

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research project set out to conceptualise the *da'wah* approach to Japanese Muslim youth. At the time of this research, there was no specific programme targeted to youth taking place at, or organized by the Chiba Islamic Cultural Centre (CICC). The CICC was understaffed even at the time this thesis was written. The Chairman of CICC had a full-time job as the principal of a private school in Chiba. There was no other CICC staff to back him up. He gave lectures at the CICC, these lectures were informative in nature, but meant for the general public, not tailored with the youth in mind. Such state of affairs was not unique to the CICC. Given extremely scarce resources and how scattered the Japanese Muslims were in terms of locations, the needs of the second generation Japanese Muslim youth were not met. They were born into a world that was already laden with expectations to live just like any Japanese does. As soon as they started school, they found themselves in highly uncomfortable and contradictory circumstances. It did not help that if one of their parents was a non-Japanese born and raised in a developing country, this parent was likely to have an inferiority complex in relation to the perceived superiority of the Japanese way of life, thus making the situation even more complex.

5.1 Conclusions

In the present study, the researcher has provided more depth into specific factors that are at work to push the second generation Japanese Muslim into rejecting Islam in

their lives, namely; a prevailing culture of indifference towards religion in Japan; how second-generation Japanese Muslims are treated as outsiders by ethnic Japanese because of their physical appearance; how these Japanese Muslim youth longed to be accepted by their ethnic Japanese friends as part of their normal development in adolescence; and how the fact that their parents did not have the same experiences living as a Muslim in Japan meant that the parents could not truly grasp what they are going through, and therefore create an intergenerational gap between these youth and their parents, which are not helping these youth to see Islam in a positive light.

5.1.1 Impact of The Present Study: A Success

Based on the findings of the current study which was founded on the *Al-ta'āruf* Concept, the researcher concludes that the main objective of the Japan-Malaysia Youth Cultural Exchange Programme 2019 to strengthen the identity of Japanese Muslim youth has indeed been achieved, thus proving that the cultural exchange experience promises a bright future to contribute towards strengthening the confidence of Muslim minority youth, not only in Japan, but potentially in other countries. It implies that religiosity can be heightened through the intercultural approach embedded in the *Al-ta'āruf* Concept.

The present study thus becomes part of the broader scholarship on the Muslim identity formation of second generation Japanese Muslim youth in particular, and Muslim minority youth in general. The present study has exposed the second generation Japanese Muslim youth to first-hand intercultural experiences living with host Muslim families in a majority Muslim country, started a long-term relationship between the youth and the host family, and enabled these youth to gain insights on how practising

Muslims live based on the values of Islam. The CICC Chairman, Hajj Kyochiro Sugimoto said:

I have been to Malaysia ten times, but this programme, first time. . . CICC is very happy (with the programme). . . This programme motivates Muslim youth to join *da'wah* activities in soft way (Farewell Dinner, 23 August, 2019)

Being experiential in nature, the approach applied in the present study is different from many other *da'wah* initiatives carried out by Muslim NGOs in Japan and Malaysia. The intercultural approach is hoped to complement the theoretical formal instruction that is usually applied by Islamic NGOs in educating youth about Islam, which usually takes place in a classroom or lecture hall. Besides, the cultural exchange approach requires physical travel, which Allah mentions: "Say: 'Travel through the earth and see how Allah did originate creation; so will Allah produce a later creation: for Allah has power over all things'" (Al-Qur'an. Al-'Ankabūt. 29:20). Physical travel is particularly significant in a cultural exchange programme as it exposed the participants to new horizons and new possibilities, resources of a culture they have not experienced previously.

There are many ways of reaching out to peoples of different nations, beliefs and backgrounds, for the purpose of *da'wah*, to spread the word of Islam, as well as to clarify misperceptions of Islam. The audience demography, in this case the second generation Japanese Muslim youth, must be taken into account and seriously considered, their needs and preferences looked into, before an attempt is made to design a programme suitable for them. The Concept of *Al-ta'aruf* was applied with the purpose of strengthening the faith of the second generation Japanese Muslim youth who reside in a Muslim minority country.

