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# Images and Perceptions of Muslims and Arabs in Korean Popular Culture and Society

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

IMAGES AND PERCEPTIONS OF MUSLIMS AND ARABS  
IN KOREAN POPULAR CULTURE AND SOCIETY

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

ASIAN STUDIES

by

Maria Magdaline Jamass

2014

To: Dean Kenneth G. Furton  
College of Arts and Sciences

This thesis, written by Maria Magdaline Jamass, and entitled Images and Perceptions of Muslims and Arabs in Korean Popular Culture and Society, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this thesis and recommend that it be approved.

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Steven Heine

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Matthew Marr

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Maria del Mar Logroño, Major Professor

Date of Defense: March 26, 2014

The thesis of Maria Magdaline Jamass is approved.

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Dean Kenneth G. Furton  
College of Arts and Sciences

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Dean Lakshmi N. Reddi  
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Florida International University, 2014

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my family, who have always encouraged me and have always supported me when I needed it most.

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS  
IMAGES AND PERCEPTIONS OF MUSLIMS AND ARABS IN KOREAN POPULAR  
CULTURE AND SOCIETY

by

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Florida International University, 2014

Miami, Florida

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Interest in Muslim and Arab societies has been on the rise in South Korea, especially since 2001, with many books and various documentaries being published on the subject. Since 2005 there have been a number of television shows and documentaries that include Muslim, and sometimes Arab characters. This study will examine how images of Muslims and Arabs are presented in Korean popular culture through the analysis of various dramas and variety shows, as well as how these images fit into the context of Korean ethno-nationalism and the history of Islam in East Asia. In addition to this analysis this study will also be exploring how these images have been changing from negative to a more sympathetic or realistic depiction of Muslims and Arabs, as well as explore which groups are responsible for this change.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Following the September 11 attacks, interest in learning about Islam and Muslims spiked worldwide. South Korea<sup>1</sup>, like many European and American nations, was faced with the fact that they did not know much about Islam or Muslims. “In a matter of a few months following the attacks, there were more than 50 book titles mentioning ‘Islam’ on Korean bookstores... Sadly but not surprisingly, however, the dominant Muslim image remains limited to the stereotype of the terrorist.”<sup>2</sup> The Korean peninsula has a long history of contact with Muslims dating back to the ninth century, and with earlier Arab and Persian civilizations since the late fifth or early sixth century.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, there is evidence of Muslims settling in Korea and being active in Korean society since the thirteenth century.<sup>4</sup> However, Korea’s long-standing historical relations with Islamic civilizations has not permeated to popular levels/audiences, and as a result, large sectors of South Korean society perceive Islam as an alien religion.

This ignorance of Korea’s shared history with the Muslim world, coupled with existing indigenous beliefs and the introduction of Western ideas of race and ethnicity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, via Japan and later on reinforced by the United States through its media, has contributed to the cultivation of an Orientalist image of the Muslim and Arab in South Korea. Images of a loud, unintelligible, aggressive, or even monolithic people can

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<sup>1</sup> Hereafter, South Korea and Korea will be used interchangeably.

<sup>2</sup> Nam Jiyun Camilla, “Islam, Itaewon, Muslims, and Koslms: Inter-cultural Dynamics in the Muslim Neighborhood of Seoul,” *Situations* 6 (2012), p. 48.

<sup>3</sup> Lee Hee Soo, Lee, Hee Soo. “Islam in Korea: History, Present Situation and Future Prospect,” *Korea Journal of Islamic Culture*, 1.1 (1997), p. 20-22.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p. 27.

be found in multiple Korean popular culture sources, such as in an episode of *Star King* which featured a Saudi character shoving a gun into a man's chest, or, in the same episode, the use of a woman in Islamic dress that is predominantly used in Afghanistan in a segment about Saudi Arabia. Although these images have been in television shows since 2005, they have become less stereotypical in the last eight years through the efforts of academia, Korean news sources, and Muslims fans of Korean popular culture.

Having been jump started by Lee Hee Soo in the 90s with his study of early Korean-Muslim contact (after preliminary research had been done as early as the 1970s), the study of Islam in Korea is relatively new, and the study of Muslim images and stereotypes is only in its early stages. The consensus is that the popular perceptions of Islam, Muslims, and Arabs in Korea is Orientalist in nature – that is, as Edward Said explains in *Orientalism*, “dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling it,”<sup>5</sup> – but they do not explore the topic much further.

### **Research Purpose and Significance of Study**

In tracing the images of Muslims and Arabs in Korean popular culture, this thesis proposes to fill a gap in the emerging literature by determining why these images exist, as well as how they are changing over time. The images in television and print sources have been predominately negative, depicting Muslims and Arabs as a backward, alien, Other that mirrors Western stereotypes of Muslims and Arabs, with no distinction between images of the Muslim or the Arab. In recent years the images have been gradually changing due to an increase of cultural awareness brought on by the efforts of Korean

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<sup>5</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage, 1979), p. 3

news sources (intentionally or not), Korean academia, and the growing Muslim community in the country, as well by Muslim fans of Korean music and television. News articles have also been produced that present Muslims in a more sympathetic light, predominantly that of a struggling minority within Korean society, rather than a threat.

This change in perception is also being reflected in Korean TV shows as well, which are becoming more cautious of their portrayals of Muslims in their programs due to the influence of Korean academia and Muslim fans worldwide. This gradual change in the image of Islam, Muslims, and Arabs in Korea is also indicative of how globalization helps to change South Korea from a homogenous society into one that is more diverse through the introduction of, perceived, new religions and cultures. In studying this topic, light can also be shed on how homogenous societies, such as South Korea, view foreigners and religious minorities in their country and how those views change over time as the country becomes more connected and exposed to the various academic and social trends around the world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Research Questions and Hypothesis**

This study is aiming, with the perception that Korean images of Islam, Muslims, and Arabs are Orientalist in nature, to answer the question of why stereotypical (eg. aggressive, uniform, conservative, mysterious, repressed or controlled – in the case of women) images of Muslims and Arabs permeate Korean society through popular culture, more specifically, variety shows and dramas, as well as how these images fit into the context of Korean ethno-nationalism and the history of Muslims in South Korea. It will also be looking at how these images and perceptions are changing to portray more realistic or humanizing characters, as well as what is being done to change them. In

exploring these questions, this study will show that these negative images of an aggressive and monolithic Islam, etc. in Korea have become prevalent due to a coupling of an ignorance of Korea's history with Muslims along with indigenous beliefs of hierarchies and the adaptation of concepts of race and ethnicity from their interactions with the United States, and to some extent Japan, which allows room for Orientalist or stereotyped images to be the norm. This study will also demonstrate that over time, images of Islam, etc. have been changing and have gradually been becoming less stereotypical due to the coverage of the Muslim community in Korean news (focusing predominantly on religion, culture, and their experiences in Korean society), and the voices of academia as well as the voices of Muslim fans of Korean television shows. Between the prevalence of the Middle East on the news and an increase in Muslim and Arab populations within Korea, interest in understanding the cultures and religion has been on the rise. With this growing interest, images have been improving due to increased cultural awareness as a result of the efforts of South Korean academia, Korean media, and the Muslim community in South Korea.

### **Background and Theory**

Edward Said writes in *Covering Islam* that,

In many instances 'Islam' has licensed not only patent inaccuracy but also expression of unrestrained ethnocentrism, cultural and even racial hatred, deep yet paradoxically free-floating hostility...there is an unquestioned assumption that Islam can be characterized limitlessly by means of a handful of recklessly general and repeatedly deployed clichés.<sup>6</sup>

Prior to the September 11 attacks, images of Muslims and Arabs in American media were already Orientalist and stereotypical. Women were either veiled and repressed or an

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<sup>6</sup> Said, Edward. *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*, (New York: Vintage, 1997)

exotic belly dancer, and men were either oil rich or a terrorist. Since the attacks more efforts have been made to present more complex Muslim and Arab characters, but images of the two have been largely simplistic and predictable.<sup>7</sup> Muslims and Arabs are usually presented in reference to terrorism – good Muslim vs. bad Muslim, their characters may be humanized, they may be seen as part of a more diverse society, or their countries may even be fictionalized in order to avoid contention. Although writers of television shows try to create more diverse and complex Muslim and Arab characters, “the results are some modifications to avoid being offensive while perpetuating core stereotypes that continue to have cultural capital.”<sup>8</sup> In examining Korean television dramas and variety shows, one can find some parallels with American television.

In Jeong-min Seo’s study on Korean newspapers that focus on the spread of Islam, he had examined 312 and of those 50% stated the Islamization of Korea as a consequence of that spread, and an additional 16% saw Islam as threatening national unity and religious cohesion.<sup>9</sup> Some of these stereotypical depictions of Muslims and Arabs are those of a backwards people, ultra-conservative, unintelligible, and aggressive. In addition to prejudiced views, many Koreans cannot tell the difference between “Islam,” “Middle East,” and “Arab.” In 2010, it had been recorded that there are roughly 45,000 resident Muslims (native and nonnative) and an additional 100,000 temporary

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<sup>7</sup> Evelyn Alsultany, “From Arab Terrorists to Patriotic Arab Americans: Representational Strategies in Post-9/11 TV Dramas,” in *Between the Middle East and the Americas: The Cultural Politics of Diaspora*, ed. Evelyn Alsultany and Ella Shohat, (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press: 2013). Kindle Edition.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Jeong-min Seo, “Children’s Media between Grooming and Persuasion: Religious Vision in the Case of Korea,” p. 49.

