Article

Principles of Islam and Social Integration: A Conceptual Framework for Promoting Peaceful Coexistence in South Korea

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Abstract

The growth of Islam as a minority group in South Korea necessitates various efforts to ensure that the Muslim community is accepted as part of the broader societal framework. The recent indications of Islamophobia in Korea further emphasize the need to shape a positive image of Islam within Korean society. Fear and expressions of hatred towards Islam and Muslims can emerge as a result of misunderstanding, stereotypes, or misinformation. This article proposes the application of representative Islamic principles to foster positive relationships with the surrounding community. These principles include the principles of peace, multiculturalism, and the concept of rahmatan lil alamin (universal mercy). The implementation of these principles can serve as a foundation for Muslims to be accepted and coexist harmoniously with other groups. This is expected to provide a deeper understanding of the values of Islam as a conceptual framework for promoting harmony in a society characterized by cultural and religious diversity.

Keyword : Islam in South Korea, social integration, peaceful coexistence, multiculturalism, rahmatan lil alamin

Introduction

The evolving demographic landscape of the Islamic population in South Korea over the past two decades has created an intriguing phenomenon within the country's demographic and social context. Initially facing challenges as a religious and cultural minority within a predominantly different cultural and religious environment, the Muslim community, particularly through the transformative and inclusive approach of the Korea Muslim Federation (KMF), has successfully shaped positive dynamics within South Korean society (Paradays, 2022)

With the increasing number of Indonesian workers, particularly Muslim Indonesian nationals, in South Korea, the Muslim population continues to grow, reaching approximately 75,000 individuals or around 0.14% of the total population (Srimulyani, 2021). Although this proportion is relatively small, the significant growth reflects a broader acceptance of religious and cultural diversity in South Korean society. This positive acceptance creates harmonious dynamics that mirror the political will of the government to promote diversity and religious tolerance.

However, it does not mean that Muslims in Korea are free from challenges. Recent developments indicate that Islamophobia has become a serious concern for human rights activists and Muslim students. A notable incident is the strong opposition from some Daegu residents to the construction of a mosque near Kyungpook National University. In the past year, the local community aggressively rejected the project, using various tactics, including physical blockades and the display of provocative banners (Kyong, 2022).

A more distressing recent occurrence is the placement of pig heads at the mosque construction site on several occasions, creating tension and a sense of insecurity for Muslim students passing through the area daily for worship. Protesters displayed banners expressing their determination to resist mosque construction, featuring parts of pig bodies, indicating a high level of Islamophobic sentiments among some residents (Rashid, 2023).

This reality highlights the existence of serious challenges for the Muslim community in Korea. Muslims still face negative prejudices and stereotypes that can create discomfort in daily interactions. These issues often relate to a lack of in-depth understanding of Islam and Muslim culture.

Therefore, various efforts are needed to present a positive image

of Islam to erode prejudices and build harmonious relationships with a diverse religious and cultural background in the community. This includes efforts to provide positive representations of Islam in everyday life. By demonstrating an inclusive attitude, Muslims can help overcome negative stereotypes and prejudices associated with their religion.

This is where the importance of applying Islamic principles that support peace and tolerance becomes crucial, forming the foundation to combat Islamophobia and build social harmony. These principles not only support the acceptance of Muslims in South Korean society but also assist in changing perceptions and educating non-Muslim communities about the values upheld by Muslims.

This article aims to provide insights into Islamic principles that can serve as a foundation for establishing positive relationships with the surrounding community. This understanding also enables the exploration of Islamic values such as peace, tolerance, multiculturalism, and the concept of *rahmatan lil alamin*, which form the basis for harmony in religious life. These various understandings are expected to provide insights into the role of Muslims in fostering harmony in a society characterized by religious and cultural diversity.

Overview of the Development of Islam in South Korea

The development of Islam in South Korea over the past two decades reflects intriguing dynamics, particularly in the context of Muslim population growth. The native Muslim population of South Korea is approximately 35,000 people. South Korean Muslims originating from Indonesia outnumber the native population, reaching around 40,000 individuals (Kemenag RI, 2018).

