diminished considerably because of US colonization. That said, this process of de-facto "de-politicization" of Islam has notably reversed, as a consequence of both Muslim secessionism and the trend towards Islamic resurgence, which have both ethno-national and transnational characteristics. The chapter describes both the historical background and the contemporary reality relating to this resurgence and re-emergence of Islam as a socio-political ideology and social movement among the Moros in the Philippines.

The chapter by Azizah Kassim provides an account of the socio-economic and legal status of the Rohingya refugees in Malaysia, by examining their marriage patterns and explains why many, especially the men, are marrying out of their ethnic group. It will discuss the consequences of exogamic marriage, especially with foreign women in Malaysia, towards the status, identity, and rights of the wives and offspring involved. Her chapter shows the contemporary dynamics of the multi-ethnic situation relating to the issue of transnational migrants/refugees in Malaysia, an already highly multi-ethnic society.

The chapter by Fukushima examines corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities by Islamic financial institutions (IFIs) in Malaysia. In doing so, his chapter examines the kind of social justice shared within Malaysian society. According to him, IFI's CSR activities are a vehicle towards national unity and ethnic tolerance, and ultimately social justice for Malaysian society.

The chapter by Tsuda explores the issue of identity within the ethnic-Chinese minority in the Muslim dominated - yet still highly multi-cultural - social setting of Indonesia. Focusing particularly on two cases in Lasem (Central Java) and Singkawang (West Kalimantan) where "Chinese elements" are painted onto

batiks, the traditional wax-resist dyed fabric now deemed as the "essence of Indonesian culture". Though the chapter doesn't address the theme of Islam directly, the concrete ongoing cases and arguments pertaining to the cultural representation of the ethnic minority raised within it serves as a useful reference for understanding the cultural diversity in Southeast Asia.

The chapter by Pugh-Kitingan describes another unique situation of the cultural mosaic in Insular Southeast Asia. Focusing on the East Malaysian state of Sabah, she describes the highly diversified nature of its socio-cultural situation. Although Malaysia is basically a Muslim majority country, it is one of the most ethnically and culturally diversified countries. The East Malaysian state of Sabah is particularly interesting in its multi-cultural composition, which is very different to that of Peninsular Malaysia. Pugh-Kitingan's chapter elucidates a relatively less researched - but still important - part of the Malaysian ethnic mosaic from the viewpoint of a non-Muslim minority community within a Malay-Muslim majority country.

Concluding Remarks

Studying Islam and Muslim society in Southeast Asia is necessary for understanding Southeast Asian society in general, not only because it is a demographically dominant religion, but also because it is both an indispensable part of a unique cultural mosaic, and one of the bases for ethno-cultural identities in the region. Without understanding Islam and Muslim society, one is unable to grasp the whole picture of Southeast Asia. At the same time, one cannot fully grasp Islam and Muslim society in Southeast Asia unless one understands Islam in the multi-cultural contexts of this region. As I have already suggested, Muslims in Southeast Asia live not in monolithic cultural contexts but among most diversified cultures and ethnic identities. This is one reason why we present research on Non-Muslim groups (such as the ethnic-Chinese in Indonesia, or the Kadazans in Malaysia) in this volume. We believe these multi-ethnic or cross-ethnic research perspectives will produce understanding of both Islam and the cultural

diversity in the region. I hope that the present volume will be relevant for all readers who are interested in Islam and/or cultural diversity in Southeast Asia.

Acknowledgements

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