Muslim residents in Korea, such as students, businessmen, and migrant workers.<sup>10</sup> Although the number of Muslims in Korea is growing; perceptions of this group have been slow to change. One example Daye Jeon provides from 2009, which will be discussed further in Chapter Three, is that of a commercial by Yonhap news in which “Two men appear in suicide bomber outfits. One of them then pushes the camera away, saying ‘You can find everything at Yonhap News.’ The men’s clothes framed against the backdrop resemble the popular stereotype of a terrorism video.”<sup>11</sup>

These clichés and prejudices, as has been shown in previous literature, have been prevalent in Korean popular media, and are part of a larger history of Orientalism in the West, also coined by Said, that has been adapted into Korean conceptions of race and ethnicity through its contact with the United States and Japan. Before Korea’s experience under Japanese control, Confucianism dictated hierarchies of age, class, and gender within society, which easily lent itself into later ideas of ethnic hierarchies (Kim, 31). Under Japanese rule in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Korea began to be influenced by Japan’s desire to be more modern through the transmission of Western ideas of Social Darwinism and aspects of Eugenics, but would also develop its ideas in opposition to Japan.

## **Methodology**

The research of this topic, which is qualitative in nature, will consist of the analyzing of Korean popular-culture sources, from 2005 onwards, and their use of tone, diction, and imagery to map out the changes in Korea’s depictions and views of Islam and Muslims. This study will also include a contextual analysis of the history of Muslims

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<sup>10</sup> Nam Jiyun Camilla, “Islam, Itaewon, Muslims, and Koslims,” p. 49.

<sup>11</sup> Jeon Daye, “The Consumption of the Diabolic Arab Image in ‘Oriental’ Korea: ‘the Other’ Enjoying the Image of ‘the Other?’” *Situations* 5 (2011), p.102

coming to Korea and East Asia as well as the context of Muslims as one of the various minority groups in South Korea. The vast majority of these sources have been found through news outlets specializing in Korean popular culture, Korean newspaper articles published in English, which focus on Muslims in Korea, as well as subtitled television shows. Sources that demonstrate who has been active in changing these images come from some of the same sources, with a few being found while visiting Seoul Central Mosque. This media analysis is not meant to be representative of Korean media as a whole, but is intended to capture diversity by looking at a variety popular sources which provided varying images of Muslims and Arabs within Korea. Additionally, although this study will be exploring religion and ethnicity with the sources provided, it will not be looking at issues of class within South Korean society. The research conducted is exploratory and is meant to provide more knowledge about the development of the image of Islam, Muslims, and Arabs in South Korea.

### **Chapter Outline**

This study is broken into four major parts the first being Chapter 2. In this chapter the theme of Korean Ethno-nationalism will be examine through a literature review. Various books and articles will be examined to determine the conception of a Korean national consciousness as well as the beginnings of ideas of ethnicity and Koreanness. This chapter will demonstrate that Korea ideas of a Korean ethnicity and Korean ethno-nationalism are modern constructs that have become deeply ingrained in Korean society, but it will also demonstrate that these ideas are changing.

Chapter 3, which focuses on the history of Muslims in East Asia, the history of Asian contact with Muslims, as well as the context in which Muslims have been

migrating to Asia and South Korea in particular. Many parallels can be drawn between the three countries, all of which first came into contact with the Middle East via trade. This section will also present statistics on where Muslim immigrants, since the 1990s, have been coming from, why they choose to migrate, as well as how adapted to Korean culture they have become.

Chapter 4 will focus on the analysis of various Korean variety shows and dramas, looking at how Muslims and Arabs are portrayed. The majority of the images are stereotypical, though the image of Muslims and Arabs in Korea has gradually been becoming less stereotypical. Chapter three will also examine why stereotypical images of Muslims and Arabs are so prevalent. Additionally this chapter will also focus on how these images have been changing over time and who has been responsible for the changes.

The final chapter will explore areas of the research that could be expanded once more sources are more readily available. The conclusion will also briefly touch upon certain areas of Middle Eastern and Islamic culture that have become more popular or normalized within Korean society. It will examine the implications of the findings of the previous chapters as well as the introduction, connecting the various chapters to give a more concise view of cause and effect

## CHAPTER 2

### KOREAN ETHNO-NATIONALISM: A LITERATURE REVIEW

In May of 2013 the Washington Post published an article on the most and least diverse countries in the world, labeling Japan, South Korea and North Korea as the most homogenous societies.<sup>12</sup> Many academic works claim that Korea's ethno-nationalism is a direct result of its history and politics surrounding the Japanese colonization and the turbulent years that followed independence. Although it was believed that today's Koreans and their nations stemmed from a common ancestor, Dangun, most Korean scholarship now recognize that the pure-blood theory is faulty. The roots for South Korean (and by extension North Korean) ethno-nationalism is more recent, i.e. the late nineteenth to early twentieth century, and is on the decline as South Korea has become more diverse and democratic over the years.

Before Korean scholars began refuting the pure-blood theory, scholars believed that Koreans as an ethnicity and a nation stemmed from the Old Joseon (Neolithic) era, which was ruled by the mythical king Dangun. In Kim Jung-bae's article "Formation of Ethnic Korean Nation and Coming of its Ancient Kingdom States,"<sup>13</sup> focuses on exploring the actual history surrounding the myth of Dangun, Old Joseon, and the Three Han in order to ascertain when Korean ethnicity, culture, and nation began. Using archeological evidence, Kim argued that the Korean ethnicity, culture, and nation began before the third or fourth century – contrary to Japanese scholars.

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<sup>12</sup> Max Fisher, "A Revealing Map of the World's Most and Least Ethnically Diverse Countries," *The Washington Post*, May 16 2013, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp/2013/05/16/a-revealing-map-of-the-worlds-most-and-least-ethnically-diverse-countries/> accessed 12/04/2013.

<sup>13</sup> Published in 1987 in the *Korea Journal*.

In her studying of Neolithic and Bronze Age pottery and cult practices, she found that Korean culture began in Neolithic Old Joseon, corresponding with the myth of Dangun, and would continue to develop through the Bronze Age period of Old Joseon. It was during this period, she states, that early settlers were assimilated into the Old Joseon culture thereby “maintaining the cultural and ethnic line as a nation.”<sup>14</sup> Kim also claims that the Korean state began as early as the thirteenth or twelfth century BCE, corresponding with Bronze Age Old Joseon. She supports her claim with archeological evidence of large chiefdoms, with populations of 10,000 to 15,000 people, during the Iron Age which stems culturally from Korea’s Bronze Age. Kim concludes by stating that Korean ethnic culture began in the Old Joseon era and that the formation of a Korean state began with the formation of chiefdoms. Considering that Kim’s article is an early work, it is not surprising that she does not criticize or refute to any large extent the idea of the Korean nation and ethnicity stemming from the Old Joseon Period.

Like Kim Jung-Bae, Han Kyung-Koo also explored the Dangun myth but refuted it. Han claims that Korean blood purity, which stems from the Dangun myth, is a recent invention and is not part of a larger Korean tradition. Additionally she claims that, historically, Koreans have had experience living with foreigners prior to the modern era and “that the real cause of prejudice is this very sense of cultural distinctiveness and superiority.”<sup>15</sup> In exploring the Dangun myth and the claim of the Goryeo and Joseon dynasties to be the decedents of Dangun, Han found that the myth and the claim was

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<sup>14</sup> Jung-Bae Kim, “Formation of the Ethic Korean Nation and Coming of its Ancient Kingdom States” *Korea Journal*, 1987, p.36

<sup>15</sup> Kyung-Koo Han, “The Archaeology of the Ethnically Homogeneous Nation-State and Multiculturalism in Korea”, *Korea Journal*, (2007), 12

only in reference to Dangun being “the first king of Korea, not the progenitor of the Korean people,” and that Goryeo and Joseon are the successors to his kingdom, Old Joseon (Gojoseon). She continues, “the records [which begin in the fourteenth century CE] of Dangun’s foundation of Korea (Gojoseon) during the same year as the ancient Chinese King Yao indicate that the political history of Korea is as long as that of China.” Through this tradition the people of Joseon could claim that their nation (and that of Goryeo) was just as old and great as China’s. Han then goes on to explain that the Dangun myth contradicts the idea that Dangun could be the progenitor of the Korean people due to the fact that there were many people living in the area before Dangun and his father arrived and decided to rule the land.

Following the Old Joseon period, peoples from outside of Korea were welcomed as long as they assimilated their “barbarian” selves to Korea’s civilized culture. Han writes, “This idea of the possibility of improving human character was one of the principles that directed Joseon’s policy toward immigrants and their naturalization. This line of reasoning is always twofold: the barbarians ‘can be’ and ‘should be’ assimilated.”<sup>16</sup> In order to help their assimilation, the new settlers were exempt from taxes and were allowed to take state examinations and even hold public office.<sup>17</sup> Although Joseon was accepting of immigrants there was discrimination based on how civilized their countries of origin are, with the Chinese having been given more favorable treatment than immigrants from Manchuria or Japan, even though the latter two are,

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<sup>16</sup> Kyung-Koo Han, “The Archeology...” p. 16.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 17-18.