Encounters between Islam and other majority religions in South Korea have led to cultural acculturation and assimilation. Interestingly, this cultural blending within the framework of Islam is not a sociological issue but rather serves as a robust foundation expressed in the spirit of preserving Islam in South Korea (Kholish & Rokhman, 2015).

The impact of global terrorism issues since 2003 has posed new challenges for Muslim Indonesian nationals in South Korea. They often face terror and isolation from the local community, especially those who choose to wear the hijab as a symbol of Islamic identity(Grayson, 2006). To overcome this negative stigma, Muslim Indonesian nationals and the Korea Muslim Federation (KMF) collaborate to enhance the positive image of Islam. Together, they actively campaign for an inclusive and tolerant Islamic theology, emphasizing rahmatan lil alamin . His

preaching is conducted in a modern, intense, and peaceful manner through education, mass media, the internet, culture, translation, and the publication of Islamic books in the Korean language. The results can rectify misunderstandings about Islamic information, familiarize non-Muslim Korean residents with Islamic culture, eliminate stereotypes, and even contribute to the growth of the Muslim population in Korea(Umayyatun, 2017).

The significant roles of Muslim Indonesian nationals and the KMF in improving the image of Islam in South Korea have proven successful. Islam is no longer identified as a religion associated with terrorism or considered as a backward and uncivilized faith. However, amid the growing interest in Islamic discourse, the tolerance exhibited by the South Korean government and society towards religious communities, especially Islam, remains a key determinant in strengthening harmonious relationships among diverse religious communities (Kemenag RI, 2018; Paradays, 2022; Umayyatun, 2017).

The importance of this tolerant approach is also reflected in concrete steps taken by the South Korean government, such as the establishment of Islamic schools in 2011 and the opening of a human rights complaints center specifically for the Muslim community. This Muslim human rights institution is the first of its kind in South Korea (Abeyasa, 2022).

The evolution of Islam in South Korea is intricately linked to the inclusive attitudes prevailing in society and the anti-discrimination measures implemented by the local government. Presently, the Muslim community in South Korea has grown to about 35,000 individuals, marking a trend towards more harmonious interfaith relations within the country. The receptive approach adopted by both the South Korean government and society, particularly towards religious groups like Islam, provides a robust framework for fostering collaborative ties with other nations predominantly inhabited by Muslims, including Indonesia (Abeyasa, 2022).

Islam and the Principles of Global Peace: Ontological Foundation for Indonesian Muslims in South Korea

The word "*salam*," which means peace in all its forms, is repeatedly mentioned in the Quran and is more often used as a noun than a verb. Because a noun is a substance, while a verb is an action, it can be said that peace, as indicated by the noun *"salam*," is a substance, a structure, and a world system that is not just an action. It is an objective reality, not

just a subjective mood (Madjid, 1999).

Islam, as the name of the religion, is formed from the same root as "*salam,*" meaning peace. Thus, Islam is a religion of peace. When Islam is embraced as a way of life by individuals or groups, it becomes an action and a way of life, whether singular or plural, male or female (Rohmah, Ismail, Kholish, & Novita, 2018). Al-Salam (the word "*salam*" prefixed with "al"), meaning "the peaceful," is one of the 99 names of Allah. This name is considered a universal code of peace ethics and a part of human behavior, both as individuals and as communities. Because the name of Allah is sacred, peace is a sacred and exalted name. A Muslim is not allowed to call themselves "al-Salam" because it is the name of Allah, but they can only call themselves "Abd al-Salam," which means the servant of the peaceful. A Muslim is a servant of the Peaceful, implementing the sacred name of Allah in their life and working for peace (Sukidi, 2001).

The way of greeting in Islam that maintains the relationship among fellow Muslims is "*al-salamu'alaikum*," meaning "peace be upon you." This greeting originates from the use in the Quran, derived from the verb "*sallam,*" which means to show respect. For example, a house is part of privacy. Therefore, no one is allowed to enter a house without permission from its occupant. Damaging, spying, disturbing, and various forms of privacy intrusion are against the concept of peace. Peace is not just a matter of International Law and International Relations among sovereign nations. Peace starts from within an individual, continues to develop within the family, and extends to social life (Qorib, 2010, p. 211).