5.1.2 The Five Domains of Human Connection: A Key Component of *Al-ta'aruf*

The events throughout the present study had been designed in such a way as to incorporate all five domains of human connection: 1) physical; 2) intellectual; 3) emotional; 4) cultural; and 5) spiritual. Such a step was crucial to increase the likelihood of success for the programme because, although the incoming youth and host parents/families belonged to different ethnic groups and nationalities, infusing the five domains based on Islamic Education (Ulwan, 2004) ensured "effective communication pertinent to the heart, mind and emotion" (Sharif & Shamsudin, 2017). All five domains acted as the conduits by which the present study connected with, engaged and reached out to the Japanese Muslim youth who enrolled in this programme. Plenty of thought and time were invested into planning, preparing and executing the present study as it required the involvement of many parties.

5.1.3 Parents of Muslim Minorities Deserve Help from Muslim Majority Communities

Committed Muslim parents believe it is their responsibility to raise children who grow up to become firm believers, people who believe in Islam with conviction. But the path to achieve this is never easy. More often than not, it is long and difficult, especially for Muslim minority parents. Japan is just one example of Muslim minority parents struggling to raise their children to become righteous Muslims. Muslims from majority Muslim countries, therefore, must do all they can to extend assistance where possible.

Like many other Muslim minorities in other countries, the Japanese Muslim youth constantly felt they were treated as the "Other" in their own birth country, even as they held a Japanese passport and are of Japanese nationality. Islamophobia is real. Efforts

must be invested so that these Japanese Muslim youth do not fall into the trap of radicalisation and terrorism. To strengthen their Muslim identity, to increase the likelihood of the second generation Japanese Muslim youth more likely to share their Muslim identity with their non-Muslim teachers and friends and not hold back, something quite out of the ordinary needed to be done.

According to the official organizer, CICC, the second generation Japanese Muslim youth already knew about certain basic knowledge about Islam, for example, the oneness of God. However, this was no indication of the strength of their faith. Knowing is not equal to believing. The amount of knowledge one has does not necessarily reflect the depth of belief. The challenge was how to move the faith of the second generation Japanese Muslim youth from a level of knowing to believing with conviction. Believing with conviction is an ideal; the researcher believes that the Japan-Malaysia Youth Cultural Exchange Programme 2019 has contributed in a small way towards moving the Japanese Muslim youth a step nearer towards this ideal. There is no telling what will happen in the coming months and years, whether the positive outcomes of this programme will remain in the Japanese Muslim youth. Only time can tell. For that matter, every person's journey is different.

5.2 Recommendations

The present study started off as an experimental programme. Most of the second generation Japanese Muslim youth actually had never seen anything outside of Japan. They were born and raised in Japan. They had no idea how other people live outside of Japan. Their only source of information was the media, which until today tends to portray Islam negatively, which did not help grow their self-confidence as young Muslims. As stated in their feedback, most of them had been hiding their Muslim

identity prior to coming to Malaysia, since they did not want to be viewed differently by their non-Muslim friends. The researcher deemed it worthwhile to try a different approach of *da'wah*, which incorporates mostly experiential learning: Let the second generation Japanese Muslim youth experience living with a practising Muslim family in a Muslim majority country, which also celebrates diversity. Let them experience getting up close and personal with Muslim families, and see for themselves the practicality and beauty of living Islam.

5.2.1 Consider Innovative *Da'wah* Strategies for Youth

Adolescence is the time when boys and girls begin to take a closer look at themselves, trying to comprehend what is seen and what is unseen. This is the time when the *tawhīd* concept must be discussed and taught to them, with the objective of raising them to become strong and confident Muslims. Having said that, a natural part of the growing up process to become confident is a need to be liked and accepted by others, the desire to belong. At a younger age, a child's need to be accepted and to belong is fulfilled by the immediate kith and kin, especially parents and siblings. In the adolescent stage, the need to be accepted by peers is stronger. Not only that. Feelings of attachment to the community where one is raised is a powerful human emotion. Any Japanese youth is likely to feel a strong desire, a longing to be as Japanese as they can, since this is part of their national identity, having been born and raised in Japan. However, the second-generation Japanese Muslim youth are perceived and treated as *gaijin* (meaning "strangers", "undecideables", "outsiders", implying "You don't belong here") in two levels: race and religion. All of the second generation Japanese Muslim youth who participated in the Cultural Exchange Programme are the offspring of

mixedmarriage, where one parent was Japanese, and the other parent a non-Japanese. Physically they did not look Japanese.