“from the modern perspective, ethnically and linguistically far closer to Koreans.”<sup>18</sup> Han also claims that there was a certain distrust for less civilized immigrants until they had fully assimilated into Joseon society. She goes on to state that due to this earlier tradition of discrimination based on culture, one can see that discrimination based on ethnicity/race is a more modern development.

Having refuted the claim that Korea has been a homogeneous society for centuries, Han goes to explain how and when Korean ethno-nationalism came into existence. It would be during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that Koreans would begin to adopt the idea of a nation based on common blood and language. During this time they borrowed from the Germans and the Japanese and used these ideas as a countermeasure against Japanese colonialism. “It was when Korea lost its statehood through annexation to Japan that Dangun was transformed from a political leader into a mythic procreator of the Korean people.”<sup>19</sup> Even after independence, Korean leaders on both sides of the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel would continue to use ethno-nationalism as a tool to maintain power and legitimacy. Han concludes by summarizing the points above, but also by discussing multiculturalism in Korea and some of its pitfalls as a tool for the nation. He claims that differences based on culture or no better than differences based on ethnicity, but an “in-depth deliberation over what shape a multicultural society should take,” is necessary.<sup>20</sup> Han was not the first to contest the Dangun myth, but he does provide a good contrast to Kim’s article considering the focus of both papers.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 19.

<sup>19</sup> Kyung-Koo Han, “The Archeology...” p. 24.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p. 28.

In 2009, Lee Yoonkyung, published the article “Migration, Migrants, and Contested Ethno-nationalism in Korea,” which focuses primarily on the influx of migrant workers and foreign brides into South Korea following the economic boom of the 1980s, and what it means for ethno-nationalism. Lee states that the claim of Koreans coming from one bloodline has been refuted by both the diversifying of the Korean population as well as the intellectual community and civil society. Lee breaks down her argument into four parts: 1) the traditional framing of Korean national identity; 2) migration and migrants changing what it means to be Korean; 3) who has been challenging “nationalists ‘Koreanness’” and how; and 4) the conclusion. She begins her argument with two theoretical premises: that Korea’s ethno-national boundaries are constructed and historically selected, it “was a product national elites constructed in reaction to the challenges Koreans faced at a particular time;”<sup>21</sup> and second, “no individuals or groups can be defined by a single identity.”<sup>22</sup>

Lee goes on to discuss Korean national identity, explaining that a Korean nationality based on a shared ethnic identity was “created in modern times when the Korean people lived under the oppression of foreign powers,” namely that of Japanese colonial rule.<sup>23</sup> Lee dates this shift to the early twentieth century, focusing solely on Japan’s unintentional role of influencing Korea’s national identity. Post 1945, it was used to encourage economic development and spur the nation in the catching up with the West and Japan. “The state not only sought to inculcate the idea that economic

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<sup>21</sup> Yoonkyung Lee, “Migration, Migrants, and Contested Ethno-nationalism in Korea,” *Critical Asian Studies*, 41:3, 2009, p. 365.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p. 366.

development depended on unwavering national unity, but it also created norms and established institutions to undergird the nationalist notion of Korean-ness.”<sup>24</sup> Additionally, the policies that would grow from this identity would lead to the otherizing of peoples in Korea who did not fit mold, such as multi-ethnic children. Such policies included citizenship based on the father’s status and the restriction of having one citizenship.

In discussing the structural changes within Korea’s population, Lee claims that the increasing migration into and out of Korea is challenging Korea’s Ethnocentric identity. The influx of migrants into Korea is due to a growing need for workers in low-paying jobs, as well as a decreasing native population in rural areas. Foreign workers began arriving in large numbers in the 1980s. Prior to 2004, some discriminatory policies were put into place to curb Korean resentment toward migrant workers. The most notable of these policies was the Industrial Trainee Program from 1991 to 2004. Unlike Foreign nationals who came in for skilled labor jobs (and would receive the status of an ‘official’ foreigner in Korea), those who came under the Trainee program received the status of ‘unofficial’ foreigners, were only permitted to stay for a year with a one year extension, and would receive much lower pay than their Korean counterparts for the same job. Due to harsh conditions, many of these trainee migrant workers opted to live as undocumented workers. Even overseas Koreans from undesirable countries would face more difficulty in gaining residency those Overseas Koreans coming from highly industrialized countries. Rural areas would also see populations shift with more Korean men marrying women

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid

from Vietnam or China. Lee asserts that this migration of people raises the question of what it means to be Korean and challenges Ethno-nationalism.

Lee then addresses who is contesting ethno-nationalism and how. She begins with protests led by migrant workers due to inhumane working environments. Protests would begin in the mid-90s, demanding improved working conditions, medical treatment, compensation for injuries, for salaries to be paid on time, and for a foreign worker protection law to be implemented. From these protests, “Koreans began to see the ugly side of their nationalism that had placed so much emphasis on ethnic homogeneity at the risk of inferiorizing others.”<sup>25</sup> The protests resonated with them due to the memory of working conditions many Koreans had experienced during the 1970s and 80s. Civic organizations also helped the migrant workers’ cause, giving them support and a voice. Through their combined efforts, work hours were decreased, pay was raised to be equal to Korean workers, and the Trainee Program was abolished, replaced with the Employment of Foreign Workers Act which allows workers to stay for a year with a possible extension of three years, maximum.

Starting as early as the 1990s, scholars began questioning Korea’s ethno-nationalism, arguing that it stifles diversity in Korea. In addition to scholarly works, the mass media has also played a role in subverting ethno-nationalism by airing stories on the struggles of migrant workers, as well as stories on ethnic diversity in Korea and how Koreans have not yet adjusted to these changes. Lee writes, “By advocating universal human rights, democratic inclusiveness, and global citizenship, the mass media have

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<sup>25</sup> Yoonkyung Lee, “Migration...” p. 373-374.

played a role in raising critical voices against Koreans' ethnocentrism."<sup>26</sup> In addition to these outlets, surveys have also shown that civil society is also starting to change along with Korea's diversifying demographics. Koreans are starting to view national identity as based more on citizenship than on ethnicity or bloodline. In a survey conducted in 2005, Koreans reported that maintaining Korean nationality and Korean language were more important than having a Korean bloodline. The responses also indicate, according to Lee, that the more democratically inclined the responder was, the more likely they were to be more open toward foreigners in Korean society.<sup>27</sup> Lee concludes stating that evidence indicates that with the influx of foreign workers and brides into Korea, Korea has been forced to reexamine their notions of what it means to be Korean. Through the work of migrant workers, civil organizations, intellectuals, and mass media, the concept of ethno-nationalism in Korea has been challenged. Lee's article, unlike the two previously discussed, does not linger long on the topic of the Dangun myth and focus more on how present day occurrences are challenging the notion of a Korean national identity based on ethnicity as well as how this challenge affects both Koreans and minority groups within Korea.

In 2007, Charles K. Armstrong reviewed Shin Gi-Wook's *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy*. Armstrong places Shin in the Modernist camp due to his claim that there is no concrete connection between the modern Korean national identity or community and that of pre-modern Korea. He refutes Shin's claim, to an extent, by stating that by the tenth century onward a foundation for the present state of

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 376.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p. 378.

Korea was laid via territory, language, and a centralized state. Anderson goes on to say that ethnic nationalism won out over all other forms of nationalism in Korea, “although international socialism and capitalist modernization were ostensibly the dominant ideologies of North and South Korea respectively... both Korean regimes relied heavily on ethnic nationalism in the period of postwar development, and nationalism remains dominant in the two Koreas today.”<sup>28</sup> He also goes on to state that Shin claims that Korean Nationalism is direct result of Korean opposition to Japanese rule and nationalism, but maintained the fervor that is mirrored in Japanese nationalism.

Anderson, Unlike Lee see ethno-nationalism as an ideology that will like stay, “but for the reasons so clearly and convincingly outlined in Shin’s book, ethnic nationalism has been a powerful force in Korean society for over a century and is not likely to fade any time soon.”<sup>29</sup> With his ending statement, Anderson is in stark contrast with Lee who sees that ethno-nationalism in on a gradual decline, making way for a more ethnically diverse and accepting South Korea.

Due to the introduction that Anderson’s review provides, I will focus on part III of Shin’s book which focuses on the legacy Korea’s Ethnic Nationalism has on Korean society. In this section Shin has two chapters. The first deals with the “ethnic homogeneity-national unification thesis.” The thesis claims that North and South Korea will eventually unify due to their shared ancient blood ties. Shin scrutinized the thesis using survey data from 2000. From the survey he found that “common blood and ancestry are defining features of South Koreans’ national identity,” and that these

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<sup>28</sup> Anderson, “Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy by Gi-Wook Shin,” *American Journal of Sociology*, 113.1 (July 2007), p. 273.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, p. 274

features support the belief that the two countries will be reunited.<sup>30</sup> Although that is the case, the survey also indicated shared ethnicity does not hide the fact that the two Koreas have grown differently, nor does it “promote hegemonic unification by the South.”<sup>31</sup> Shin suggests that should North and South unify, formulating a civic national identity and establishing democratic institutions can help ease the unification process and minimize exclusion. He ends the chapter stating that it is unlikely that ethnic nationalism will dissipate quickly, and Anderson would agree.