Allah speaks to His Messenger with respect and full of greetings of peace. Allah declares with honor that the essence of His message is peace, where He will send a messenger of peace to the world and invite to a peaceful life. The inhabitants of paradise are greeted by Allah with a greeting of peace as a reward for their patience and peaceful behavior on Earth. Islam is an image of an ideal state where everyone can live in full peace. Paradise is called the "house of peace" or "*Dar-al-Salam*."

Peace can also be related to time, the universe, and the cosmos. Symbolically, peace is more needed in darkness than in brightness, just as peace is needed at night rather than during the day. In the dark, insecure atmosphere of night, the need for security increases. Peace must function especially in dark times, namely in situations of insecurity and in vulnerable conflict areas (Hick, (1985).

In the context of its implementation in South Korea, the genealogy of Islam in the Land of Ginseng can be accepted by the native South Korean population because Islam comes in a way of peace. The presence

of Islam in South Korea can be traced back to the 9th century, during the Silla dynasty, when trade contacts were established with Muslim communities in Persia and Iraq. Even in the Silla dynasty, Muslims were allowed to establish Muslim villages in the Land of Ginseng due to their peaceful and serene attitude at that time (Baker, 2006).

In the modern era, Islam entered and spread its presence in South Korea through the arrival of Turkish forces during the Korean War in 1950-1953. Turkey, as part of the UN forces, not only provided humanitarian aid but also brought principles of peace, harmony, and salam into South Korean society (Haq, 1985).

Under the leadership of imams such as Abdulgafur Karaismailoglu, they not only assisted in providing food and building schools but were also active in spreading the teachings of Islam. Their religious practices, such as congregational prayers, the call to prayer (*adhan*), and the recitation of the Quran, created a positive impression and sparked curiosity among the Korean people (Hadi, 2022).

The Turkish forces not only built religious facilities, such as mosques and schools, but also made positive contributions to social areas. By assisting widows and orphans and establishing schools like Ankara School, they spread messages of peace and compassion in the midst of Korean society (Umayyatun, 2017). These humanitarian actions not only garnered sympathy but also created a peaceful atmosphere that ultimately had a positive impact on the development of Islam in South Korea.

The preaching by Turkish forces created a Muslim community in South Korea that not only became part of the local community but also brought concepts of peace, harmony, and salam into daily life. By upholding these principles, Islam in South Korea grew into a positive force that enriched the culture and played a significant role in building harmony among diverse communities in the country.

Starting from these humanitarian contacts and peace initiatives, many South Koreans became interested in Islam, and not a few converted. In 1955, an organization was initiated by South Korean Muslim minorities under the name Korea Muslim Federation (KMF) or *Hanguk Isullam Gyo*. This organization aimed to serve as a basis and platform for the da'wah of Muslim minorities in South Korea (Kemenag RI, 2018).

At the peak of Islam's emergence in South Korea in March 1967, the South Korean government, under the Ministry of Culture and Communication, warmly embraced the introduction of this new religious entity. This pivotal moment was marked by the inauguration of the Korea

Muslim Federation (KMF).

Subsequently, the South Korean government consistently facilitated the establishment of places of worship. Notable instances include the allocation of a 1,500 m² land grant for the construction site of the Central Mosque by the late President Park Jung Hee in December 1974, the opening of a temporary mosque in Busan in December 1976, and the establishment of a temporary mosque in Yokri, Gwangju in April 1978. This positive trajectory continued with events such as the inauguration of the Al Fatah Mosque Council in Pusan in September 1980, the Kwangju Mosque in June 1981, and the annual W.A.M.Y. camp held from August 1983 to August 1985. Other milestones include the inauguration of the Anyang Rabita Al-Alam Al-Islami Mosque in April 1986, the Abu Bakar As-Siddiq Mosque in Jeon-ju in September 1986, and the organization of the Local W.A.M.Y Muslim Camp in August 1987 and 1988. Consequently, the progress of Muslims in South Korea has been highly noteworthy, and the endurance of their institutions has persisted and strengthened up to the present day (Hadi, 2022).