For the second generation Japanese Muslim youth, to be committed Muslims, the desire to be Muslim must be significantly stronger than the desire to be accepted as a Japanese. The Cultural Exchange Programme is an intervention which attempted to create a sense of acceptance and belonging among the second generation Japanese Muslim youth. Essentially, the programme was designed to help them realise that they can choose to identify with the Muslim heritage. That it is alright for them not to embrace the Japanese way of life where it conflicts with the Muslim lifestyle, for instance, drinking saké, an alcoholic beverage which is deeply rooted in Japanese tradition. Through the Cultural Exchange Programme, they learned that there is an alternative way to be accepted and have a sense of belonging.

The present study is mostly experiential in content, which was one of the long-term strategies adopted by the Prophet Muhammad SAW in *da'wah*. The approach used in this Cultural Exchange Programme also took into account that the prevailing cultural forces shaping the identity formation for Japanese youth cannot be ignored, and is not the same as the Western perspective.

The present study explored an innovative *da'wah* strategy to reach out to minority Muslim youth. Over the years, it is common to hear about *da'wah* being carried out by way of conferences, seminars and workshops. There is even a relatively new method now called Street *Da'wah*, where Muslim activists approach the public on the street to share with them the beauty and truth about Islam. In conferences, seminars and workshops, participants register themselves to learn about various facets of Islam from learned teachers. It is likely that people who attend such sessions already have an interest and the capacity to sit and learn for an extended period of time, since such

sessions usually would last from almost an hour to several hours a day. But not everyone is willing to go through such a process of learning. The youth might attend under the instruction of their parents or guardian and yet learn nothing. We need to consider alternative and innovative forms of approaching the youth, especially for those who are not particularly interested in such channels of learning. Not everyone learns by sitting down, listening to the teacher and taking notes. We need to explore and identify new modes of reaching out to them, to grow the interest to learn about Islam.

5.2.2 Apply the *Ansār-Muhajirin* Relationship in Future CEPs

The Prophet Muhammad SAW is the best example how to run our lives, including how to resolve contemporary problems in raising the young generation in a multicultural setting, no matter where they reside or come from. Allah says: "And you (Muhammad) (stand) on an exalted standard of character." (Al-Qur'an. Al-Qalām. 68:4).

It must be remembered that upon his migration to Madinah, the Prophet SAW made a unique arrangement whereby the local *Ansār* were requested to help the *Muhajirin* in all possible ways. Establishing unity and brotherhood is a critical factor in starting the Muslim community in Madinah, a landmark of Islamic tradition; this is the idea that the present study adopted. The Japanese Muslim families were up against a wall in raising their youth as Muslims, just as the Makkan Muslims were up against a wall, prosecuted to the extreme in Makkah. Under such circumstances, the assistance of the Madinan Muslims were timely and much needed. The *Ansār* rose to the occasion with exemplary kindness and consideration, extending spaces in their homes, doing all they could to support the *Muhajirin* to begin life anew. Similarly, in the present study, the Malaysian Muslim host parents rose to the occasion, extending

their homes to provide shelter and all basic necessities with the aim of establishing a long-term relationship with the second generation Japanese Muslim youth. In this programme, the Japanese Muslim parents only had to cover the costs of their children's flights, while the Malaysian host parents covered all ground costs in Malaysia such as meals, accommodation, utilities, *takaful* insurance, boat ride and museum entry fees. This programme did not allow any of the Malaysian host parents to make a profit. On the contrary, they were required to spend on the Japanese Muslim youth just as they would their own sons or daughters on a normal day.

The host parents had been briefed earlier that the present study was an application of the *Ansār-Muhajirin* concept. The Malaysian host families would be the *Ansār*, supporting the Japanese Muslim parents in providing an avenue for the second generation Japanese Muslim youth to experience how Muslims in a multicultural society live relatively harmoniously. Certainly Malaysia has its own set of issues when it comes to racial tensions, but by and large, its citizens still are able to accept each other's differences. The Malaysian Muslim host parents took upon this role wholeheartedly, doing all they could to make sure that the Japanese youth under their wings felt welcome and at home. Therefore, the *Ansār-Muhajirin* relationship is a strategy that is highly recommended to be adopted for future cultural exchange programmes involving Muslim minority youth.