In his second chapter Shin explores nationalism and globalization and argues that “Korean nationalism informs the ways in which globalization is experienced by the South Korean People.”<sup>32</sup> He argues that globalization is used by the Korean government in order to bolster the country’s competitiveness “and has simultaneously sought to preserve and strengthen national heritage and culture.”<sup>33</sup> Shin concludes his book by arguing that ethnic nationalism in Korea cannot be ignored and must be recognized as a strong force in both Korean society and politics. He advises that Koreans find a constructive way to use it in order to veer away from its possibly negative uses, e.g. racism, exclusion, or oppression. Unlike Lee and Han, Shin does not explore what ethnic nationalism means for ethnic minorities in Korea, but he does explore what it could mean for Korean unification – it could be used as a tool for initiative, but other tools must be used as well to ensure that ethnic nationalism remains benign.

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<sup>30</sup> Gi-Wook Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press. 2006), p. 201.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p. 184.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p. 220.

Nadia Kim's book *Imperial Citizens: Koreans and Race from Seoul to LA* is a little different from the other books in that it focuses more on concepts of ethnicity in Korea (as well as among the Korean American community) than on nationalism. Because half of the book focuses on the Korean American community in Los Angeles, I will be focusing on the first few chapters, which special attention paid to chapter two: "Ethnonationality, 'Race,' and Color: The Foundation." The introduction of her book is titled "Imperial Racialization" and focuses on U.S. Imperialism and racial hierarchies. It touches upon the transmission of racial hierarchies through Korean interaction with the U.S. Armed Forces and U.S. media. In chapters three and four, Kim explores these facets more in depth, looking at themes of white superiority as presented via America popular culture or the military, as well as how Koreans position themselves between White superiority and Black inferiority.

Chapter two explores the origins of how Koreans were introduced to the concept of race, which Koreans would equate with blood origins. It would be in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century that Korea would begin tackling the subject of being nation. Through exposure to western and Japanese writing on nations and race, Korea would begin to formulate its ideas of what it means to be a Korean national. In 1908, just two years before Korea's annexation to Japan, Koreans were already beginning to favor the idea of Korea as "*tanil minjok*, - 'the single ethnic nation,'"<sup>34</sup> which was popularized by the myth of Dangun,

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<sup>34</sup> Nadia Kim, *Imperial Citizens: Koreans and Race from Seoul to LA*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press., 2008), p. 24

with many writing in “Darwinist fashion, [stating] that the country’s most urgent task was to preserve his bloodline in a time of world struggle.”<sup>35</sup>

Before Korea’s experience under Japanese control or racial influence from the West, Confucianism dictated hierarchies of age, class, and gender within society, which easily lent itself into later ideas of ethnic hierarchies.<sup>36</sup> Under Japanese rule in the early 20th century, Korea began to be influenced by Japan’s desire to be more modern through the transmission of Western ideas of Social Darwinism and aspects of Eugenics. Also during this period, Korea experienced a surge in Christian missionary work which helped to further ingrain color hierarchies along with Korea’s own tradition of associating lightness with superiority and darkness with inferiority.

After the Korea’s independence from Japan and subsequent occupation by US military forces, especially after the Korean War, Western conceptions of ethnicity would be further implemented through Western movies, television shows, and news outlets. An even outside of Western influence, Korean politicians such as Park Chung Hee would heighten nationalism through ethnic ideology, play on insecurities from Korea’s colonization. Nadia’s work on ethnicity in Korea supports the idea that ethnic nationalism is a modern conception. Beyond the second chapter the book does not explore ethno-nationalism and its implications on minority groups in Korea, but does hint at a sort of kinship with other minorities in opposition to White America.

Hong Kal’s *Aesthetic Constructions of Korean Nationalism: Spectacle, Politics, and History*, is another slightly different book in that it approaches the topic of

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Nadia Kim, *Imperial Citizens*, p. 31.

nationalism in Korea through expositions and exhibitions. In the first part of the book Hong Kal focuses on two exhibitions that display representations of colonial governmentality. In the first chapter the 1915 Korean Industrial Exposition is examined for its structure, way of addressing the audience, and how it influenced “the popular imagination of the Korean Nation.”<sup>37</sup> Kal argues that the purpose of the exposition was “to give the nation a *form* imaginable to the colonized people [in relation to Japan].”<sup>38</sup>

Chapter two focuses on the Korean Exposition of 1929, which was meant to promote harmony between Korea and Japan, through a discourse of Pan-Asianism. Chapter three “explores the relationship between modernity and the visual environment of the city, and how it stimulated a fantasy of liberation and the construction of identity and difference.”<sup>39</sup> Kal states that the purpose of the first part of the book is to explore Korea’s national subjectivity, which she argues is contradictory and ambiguous.

In part two Kal explores the relationship between Korean nationalism and its colonial past, calling them contradictory. In chapter four examines Ethnic nationalism through war memorials in Korea and Japan. In this Chapter Kal focuses on the War Memorial of Korea and the Yasukuni shrine in Japan due to both playing large roles in the construction of nationalism, both symbolically and socially.<sup>40</sup> Kal argues that the biographies of nation are written in such a way to link to the past as well as to the future

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<sup>37</sup> Hong Kal, *Aesthetic constructions of Korean Nationalism: Spectacle, Politics and History*, (London: Routledge, 2011), p. 5

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p. 6.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p. 62.

in order to today's generation who may feel separated from their countries past due to globalization.

The War Memorial of Korea is meant to commemorate the martyrs of war as well as to instill a sense of patriotism into the generation who never had to experience war. The Museum, Kal states, also constructs "an 'ethnic' lineage of the nation, a sacrifice of forefathers for the children of the nation: the *Koreans*," which she finds problematic.<sup>41</sup> The reason for which is that the museum claims its mission to be the transmission of a "live history which we have been defended for five thousand years."<sup>42</sup> Her issue with this claim is that it purports that Korean ethno-nationalism goes as far back as ancient times, because of this issues she goes on to explore how the museum constructs ethnic nationalism "in terms of war, kinship, familial sacrifice and how this process of making "we" is closely related to the construction of "others."<sup>43</sup>

Hong Kal notes that the museum is built like a temple and despite its Greco-Roman style it is actually built like a Confucian temple. At the north end the Memorial hall is made in a similar style to the ancestral inner shrine, with lit bowl reminiscent of an ancestral alter to be used to commune with the dead. Kal write that "the movement from the exterior to the interior is thus a journey back to the 'origin.'"<sup>44</sup> The purpose of the journey and the room are to reconnect with the past and with one's ancestor. "Both the dead and the living find themselves returning to the ancestor from whence they came and

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p. 64.

<sup>42</sup> Hong Kal, *Aesthetic constructions of Korean Nationalism*, p. 64.

<sup>43</sup> Hong Kal, *Aesthetic constructions of Korean Nationalism*, p. 64.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p. 65.

where their sacrificial life for the nation is legitimized.”<sup>45</sup> By producing this journey the museum is producing ethno-nationalism, encouraging people to give tribute to their shared ancestral heritage.

Kal then explores the creation of the “other” through the museum’s exhibitions. One such example is its treatment of North Korea, which is portrayed as an abnormal state than need to return to South Korea’s ‘normal’ state, which in doing so they are also creating an innocent and legitimate “us.” Kal also notes, that the museums in both South Korea and Japan only tell the stories that the Nation-family wants to hear, the skeletons of self-imposed authoritarian rule can stay in the closet. Hong Kal’s book continues to explore other manifestations of nationalism through art, but Chapter four is the only one to focus on ethnic nationalism and in a way that is much different than the previous works explored. Kal’s work provides a new perspective on analyzing ethno-nationalism in Korea, looking not just at the rhetoric but also the imagery and the structure of exhibitions. She brings up the issue of how ethnic nationalism white washes, in way, a nation’s history or the xenophobic tendencies that can arise from such a tradition. She argues that without critical self-reflection, examining the negative aspects of ethnic nationalism, it will be difficult for these countries to move past their experience of historical injustices.

The final book explores the image of the nation in Korean education from 1880 to 1910, essentially from around the time that South Korea began conceptualizing a national identity until their annexation to Japan. The first chapter of Lee Yoonmi’s *Modern Education, Textbooks and the Image of the Nation: Politics of Modernization and*

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

*Nationalism in Korean Education, 1880-1910*, focuses on Modernization, new and old education, and briefly touches upon why Korea would rebel so fiercely against Japanese colonization, as well as methodology – namely historicizing national identity using an interpretive-historical-sociological method.

In chapter three Lee introduces Yu Kil-jun, the first person to introduce social Darwinism to Korea. In his book *Soyukyonmun*, he wrote about hierarchical stages of civilization and wrote that no nation has reached the highest stage, or *kaehwa*.<sup>46</sup> Other writers would call for Korea to be less secluded, and by the 1890s notion of survival of the fittest became popular. Many would call for Korea, and Asia to advance as the West had.