Islam and the Imperative of Multiculturalism: Epistemological Basis for Tolerant Indonesian Nationals in South Korea

Multiculturalism is explicitly configured in the Quranic verse Al-Hujurat, 49:13, which states (Baidhawy, 2003):

> "O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted." (Quran, Al-Hujurat/49:13)

Several things can be understood from the above verse. Firstly, the sequence of sentences in the verse explains the chronological flow of human life. In Al-Maraghi's interpretation, the term "male" refers to Adam and "female" to Hawa (Eve). In Al-Azhar's interpretation, *dzakakarun*, meaning male, is interpreted by Hamka as having a genuine meaning, i.e., the male itself, and *untsa,* meaning female, is also interpreted genuinely, meaning the female itself. Both meanings are analogized to signify that no human is created except through the combination of a male and a female. Their union results in the gathering of two fluids into one for 40 days, known as *nuthfah.* Then, for another 40 days, it becomes blood, and for the next 40 days, it becomes flesh. After these three sets of forty days – *nuthfah, 'alaqah*, and *mudghah* – humans are created, and life is breathed into them, leading to their birth in this world.

Next, the following sentence mentions that the term syu'ub linguistically in the verse means a large tribe descended from a single ancestor. In Ibn Kathir's interpretation, the term syu'ub has a broader meaning than the term *qabail* (tribes). However, some also argue that syu'ub refers to the inhabitants of other lands. From these interpretations, it can be deduced that, from a historical perspective, humans are fundamentally the same in terms of their origins, namely Adam and Hawa.

Thus, in the context of the above verse, Allah reminds humans that, fundamentally, they are the same in terms of their humanity. However, what distinguishes them is the quality of their piety. This difference is not based on nationality or tribe but on obedience to Allah and adherence to His Messenger.

The verse also emphasizes that the creation of humans into nations and tribes, both large and small, is not meant to keep them apart but to know one another (*lita'arafu*). There should be no distinction or showcasing of differences, but rather an acknowledgment of common ancestry.

Based on this epistemological foundation, Islamic preaching must be grounded and simultaneously guide humans toward three functional relationship patterns: the relationship of faith, the relationship between humans and God *(hablun min Allah*, theological aspect); the relationship of togetherness, i.e., the relationship of humans with each other (*hablun min al-nas*, anthropo-sociological aspect); and the relationship of humans with the surrounding environment (*hablun min al-'alam*, cosmological aspect).

Multiculturalism is an ideological view that advocates openness among existing differences with full respect without dominance (Fay, 1998). In religious life, this view underlies even the slightest respect for the ways of life, traditions, and teachings of other religions without dominance and agitation. Within certain limits, this respect is also a requirement for every follower of a religion, both among the elite and the common people (Moore & Woodrow, 2010). In short, multicultural societies presuppose three main conditions: the existence of pluralism in society, the aspiration to develop a common national spirit, and an ethos that upholds pluralism (Hamzah, 2004).

The primary aspirations of multiculturalism are in stark contrast to the views of religious radicalism, where followers of one religion perceive the truths of other religions from the perspective of their own faith. In this context, there is a dominance of values that eliminate respect

for the existence of the teachings of other religions. Departing from this commitment, spreading religion by eliminating someone's established religious beliefs, in the context of multiculturalism, is an act of religious radicalism and is undoubtedly contrary to the spirit of multiculturalism. Thus, the spirit of multiculturalism serves as the foundation for the harmony of various perspectives (Fay, 1998).

The actualization of the spirit of multiculturalism in the context of South Korea finds momentum when there is an awareness of the need to make a commitment to realizing a more tolerant social order in South Korea, one that can accept and give in the midst of cultural differences (multiculturalism), develop a democratic attitude in life (democratization), uphold justice and the law (law enforcement), have individual and collective pride (human dignity), and be based on religious life in social interactions (religionism) (Supriyoko, 2003).

As a strategy for social integration, multiculturalism upholds and respects cultural diversity. This implies that a highly polymorphic or diverse social reality will not be an obstacle to building social relationships with full tolerance. Indeed, a sense of accepting the reality of living peacefully alongside each other with the inherent differences in each social and political entity will grow (Subagyo, 2001). Thus, it can be affirmed that multiculturalism is a concept that aims to bring society into harmony and peace, without conflict and violence, even with the complexity of differences.