5.2.3 Find Committed Host Parents

Commitment from host parents was critical for the success of this research, as the quality of the interactions between the Japanese Muslim youth and the host parents and family members would colour the perceptions of the youth. In this research, host parents were considered suitable if they had a proven track record in raising youth,

either their own offspring, or those under their wings. One household was childless, but upon due consideration, the researcher decided to include them since they were professionals in the field of education, dealing directly with youth themselves, and hence were qualified to interact with the Japanese Muslim youth entrusted to them.

Making them feel cared for was a human way of reaching out to these Japanese Muslim youth. The host parents played the role of caring adults, treating them with attention and care by providing them meals, bringing them to events and places of interest, fetching them home, looking after them when they fell ill (one of them was a little unwell for a few days upon arrival) and being there to answer their queries to the few who could speak English. For the Japanese Muslim youth who could barely speak English, they could feel the presence, care and attention just by the mere presence and positive gestures of their host parents and family members. The positive gestures and body language sent a strong message to indicate that the Japanese Muslim youth were welcome into their Malaysian homes. Caring was the first step. Although it is true that communication will inevitably crop up as an issue in cultural exchange programmes, it is proven that participants of such programmes in the end experienced a sense of accomplishment, provided they were given opportunities to work together to achieve common goals. As well, Japanese youth look for deep positive interactions in the cultural exchange setting which were present throughout the present study.

5.2.4 Identify Local Youth Volunteers Early

For the present study, focus was given to the incoming second generation Japanese Muslim youth. For future studies, the researcher recommends looking into the experience of the local youth as well. Also, it would be good to identify and source an equal number of locals (Malaysian) youth volunteers who would be present

throughout the programme, not necessarily the children of the host parents themselves. Each Malaysian youth would be paired with a Japanese youth right from day one, so that they could start practicing the language they were assigned to learn, and pick up subtle positive behaviours e.g. mannerisms from each other. For childless host parents, the researcher would suggest to arrange for an equal number of Malaysian Muslim youth of the same gender to stay with them temporarily, to enable the Japanese Muslim youth to interact with the Malaysian Muslim youth within the comfort of home. For example, if a host family were to take in two Japanese Muslim youth, both females, arrangements would be made to have two Malaysian Muslim female youth to stay with the family throughout the period of the programme to allow proper *ta-'arūf* and therefore maximise bonding.

5.2.5 Create A Safe Environment for Learning

Prior to receiving the second generation Japanese Muslim youth, the Malaysian Muslim host parents had been briefed about the circumstances leading to the present study. The host parents understood the issues and challenges faced by Japanese Muslim families in raising these second generation Japanese Muslim youth. They were fully aware that they must support these youth wherever possible, making them feel welcome despite the language barrier, as most of the second generation Japanese Muslim youth had a low level of English proficiency. None of the host parents could speak Japanese. They only spoke Malay and English and some of them, a bit of Arabic. In the beginning, some of the Japanese Muslim youth felt uncomfortable and were not at ease, given their low level of English proficiency. But the host parents made them feel welcome and made sure the language was not an issue. At the farewell dinner, all the second

generation Japanese Muslim youth without hesitation raised their hands when asked if they wanted to return to Malaysia. As told by Tokuda's host mother to the researcher:

I was very concerned since Tokuda was very quiet . . . I was not sure if he was comfortable . . . but on the third day, suddenly he was taking out all kinds of presents. . . He was more relaxed, more at ease, smiling . . . My husband and I were surprised (Personal Communication, 7 September, 2019)

After the Japanese Muslim youth left, although the feedback given was that the programme was too packed, the host parents reported that they still succeeded to slot in pockets of time available to bond with their Japanese Muslim youth. Host mother, Sabariah, told the researcher at the end of the programme:

I certainly want to visit my son (the Japanese Muslim youth she hosted) in Japan. . . Felt like sending my own child to college [. . .] (Personal Communication, 1 September 2019)