Moving on to Chapter five, Korea experienced educational reforms in 1904 which introduced Korean language and history into the curriculum, with the textbooks being printed in *hangul*. During this early period the text books were highly politicized but after becoming a Japanese protectorate in 1905, Japan began modifying the more nationalistic elements of Korean textbooks. The book published from 1894 to 1910 discussed not only the civic aspects of nationalism, but the ethnic as well. The text book would stress their current dynasty, pick certain heroes, and stress independence. Prior to the protectorate treaty, Korea identified modernization with the West and opposed “Chinese centered-order” in constructing Korean ethnic nationalism.<sup>47</sup> By 1905, though still using Western

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<sup>46</sup> “The point at which ‘human affairs reach the most beautiful – or perfect – state.’” Yoonmi Lee, *Modern Education, Textbooks and the Image of the Nation: Politics of Modernization and Nationalism in Korean Education, 1880-1910*, (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 2000), p. 51

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, p. 93.

examples of modernization, the textbooks began to warn against becoming completely Western.

Also during this period, “the textbooks increasingly dug into the past to articulate a cultural identity in order to aid ‘collective survival’ in the present.”<sup>48</sup> Textbooks would be open to both the West and the modernization of the ‘ethnic’ by choosing pieces of their tradition in order to facilitate state formation/nation building. One textbook from 1906 explained though Korea could learn a lot from the West, it should also consider its own “natural conditions, race, customs, and history,’ before emulating the West.<sup>49</sup> Independence became an important theme during this period, emphasizing the greatness of Choseon and its kings and history. By 1905 textbooks began to demonstrate a fear of losing Korea’s independence and should cultivate its independent spirit. Textbooks, such as *Yunlihak-kyokwaseo*, would claim that the Korean nation is like a family in which all the citizens belong to the larger lineage of the court.

Lee then goes on to mention that during this period textbook used Dangun as the founder of the Korean Nation. In the original story of Dangun, he is succeeded by Kija, a royal family member of Yin China who had be credited as the founder of Korean civilization and culture. During the twentieth century his role would be diminished (and transmitted to Dangun, according to the sourced discussed earlier). Like the majority of text mentioned before it, Lee book focuses on the late nineteenth to early twentieth century, but for the entirety of the book. Like the other works mentioned Yoonmi Lee dates Korean ethnic nationalism to this same period, but delves more in depth into the

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid, p. 95.

<sup>49</sup> Lee, p. 97.

various theories of nation building and state formation, in addition to analyzing how education had been used to transmit nationalistic ideas.

From these works it is evident that pure-blood theory is a modern construct alongside Korean ethno-nationalism. Although earlier sources would claim that the Korean Nation and the Korean people all stemmed from the same Neolithic ancestor, the story its-self and the hero building tradition refutes the claim. It would not be until the late nineteenth to early twentieth century that concepts of a shared ethnic lineage would come into prominence. As for where ethno-nationalism is going, none of the sources could reach a consensus; some believe it is on a slow decline, while others believes that it will not be leaving any time soon. It is likely, though, that as Korea becomes more diverse, ethno-nationalism will follow the former trend and slowly decline.

## CHAPTER 3

### A BRIEF HISTORY OF ISLAM IN EAST ASIA

This chapter will examine the history of Muslims in East Asia, beginning with China and Japan, in order to provide context for the arrival of Islam into the Korean peninsula and how it has been shaped and characterized from the pre-modern to modern era, as well as examine the influence of Muslims within these three societies.

#### **Muslims in China**

There are many dates given for the introduction of Islam in China, many of which coincide with the various legends<sup>50</sup> surrounding the event, but the date most agreed upon by historians is 651 AD, found in Chinese records to be the year that “the king of Tashi (Arabia) Amir al-Mumin sent an envoy for the first time to the Chinese court bearing tribute.”<sup>51</sup> Prior to this envoy, Arab records indicate that commercial relations between China and the Arab world date back to 636 AD.<sup>52</sup> During the Tang and Sung dynasties many Arabs and Persian came to China to conduct trade, even when in 751, Chinese and Muslim armies met for the first and last time on the battle field.

During the Tang dynasty, the Abbasid Caliphate was making inroads into Central Asia, and had nearly consolidated their conquest of Transoxania in 750. Prior to this near consolidation, the Prince of Tukharistan (a region of Transoxania) asked China for help

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<sup>50</sup> One such legend is that the uncle of the prophet Muhammed, S’ad b. Abi Waqqas traveled to China with three companions and the Chinese Ambassador to Arabia in the year 632. The legend claims that he was the first to bring Islam to China and that upon his death, he was buried in Canton. (Lee Hee Soo “The Spread of Islam....”

<sup>51</sup> Lee Hee Soo, “The Spread of Islamic Culture to East Asia Before the Era of Modern European Hegemony” *Islam Arařtirmalari Dergisi*, 7 (2002), p.60

<sup>52</sup> This date can be found in a report sent by ‘Utba b. Gazwan to the Caliph ‘Umar, informing him of the successful taking of Basra and the trade that come into the city. “Thanks to Allah, we concuered Basra whence so many junks were coming from Oman, Bahrain, Morocco, India and China,” Ibid, p. 58.

against bandits in the region; a Korean officer was sent and was successful in quelling the bandits.<sup>53</sup> “He was then called in by the King of Farghana to help in a local dispute with the neighboring king of Shash. The Chinese forces ended up by taking Shash and the king fled to seek help from the Abbasid governor Abu Muslim, who had established himself at Sarmarqand.”<sup>54</sup> This event snowballed and culminated into a battle between Arab and Chinese forces in 751 at Taraz, in which the Arab forces were victorious and would end their eastern expansion.

After the war a number of the Muslim soldiers would join the Arab and Muslim traders in China, and relations between China and the Muslim world remained friendly with the arrival of an Arab envoy the following year.<sup>55</sup> When the T’ang emperor was faced with a rebellion in 756, led by Lu-shan who took the cities of Ch’angan and Lo-yang, he called on the Abbasid Caliphate for aid. “The Abbasid Caliphate immediately responded to the appeal and sent a contingent consisting probably of some 4,000 Persians and Iraqis... Chinese history clearly indicates that Arab troops, with the co-operation of the Uighur armies, assisted the Chinese armies in recapturing the two capitals from the rebels in 757.”<sup>56</sup> These troops, much like their predecessors from the battle of Taraz, stayed in China, but this time as a reward for their services. “Those who stayed married Chinese women, thus becoming the real nucleus of the naturalized Chinese Muslims of

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<sup>53</sup> Hugh Kennedy, *The Great Arab Conquests: How the Spread of Islam Changed the World we Live in*, (Philadelphia: Da Capo Press, 2007), p.294.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Lee Hee Soo, “The Spread of Islamic Culture to East Asia...,” p. 62

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

today.”<sup>57</sup> By the ninth century, Mosques would be founded in China’s major port cities. Arab sources indicate that more than 150,000 Muslims were living along China’s south-eastern coast during this period.<sup>58</sup> “The information, coming from Chinese records, shows that foreign sojourners enjoyed freedom in their commercial and religious life and also something that resembled their own integral state within another country.”<sup>59</sup> A number of Muslims would integrate themselves into Chinese society, but many would instead join the *Fan-Fang*, or Muslim community, which enjoyed some autonomy.

Following this period, the Song dynasty saw a reopening of sea trade with the Arab and Persian merchants, many of whom would settle or conduct business in Canton and Guanzhou. In China’s major port cities, such as Hangzhou, there were amenities provided for the foreign and Muslim community. Jaques Gernet notes in his book *Daily Life in China on the Eve of the Mongol Invasion*, notes that “Marco Polo assures us that there were also hot baths for foreigners, probably provided for Muslims accustomed to the stifling heat of the Turkish bath.”<sup>60</sup> Gernet supposed that “there must have been restaurants, although there is no actual proof of it, where the religious taboos of Muslim merchants were respected.”<sup>61</sup> By the thirteenth century, the Mongol rulers would appoint Muslims to official positions and many of the merchant population would still remain in communities separate from the Chinese. By the time of the Ming dynasty, the Muslim

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p. 68.

<sup>59</sup> Lee Hee Soo, “The Spread of Islamic Culture to East Asia...,” p. 68.

<sup>60</sup> Jacques Gernet, *Daily Life in China on the Eve of the Mongol Invasion (1250 – 1276)*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962), p. 125.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, p. 134.

community became cut off from their ties in the Middle East due to China's isolationist policy toward nations to the West.<sup>62</sup> During this period, the Muslim population became more integrated into Chinese society "through marriage with Chinese women and the adoption of Chinese manners. Many mosques were built in the pagoda shape of Chinese temples... The Muslims became outwardly indistinguishable from the Chinese."<sup>63</sup>

There are few instances of unrest or violence between the Muslim community and the Chinese government. Outside of the battle of Taraz, there had only been two major instances of conflict prior to the decline of the Qing dynasty. The first would be in 758, in which "clashes between Muslim and local people in Canton resulted in the destruction of much of the city."<sup>64</sup> The second would be during the Huang Ch'ao Rebellion in 879, which brought the Tang dynasty to an end, and in which "thousands of Muslims were massacred. During this period, many Arab and Persian Muslims moved to the Indo-China peninsula or the Malay ports... Other Muslims might well have proceeded to the Korean peninsula and Japan."<sup>65</sup> Peace between the Muslim community and the Chinese would resume in the Song Dynasty and would continue until the latter years of the Qing dynasty.

Although Muslims initially opposed Manchu rule in China, they did not come into any major conflict with the government until the nineteenth century.