This is where the urgency lies for religious communities to develop true relationships among various religious followers and institutionalize true brotherhood in a formal framework that follows up on that true brotherhood with dialogues and humanitarian work across religions. In the dynamics of the development of Islam in South Korea in the 21st century, the aspect of multiculturalism plays a significant role in shaping a positive image of Islam. Despite South Korea being known as a developed and modern country with a liberal-capitalist ideology, the presence of around 200,000 Muslims, including 75,000 native Korean Muslims, creates a unique multicultural atmosphere.

There are approximately 75,000 native Korean residents who have embraced Islam, representing various segments of society such as professors, doctors, legal experts, economists, rulers, civil servants, military personnel, students, and farmers. This fact indicates that acceptance of Islam is not limited to immigrant groups but also extends to the local population, creating a rich multicultural landscape within South Korean society.

Effective communication has allowed the Islamic community to develop its own identity and culture, diversify ethnically, and remain isolated from the broader Korean society. However, as this community grows large enough to have a collective voice, two paths emerge for Muslims in Korea. One is the "interstitial identity," signifying non-participation in the politics of the majority Korean society or their country of origin. The other is a "reconstituted identity" that aspires for integration into mainstream Korean society by active participation while preserving their uniqueness (Jang & Choi, 2012).

The current multicultural policy of the Korean government may steer Muslims in Korea towards the first path. Nevertheless, the ongoing development of the Muslim community in Korea may necessitate that the Korean government and people implement more inclusive multiculturalism policies to facilitate Muslims in Korea to take the second path. This reflective situation provides an opportunity for Korean society to transform the current multicultural policy, oriented towards differential exclusion and assimilation, into a more inclusive model of multiculturalism (Jang & Choi, 2012).

The organization of the Korea Muslim Federation (KMF) since the 1970s and its support for the Muslim community through various activities, such as education, mass media, culture, and social issues, reflects a multicultural approach in building harmony among various groups in society (Park, 2013) Education, as one way to spread Islamic teachings in South Korea, also involves various activities such as seminars, Arabic language classes, exhibitions of Islamic culture, and the establishment of schools at various levels. This factor has a positive impact on a literate society with a high spirit of learning, integrating Islamic teachings into daily life peacefully and gradually (Umayyatun, 2017).

Islam as a Mercy to the Universe: An Axiological Foundation for Indonesian Muslims in Building Social Harmony

Islam is a religion of mercy for all creation, providing tranquility, peace, safety, and well-being not only to its followers but also to others, all living beings, and the entire universe. As a religion of mercy, Islam teaches humanity how to face and live a pluralistic life. In the historical context of Islam during the prophethood of Muhammad SAW, a religious society was formed, becoming a common consciousness at that time.

The concept of *rahmatan lil-alamin* is the most fundamental in Islam and is a teaching brought by Prophet Muhammad SAW. He was

tasked with being a source of mercy and spreading mercy to the entire universe (Tamrin, 2007 h. 108), as explicitly understood in the Quranic verse: "*And We have not sent you, [O Muhammad], except as a mercy to the* worlds" (Quran, 21:107).

From this verse, it can be understood that Islam, since its inception, has been an agent of spreading compassion and humanism in the Arabian Peninsula. The spirit of compassion remains relevant and applicable in the contemporary context. Similarly, Islam has been a pioneering force of moderation among the diverse and pluralistic tribes and clans in the Arabian Peninsula during the era of Jahiliyyah (Days of Ignorance). However, the diaspora of radical ideologies has led to Islam being labeled as a terrorist religion that cannot harmonize with modern ideas, often due to a partial and textual understanding (Kholish & Rokhman, 2015).

The portrayal of Islam as a religion of terrorism and radicalism has been affirmed and vocalized by many Western intellectuals. Samuel Huntington and Francis Fukuyama have referred to Islam as a religion that imports violence and is anti-humanistic. They even claim that since the collapse of the communist regimes, Islam has emerged as a replacement that is even more brutal. This perception is fueled by the emergence of terrorist movements in the Middle East, from Al-Qaeda, the Taliban, to more recent groups like ISIS, which have even extended their influence to Indonesia (Tamrin, 2007).