Host mother Ani echoed the same sentiment, saying:

The house is so quiet now (Personal Communication, 1 September 2019)

Host mother Rosila said:

I miss everyone, especially the Japanese youth (Personal Communication, 1 September 2019)

5.2.6 Manage the Communication Gap Proactively

Proactive steps need to be done earlier to prepare all youth and host parents to deal with the communication gap better. For the coming batch of Japanese Muslim youth, a list of common everyday English words and phrases will be prepared, and all of the participants will be required to acquire a minimum number of words prior to

landing in Malaysia. Learning basic English will be an additional goal for the next batch onwards, an asset which will be valued by the Japanese biological parents. It will also facilitate communications between host parents and incoming Japanese Muslim youth.

5.3 Concluding Remarks

Naturally, after a time lapse following completion of research such as this study which is intended as an intervention programme, there would be concerns over how the participants might be getting along. Have the effects of the intervention worn off? Have the participants changed in any way? The researcher was able to follow up with a few parents of the Japanese Muslim participants about a year after the present study.

According to participant Riku's mother:

Alhamdulillah (praise be to God), my son Riku has changed a lot . . . He has been reminding his younger siblings to listen to their mother . . . The thing that makes me so grateful is that he often goes to the mosque to perform *jama'ah* (congregational) prayers especially for *Maghrib*, *Isha'* and *Fajr*. Imagine how a mother feels . . . when a child wakes up earlier to pray at the mosque, while the mother herself needs to be awakened (Personal Communication, 30 September 2020)

The researcher also followed up with the father of another participant, Yuta.

According to Yuta's father:

After joining the Cultural Exchange Programme last year, my son become quite confident with Islam. Before the programme he was below average as a Muslim. . . Now Yuta is above my expectations. Most of the tasks I give him, he can do it well. The programme built his confidence towards Islam. I do not push him, he does it willingly (Personal Communication, 15 September 2020)

The reader of this thesis might recall participant Tatsuki, who, upon completing the Cultural Exchange Programme, declared that he would:

live a little more dignified as a Muslim (Online Interview, 30 August 2019)

Indeed, he is now back to working on his YouTube channel which he originally created to raise awareness about Islam. When he arrived in Malaysia last year, before he participated in the present study, he had already started on the same channel, but, as his host parents told the researcher, had doubts whether Islam was the right path for him and was not too sure if he would continue with the YouTube Channel.

It must be mentioned that participant Riku, Yuta and Tatsuki all came from practising Muslim families. Having a practising and supportive family, the researcher believes, is a strong factor in helping these youth to sustain their interest and commitment to live as Muslims for the rest of their lives.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, plans for the next Japan-Malaysia Youth Cultural Exchange Programme had to be postponed indefinitely until it is safe to travel. Nevertheless, in June 2020, the Japanese Muslim participants reconnected with the Malaysian youth volunteers virtually. Six of the nine Japanese Muslim youth were present. The other three had Internet connection problems and were not able to join. Nevertheless, plans are afoot to keep this virtual connection going every fortnight to keep the *Al-ta'āruf* Concept alive and well, in preparation for the next Japan-Malaysia Youth Cultural Exchange Programme. In each virtual session which lasts for about an hour, the Japanese and Malaysian youth take turns to share cultural elements unique to their respective countries.

The Japan-Malaysia Youth Cultural Exchange Programme 2019 was an attempt to respond to the dire need of the Japanese Muslim minority community who face great challenges to instill a strong Muslim identity in their children. For future Cultural Exchange Programmes, it was agreed by both the Japanese and Malaysian

coordinators that under no circumstance shall the programme be commercialised and turned into a profit-making enterprise. This clause is to ensure that both the Malaysian and Japanese sides take upon their roles with the right and pure intentions for the sake of *da'wah*, not spurred by a desire for profit. The long-term goal is to allow the programme to grow over time, finding volunteers, host parents and partners who are willing to play their roles, and replicate the programme in future. In addition, future studies may explore possible ways of aligning intercultural research ideas and concepts in the Qur'an; there is great possibility for us to uncover more gems in the Qur'an provided we are willing to do the work.