With the decline of the Manchu regime, Muslim revolts occurred in almost every Muslim area. The Muslim revolts were mainly initiated in provinces where

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<sup>62</sup> Lee Hee Soo, "The Spread of Islamic Culture to East Asia..." p. 71.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*, ed. 2, (London: Pearson Longman, 2004), p. 121.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 69.

Muslims constituted a large segment of the population. The prime reason was that Muslims were loyal to the Ming dynasty and they refused to be ruled by the Manchus... The second reason was an aspiration for independence and the creation of a Muslim state in Turkistan, where the absolute majority of the inhabitants were Muslims.<sup>66</sup>

Muslims in China began to identify themselves more and more with Muslims of the Ottoman Empire, especially with the advent of European colonial aspirations in China and Muslim lands; many Muslims during this period became attracted to both Chinese nationalist movements as well as Pan-Islamism.<sup>67</sup>

Today there are about 9.56 million Uighurs<sup>68</sup> and about 20 million Hui Muslims<sup>69</sup> in China. Though both groups are Muslim, each has a different relationship with Chinese government and society. The Uighur population and the Chinese government have an antagonist relationship, with some faction of the Uighur population wanting independence. The Hui Muslims on the other hand are Han Chinese that had converted to Islam centuries ago, their culture is relatively similar to that of the Chinese, with the exception of Muslim customs. The Hui and the Chinese government (and society as a whole) have a better relationship with one another, though both groups see themselves as superior to the other.<sup>70</sup> Both groups do face discrimination, but it is likely that the latter group may become more accepted as they assimilate further, appearing to be more Han Chinese, as for the former it is unclear whether they can reconcile with the Chinese

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<sup>66</sup> Lee Hee Soo, "The Spread of Islamic Culture to East Asia...", p. 72.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid 73.

<sup>68</sup> Enze Han, "Boundaries, Discrimination, and Interethnic Conflict in Xinjiang, China," *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*: 4.2 (2010), p.249.

<sup>69</sup> Osman A. Chuah, "The Cultural and Social Interaction between Chinese Muslim Minorities and Chinese Non-Muslim Majority in China: A Sociological Analysis," *Asian Social Science*, 8.15 (2012), p.269.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, p.268

government and it is rather far-fetched that they would become accepted by Chinese. It would seem that their only source of recourse would be through independence, if they are able to attain it.

### **Muslims in Japan**

Japan has a relatively short history with Islam in comparisons to its neighbors, China and South Korea, who have a history of direct contact with Islam and Muslim countries that extends from the ninth century onward. Japan's history with Islam and Muslims, at least direct contact, does not occur until the Meiji period. Prior to the Meiji restoration, Japan's experience with Muslim countries was likely through goods they imported from the Chinese and Europeans. Although this is the case, it is possible that Japanese merchants, students, monks and diplomats to China may have come into contact with Muslim merchants or officials.<sup>71</sup> The Meiji Restoration, which lasted from 1868 to 1912, saw the modernization of Japan, a time when the country was in awe of many things Western. From 1871 to 1873 members<sup>72</sup> of the Iwakura Mission traveled various countries of the world for diplomatic and modernization purposes. During a visit to Egypt, one of the members, Kume Kunitake, wrote about the Japanese reaction to the country.<sup>73</sup>

When visiting the Suez Canal, the group marveled at the work, but attributed it to Western innovation, while in the same breath refer to the Egyptian workers as

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<sup>71</sup> Lee Hee Soo, "The Spread of Islamic Culture to East Asia...", p. 65-66.

<sup>72</sup> Oligarchs.

<sup>73</sup> Eskil O. Vestre, "Japan as a Multicultural Society: Exploring Contemporary Minority Issues Through the Case of Muslim Immigrants," Master's Thesis, The University of Oslo, Spring 2011., p.65.

backwards.”<sup>74</sup> When visiting Yemen they theorized as to why those in warmer regions are not as advanced as Europe, claiming that because of the warm weather they do not have to work as hard to survive, so “After eating, ‘they lie down’, and ‘pass their days almost like beggars’, content just by continuing to live, ‘and so in thousands of years they have not advanced one step in civilization.’”<sup>75</sup> Although Japanese views of Middle Easterners was fairly negative, some sources claim that the Ottoman Empire and the Japan had a good relationship.<sup>76</sup> The Fathils write that during Russian expansion many Turkic Muslims fled to Japan and were given asylum, not just out of sympathy but also because they were seen as potential allies against the Russians.<sup>77</sup> In the same article, they claim that a number of Egyptian settled in Japan, married Japanese women, and between the two groups a sizable Muslim community was made.<sup>78</sup>

The early Muslim communities in Japan had made a small impact on Japan. By 1938 they had built a mosque and by the end of the decade there were 1,000 Muslims in Japan. Japan began collecting books on Islam in order to better understand their subjects, but much of the orientalist views of Muslims would come from European sources. Though the Japanese saw themselves as better than the Arabs and Muslims, during the time of World War Two, the Japanese saw themselves as “fighting on the same side in

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Eskil O. Vestre, “Japan as a Multicultural Society,” p. 65.

<sup>76</sup> Fauziah Fathil and Fathiah Fathil, “Islam in Minority Muslim Countries: A Case Study on Japan and Korea,” *World Journal of Islamic History and Civilization* 1.2 (2011): p. 132

<sup>77</sup> Ibid

<sup>78</sup> Ibid

the ‘battle’ of ‘civilisations.’”<sup>79</sup> Japan’s history with Islam is an interesting mix of orientalism and camaraderie, in which the Japanese see themselves as on the same side as the Muslims in the fight against Western colonialism, but also better and more advanced than Muslim civilizations.

This dynamic changes over time with the Japanese still seeing themselves as more modern and advanced than their Muslim counterparts, but no longer see themselves as being on the same side. Japan, in addition to adopting Western views on Muslims and the countries they come from, also have social amnesia – they have forgotten their own history with Islam and the Middle East. In addition to this factor, and probably most affected by social amnesia, is their own history with ‘outsiders,’ which helps to define their view of the inherent backwardness and barbarism of Muslims.

The number of Muslims in Japan is unknown. There have been estimates as high as 300,000 but they are likely too high an estimation. It is difficult to calculate how many Muslims there are in Japan, partially because there is no section on religion on the census and partially because the percentage of Muslims in Japan is very low – roughly 0.23% or less.<sup>80</sup> Other sources put the number of Muslims in Japan at roughly 100,000 Muslims, with the native Japanese Muslim population being anywhere between 1,000 to 10,000.<sup>81</sup> The majority of Muslims coming to Japan come from Asia, with the vast majority coming from South and South East Asian countries, with about only 9.5% of those

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<sup>79</sup> Eskil O. Vestre, “Japan as a Multicultural Society,” p. 70-71.

<sup>80</sup> The percentage is my own estimation based off of Japan’s 2011 population in comparison to the over estimation of 300,000 Muslim. South Korea which has a Muslim population of roughly 145,000 or more is roughly 0.29% of the Korean population.

<sup>81</sup> Fathil, 130.

immigrants marrying Japanese citizens.<sup>82</sup> It has been reported that there are roughly 20 to 38 mosques (many of them are converted office space due to the high cost of land<sup>83</sup>) in Japan, in addition to over 100 *musallas*, or prayer rooms.

In recent years Muslims have been facing discrimination at work, in which many are not allowed breaks for prayers, or are not allowed easier work hours during the holy month of Ramadan – a time when Muslims fast from dawn until dusk.<sup>84</sup> Other sources claim that it is easier for foreign Muslims to have those rights be respected – because they are a foreigner and therefore different, they are not bound to Japanese standards – than it is for a Japanese Muslim to be ‘given’ those rights.<sup>85</sup> The reason that the latter may happen is because even if a Japanese person is Muslim, the person will not be foreign, but his religion will be seen as foreign and different “by Japanese employers, who are not legally required to allow their workers to pray, but often may do so out of courtesy.”<sup>86</sup>

It is from this idea of foreignness that that Muslims can be seen as outsiders and “that any celebration of ethnic diversity in Japan is always met by ‘the master narrative of seamless national homogeneity that dominates Japan’s discursive space.’”<sup>87</sup> Japan’s history with this concept spans many centuries and has the most experience in exclude the native Ainu from the Japanese fold. It is from this tradition that one can find how the

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<sup>82</sup> Hiroshi Kojima, “Variations in Demographic Characteristics of Foreign ‘Muslim’ Population in Japan: A Preliminary Investigation” *The Japanese Journal of Population*, 4.1: (2006), 118 and 123

<sup>83</sup> Yeseul Christeena Song, “The Everyday Life of Muslims in Japan,” *Focus* 52, p.8.

<sup>84</sup> Eskil O. Vestre, “Japan as a Multicultural Society,” p. 51.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 72

Japanese identified barbarism with the way someone looks. In Japan, some Muslims tend to stand out with their tan skin, beards, or by wearing the *hijab*<sup>88</sup> if they are a woman. “Associating Muslims with beards seems to be a widespread image: a survey among high school students indicated that their image of Islam was a religion practiced by bearded men living in desert areas.”<sup>89</sup> The Ainu, who have traditionally been associated with barbarism by the Japanese, were often characterized by their hairiness.<sup>90</sup> Because Muslim men often times are bearded, they may be regarded as barbarians, or, at the very least, emphasizes how different they are from the Japanese, so much so that they do not belong in Japanese society.