What Huntington (2004) sees is only a partial picture of Islam in the Middle East, including countries like Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Egypt, Palestine, and Yemen. Politically, these nations are often perceived as enemies by the West, framed under the mission of Western capitalism to dominate them, ostensibly in opposition to the authoritarianism of the rulers in the Middle East. However, this justification may not be entirely accurate.

Muslims in South Korea present a different face from the often-leveled accusations. Followers of Islam in the Land of Ginseng demonstrate a high level of tolerance and harmony with any religion, providing an oasis amidst the prolonged conflicts in the Muslim countries of the Middle East.

The global Muslim community, which once held high hopes for the progress of Islamic civilization in the countries of the Middle East, now seems to see those hopes shattered in the midst of their journey. Indonesian Muslims, as the world's largest Muslim population, are considered agents of transforming the progress of Islam in the future, replacing the Middle Eastern countries that are currently in decline

(Kholish & Rokhman, 2015). Consequently, as an axiological expectation, Muslims in South Korea must also be able to act as ambassadors of peace in the Land of Ginseng.

Being a Muslim requires reviving the spirit of Islam that has been neglected by some Muslims lately, especially the extremist tendencies. The Muslim community in South Korea must respond to the heterogeneity and diversity of Korean society, which is highly pluralistic, as occurred in the early days of the prophethood. With the hope of realizing Islam that is truly *rahmatan lil 'alamin* in South Korea, whose compassion is felt not only by Islam but by all religions.

Islam in South Korea, especially through the practices of Muslim communities applying the concept of *rahmatan lil alamin*, has formed a harmonious relationship with society and the state. Mosques are not just places of worship but also hubs of information and learning for non-Muslims, creating an inclusive and educational environment (Park, 2013). The diligent and frugal lifestyle of Muslim communities attracts the attention of Koreans, while religious activities considered unique stimulate curiosity among them.

Another reflection of the concept of *rahmatan lil alamin* is seen in the practices of Muslim communities, such as inviting Korean colleagues to live together and participate in religious activities. When non-Muslims show interest, Muslims patiently explain the religious and cultural life of Islam, creating a space for dialogue and understanding. Mosques and Islamic information centers, organized by the Korea Muslim Federation (KMF), serve as centers for learning about Islam that uphold the values of *rahmatan lil alamin*.

With the increasing number of Muslim immigrants and tourists, various facilities such as mosques, halal restaurants, and halal products have begun to flourish in South Korea. The KMF collaborates with the government in developing halal food and the halal economy. The high level of religious freedom and tolerance in South Korea facilitates the acceptance of Islam. Muslim minorities play a strategic role in South Korea's political and economic diplomacy with Muslim-majority countries. The modern Islamic outreach conducted by the KMF, through education, culture, and mass media, has created a deep understanding of the values of *rahmatan lil alamin* among the local community.

The Muslim community in South Korea, led by the KMF, not only grows dynamically but also plays a significant role in building harmony and enriching the culture of the country. By emphasizing the principle of *rahmatan lil alamin*, Islam has successfully created harmony and positive

acceptance in the midst of South Korean society and the state.

Conclusion

Islamic values play a pivotal role in shaping a profound conceptual framework for fostering social harmony among the Muslim community in Korea. The foundational principles of peace, multiculturalism, and *rahmatan lil alamin* are deeply ingrained. Peace, functioning as an ontological bedrock, not only cultivates a harmonious milieu but also molds a positive perception of Islam within society. Multiculturalism, serving as an epistemological anchor, is not merely applied but internalized through the teachings of the Qur'an, reinforcing tolerance and the celebration of diversity as a collective richness. Conversely, the concept of *rahmatan lil alamin* acts as an axiological foundation, compelling Muslims to be agents of peace in the midst of a heterogeneous society. By embodying Islamic teachings with unwavering tolerance, the Muslim community in South Korea significantly contributes to dismantling Islamophobia and fostering positive social integration. Through these affirmative actions, Muslims not only serve as agents of peace but also as facilitators reinforcing awareness of multiculturalism, paving the way for mutual understanding, and sculpting a harmonious image in the fabric of South Korean society.

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