It is from these various factors, including history, that the current images of Muslims and Islam in Japan prevails. The majority of these images come from a mixture of Western Orientalist tradition, in which the Muslim is perceived as backwards; irrational; violent; and/or exotic and sensual, and their own conceptions of what constitutes a barbarian.

### **Muslims in Korea from the Pre-modern to Modern Era**

The Korean peninsula has a long history of contact with Muslims dating back to the ninth century, and with earlier Arab and Persian civilizations since the late fifth or early sixth century. The earliest mention of Muslims in Korea is by Ibn Kurdadbiḥ, a

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<sup>88</sup> Modest head covering or veil. In Japan “it is often associated with backwards oppression of women,” Eskil O. Vestre, “Japan as a Multicultural Society,” p. 86

<sup>89</sup> Eskil O. Vestre, “Japan as a Multicultural Society,” p. 86.

<sup>90</sup> “Early 1300s Japanese accounts of ‘foreign’ barbarians in Japan’s frontiers described them as hairy, growing hair all over their bodies... Similarly, 1500s accounts by Japanese describe the land “to the north of Japan” as “inhabited by huge, bearded natives”... 1700s accounts still emphasized their hairy looks, one stating that “their bodies are most hairy and their eyebrows a single line; some even grow body hair like bears” Vestre, 86

Persian geographer, who wrote about the location and topography of Shilla. He writes, “Muslims who happened to go there were fascinated by the good environment and tend to settle there for good.”<sup>91</sup> Later accounts would also mention the migration of Iraqis or Alwais<sup>92</sup> to the Korean Peninsula.<sup>93</sup> Accounts of Muslims in Korea did not only come from Muslim sources, but also from Korean sources such as the *Koryosa*,<sup>94</sup> which mentioned, in the eleventh century, Muslims coming to the court of Hyun Jung to present their goods.<sup>95</sup> According to Lee Hee Soo, “during the Koryo dynasty, more than one hundred Arab merchants visited the kingdom. Also, some Uighur Muslims from central Asia settled in Korea, and ... that there was even a mosque in Gaesung during this time.”<sup>96</sup> He also concludes that the reason that these Muslims, mostly Arabs and Persians, stayed can be found in the Muslim sources, which state that it was because of the climate, the fertile land, clean air and water, and the riches to be found or made in Korea.<sup>97</sup> Many yearned for Shilla, the name used for Korea throughout the centuries by Muslim scholars, for its beauty and because many believed incurable diseases could be treated there.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Lee Hee Soo, “Early Korea-Arabic Maritime Relations Based on Muslim Sources,” *Korea Journal* (1991): 26.

<sup>92</sup> Alawi in this case likely refers to the supporters of Ali, or Shi’ites, not the current sect that goes by the same name. It should be noted that the Alawi claim may not be as strong as the Iraqi claim.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*, 27

<sup>94</sup> Official chronicles of the Koryo dynasty.

<sup>95</sup> Lee Hee Soo, “The Spread of Islamic Culture to the East Asia,” p. 67.

<sup>96</sup> Nam Jiyun Camilla, “Islam, Itaewon, Muslims, and Koslms: Inter-cultural Dynamics in the Muslim Neighborhood of Seoul,” *Situations* 6 (2012), p. 49.

<sup>97</sup> Lee Hee Soo, “Early Korea-Arabic Maritime Relations Based on Muslim Sources,” *Korea Journal* (1991), p. 26-28

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid*, p. 29

Before Muslims would begin to migrate to Korea, Koreans would first come into contact with Muslims in Chinese ports and courts, by 1024 the *Koryosa*, mentioned above, stated that al- Razi and a hundred people from the Tashi country (Arabia) came and presented their native products to the King.”<sup>99</sup> A similar instance was recorded a year later with the added descriptor of Tashi being a barbarian country.<sup>100</sup> Sea trade in Korea would increase during this period with merchants coming in from East Asia and the Muslim world. Outside of Muslims sources, there is no evidence of Muslims or Arabs settling in the Korean Peninsula until the thirteenth century, when the Mongols and then the Yuan dynasty was exercising influence over Koryo.<sup>101</sup>

As time progressed through the Koryo dynasty, Muslim communities would settle and some villages would even be founded by Muslim merchants.<sup>102</sup> Lee gives two examples of Muslims being naturalized into Korean society. The first is that of Samga, possibly a Uighur, who came to Korea as a chamberlain to a Mongol princess; through the marriage to a Korean woman, Samga “is known as the originator of the Chang clan of Doksu, whose communities are prosperous even to this day.”<sup>103</sup> The second example he gives is that of Min Bo, who came to Korea in the 1270s and went on to gain a high

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<sup>99</sup> Lee, “Islam in Korea: History, Present situation and Future Prospect,” *Korea Journal of Islamic Culture* 1.1 (1996), p. 24

<sup>100</sup> Lee, “Islam in Korea: History, Present situation and Future Prospect,” p. 24.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid*, 26.

<sup>102</sup> “However, there can be some people found in Korea who remember that their villages were founded by Arab merchants. They know that they have Muslim ancestors.” Jeong-min Seo, “Children’s Media between Grooming and Persuasion: Religious Vision in the Case of Korea,” (Graduate School of International and Area Studies Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Seoul, Korea), 3.

<sup>103</sup> Lee, “Islam in Korea: History, Present situation and Future Prospect,” 27.

ranking position in the Korean court.<sup>104</sup> During this period Muslims would found communities within and around the Koryo capital and would also build mosques; occasionally “the Muslim [religious] leaders [would be] invited to attend official court ceremonies where they practiced their own religious rituals such as Qu’ran recitation and Arabic ‘Dua’ to pray for the king’s long life and the prosperity of the country.”<sup>105</sup> Well into the fifteenth century, Muslims were accepted in Korean society, but a change would occur in 1427 when a royal decree disallowed Islamic rites and dress to be performed and worn.<sup>106</sup>

During the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910) Muslim communities begin to assimilate to Korean culture and religion due to the ban on foreign cultures (with the exception of Chinese culture); though this is the case there are still families with names that indicate Muslim ancestry.<sup>107</sup> During the Joseon period, even with its Sino-Korean culture policy, the King Sejong (r. 1418–1450) was recorded to have enjoyed listening to Quranic chanting.<sup>108</sup> According to Fauziah and Fathiah Fathil, Muslims would continue to migrate from central Asia to the Korean peninsula up until the banning of foreign cultures in the Joseon dynasty, but would continue again in 1900s with the expansion of Russia into

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 28

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Fauziah Fathil and Fathiah Fathil, “Islam in Minority Muslim Countries: A Case Study on Japan and Korea,” *World Journal of Islamic History and Civilization* 1.2 (2011): 133. And Nam Jiyun Camilla, “Islam, Itaewon, Muslims, and Koslms: Inter-cultural Dynamics in the Muslim Neighborhood of Seoul,” 49.

<sup>108</sup> Nam Jiyun Camilla, “Islam, Itaewon, Muslims, and Koslms: Inter-cultural Dynamics in the Muslim Neighborhood of Seoul,” 49.

Central Asia and the Japanese occupation.<sup>109</sup> Lee states that about 200 Russian Turkic Muslims would flee to Korea prior to the late 1890s (with a second wave in 1917 and then a final wave in the 1920s), and merchants in Manchuria would often trade in the northern part of Joseon.<sup>110</sup> Most of the Turkic immigrants (mostly of Tartar descent) would settle in Seoul and a small number of Koreans would convert to Islam during this time.<sup>111</sup> Sentiment toward Muslim immigrants worsened as Japanese occupation continues, with the Turks being seen and yet another set of outsiders.

A lasting Muslim presence in Korea would not really be felt until after the Korean War. With the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, the UN sent Turkish troops to the peninsula in order to help the South in their fight against the North Korean troops. By 1955, the imams who came with those troops would have their first two converts.<sup>112</sup> According to Lee Hee Soo, Turkish imam were not allowed by the Turkish government to teach Koreans about Islam until they received special permission to teach those that visited the camp and then to teach at lectures. In that same year, the first Muslim society was formed in Korea; twelve years later the Korea Islamic Foundation was established. Prior to the 1960s, Lee explains, relations with Muslim countries were focused primarily with those in South and South East Asia. In the 1970s, with the arrival of the Oil Crisis, South Korea began to focus its attention on Muslim countries, especially oil producing countries in the Gulf. In 1976, Seoul Central Mosque would be built, as well as an

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<sup>109</sup>Fauziah Fathil and Fathiah Fathil, "Islam in Minority Muslim Countries: A Case Study on Japan and Korea," p. 133.

<sup>110</sup> Lee, "Islam in Korea: History, Present situation and Future Prospect," p. 32.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>112</sup> Jeong-min Seo, "Children's Media between Grooming and Persuasion: Religious Vision in the Case of Korea," p. 3

Islamic center, and the Korea Islamic Foundation was transformed into the Korea Muslim Federation.<sup>113</sup> By 1997, five mosques had been built in South Korea and the Muslim population had reached 40,000.<sup>114</sup>

A little more than 20 years after Korea's "first" converts, the Muslim community in Korea would build its first mosque since the pre-modern era in Itaewon (Seoul Central Mosque) with the financial aid of Arab countries. "Now there are more than 8 mosques and 61 prayer centers throughout the country."<sup>115</sup> In 2010, it has been recorded that there are roughly 45,000 resident Muslims (native and nonnative) and an additional 100,000 temporary Muslim residents in Korea, such as students, businessmen, and migrant workers.<sup>116</sup>

In a survey conducted by Lee Hee Soo and Joh young-Joo in 2012, of the 100,000 immigrant Muslims living in Korea about 39% come from Indonesia and another 23% comes from Pakistan, another 22% came from Middle Eastern countries.<sup>117</sup> Additionally 37.2% of the immigrants completed high school, another 16.2% went to college, and another 34.5% completed university or graduate school.<sup>118</sup> The majority (66.8%) of immigrants came between 2007 and 2011, though 1.4% of the 148 interviewed came in

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<sup>113</sup> Lee, "Islam in Korea: History, Present situation and Future Prospect," p.38-39.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 38.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Nam Jiyun Camilla, "Islam, Itaewon, Muslims, and Koslms: Inter-cultural Dynamics in the Muslim Neighborhood of Seoul," p. 49.

<sup>117</sup> Lee Hee Soo and Joh Young-Joo, "A Survey of Muslim Immigrants in Korea-Focussed on Adaptation to Korean Lifestyle and Religious Observation," 한국중동학회논문총제33권 제1호 (2012), p. 139.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid, p. 140.

1994.<sup>119</sup> The majority of immigrants moved to Korea to study (22%), earn money a lot of money (34.5%), or find a job (13.6%).<sup>120</sup> In regards to the type of work Muslim immigrants engage in

15.5% of respondents reported currently being self-employed (including family businesses), 8.1% reported being employed in professional or managerial positions, 11.5% reported being employed in clerical, sales or service positions. 40.5% of reported being employed in factory or labor positions, 2% reported being unemployed, while 22.3% reported being students in Korea.<sup>121</sup>

Of the immigrants surveyed, the majority, 47.3% considered their Korean to be ‘not good,’ 32.4% consider their Korean to be good, and 11.5% think it is very good.<sup>122</sup> The vast majority of Muslim immigrants have more than one Korean friend, with only 16.9% having 0-1 friends.<sup>123</sup> When questioned about how they perceive their quality of life in Korea, “over 80% of respondents answered either satisfied or very satisfied with their overall life in Korea;” and 67.6% of respondents saw themselves as having adapted to life in Korea.<sup>124</sup>

The number of Muslim immigrants coming into Korea has been steadily on the rise since the 1990s, and has experienced a steep climb since the late 2000s. Muslims feel that they have adapted well into Korean society and are fairly happy with their lives there. On the other hand, some Muslims feel misunderstood or are treated as a novelty, “Bae sometimes gets pictures taken of her in the subways when she wears her hijab, and

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid, p. 142.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, p. 146

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, p. 150.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, p. 151.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid, p. 152.

her going to the Mosque is always treated as an extraordinary thing. ‘And I don't get to have many male friends around. I think I intimidate them.’”<sup>125</sup> Muslims also face some difficulty in staying away from pork and alcohol, with some allowing themselves to drink in business meetings due to the prevalence of the practice in Korea.<sup>126</sup> Muslims do face prejudice from Koreans due to ignorance of their beliefs; images perceptions of Muslims are beginning to change, especially in news reports focusing on Muslims living in Korea.

Although the number of Muslims in Korea growing; perceptions of this group have been fairly stereotypical over the years, but these views have been changing over time. As the following chapter will explore, entertainment stations will learn from previous mistakes and the image of Muslims and Arabs in Korea television shows will gradually become more positive or, at the least, more realistic or more human.

### **Comparison**

The images and perceptions Korean society holds of Muslims and Arabs are informed by their history. Although Korea, like China, has had a history with Muslims that spans centuries, the two diverge in the fifteenth century. Though both countries adopted “isolationist,” as well as Japan, China’s Muslim community continued to thrive despite losing contact with Muslim communities outside of China. In Korea on the other hand, Muslim communities shrank as the Joseon dynasty matured. Though some Muslim communities may have remained, most assimilated into Korean culture causing fewer Koreans to come into contact with Muslims in Korea. Toward the end of the Joseon dynasty, waves of Turkic Muslims came into Korea, but for the most part did not leave a

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<sup>125</sup> Bae Ji-sook, “Life is Very Hard for Korean Muslims,” *Korea Times*, August 10, 2007. [http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2007/08/117\\_8104.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2007/08/117_8104.html)

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

lasting impression due to being scattered across the country. The area where most would come into contact with Muslims would be in Manchuria, especially during the Japanese occupation of Korea.

As mentioned in the introduction, it would be during Japan's increasing influence over Korea that Korea would begin solidifying its idea of nationalism through a shared language and ethnicity – it was at this time that Dangun myth became ingrained with Korean ethno-nationalism. With this new idea of nationalism being based off ethnicity, Korea, and Japan, would see other ethnic groups as outsiders. Both Korea and Japan view themselves as homogenous societies, and it is from these ideas of ethnic purity that images of Arabs and Muslims as a stereotypical other can arise.

## CHAPTER 4

### IMAGES AND PERCEPTIONS OF MUSLIMS AND ARABS

Since 2001 many in South Korea have grown interested in Islam, but there are many who still ignorant about it. There have been various books, news articles, and television shows depicting Islam, and some of them demonstrate a fair representation of the Muslim community. Other, more common, popular culture sources tend to present a more stereotypical view of what Islam or Arab culture is. As mentioned earlier, Jeong-min Seo discovered in his study on Korean newspapers that half of those examined saw Korea as experiencing an Islamization and, according to 16%, this Islamization is a threat to Korean unity. In addition to these negative views Muslim workers in Korea are often times faced with discrimination, in which they will be assigned jobs in which they must handle pork products.<sup>127</sup>

In addition to prejudiced views, many Koreans cannot tell the difference between “Islam,” “Middle East,” and “Arab.” A public poll from 2011 recorded those figures and was examined by Daye Jeon, who stated that

“although 54%, or sixty seven among the respondents, answered that “the Arab” is not exactly the same as “the Middle East,” only eight of them knew the term correctly. More than half of them (68%) thought the word “Arab” refers to Islam, and more than a quarter of them (26%) thought it refers to a geographic area.”<sup>128</sup>

In addition to these figures there were other polls in which Koreans were asked to pick the Arab from a group of photos. In each of the polls the majority respondents would pick

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<sup>127</sup> Yun suh-young, Nam, Jeong-min Soo

<sup>128</sup> Jeon Daye, “The Consumption of the Diabolic Arab Image in ‘Oriental’ Korea: ‘the Other’ Enjoying the Image of ‘the Other?’” *Situations* 5 (2011): 100.

the people who best fit into the Arab stereotype, such as picking King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia wearing a *thobe* over a Lebanese male model and the Sudanese president, even though all three are Arab. In another poll a Saudi woman wearing *niqab*<sup>129</sup> was picked (90%) over Nancy Ajram, a Lebanese singer and a Christian Arab, and Layla ben Ali, the former first lady of Tunisia.<sup>130</sup> In both of these cases Arabs are being associated with their clothing, which in the case of the woman is associated with Islam, and for the man it is associated with traditional Arab dress, which may or may not have religious connotations to the average Korean. This sort of idea of what Arabs and Islam are ignores the fact that both are in fact quite diverse. An Arab can be Christian, Muslim, or Jewish, and a Muslim can be of any ethnicity. With figures like these, how are Muslims and Arabs being depicted that causes so many to view those two images as representative of Arabs?

### **The Images in Korean Popular Culture**

Daye Jeon gives two examples that demonstrate, via a popular culture source and a news source, how these images permeate Korean society promoting stereotypical views on Arabs and Islam. The first example cited is that of an comedy skit called *Alkkarira News* that aired on SBS<sup>131</sup> on 2005, in which the comedienne, Kim Se-Ah,

“Pretended to be reporting something on a news program; her voice was loud and high-pitched, and the audience laughed at everything she said. She was wearing a hijab, and the language she spoke sounded somewhat foreign, with an occasional

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<sup>129</sup> A type of Islamic dress which covers all but the eyes.

<sup>130</sup> Jeon Daye, “The Consumption of the Diabolic Arab Image in ‘Oriental’ Korea: ‘the Other’ Enjoying the Image of ‘the Other?’” 105.

<sup>131</sup> Seoul Broadcasting System, a national television and radio broadcasting network in South Korea.

muffled Korean curse word. [She] greeted her audience with the mock-Arabic words ‘ala-katarabia alkkarira shatarabia.’”<sup>132</sup>

The skit elicited critique from the Arabic Language department at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies as being unfair to the Arab world. Though the producer gave no apologies, Kim Se-Ah changed her skit to be one in which she appears to be an alien, and no longer mocking the Arabic language. Jeon argues that the skits could be interpreted as “the Arab people... being treated as de facto aliens: incomprehensible, unintelligible and crude.”<sup>133</sup> Even though this skit was supposed to be taken just as comedy, according to the producer, it does perpetuate a stereotypical view of Arabs and Muslims in which all dress a certain way, and all talk loudly and unintelligibly, and for those reasons they are mock-able. Replacing the skit with an alien, can also be interpreted as emphasizing the strangeness of and how different Arabs and Muslims are from Korean society. By making them “de-facto aliens,” Arabs and Muslims in Korean society, even Korean Muslims, would only be seen as “Other” and therefore not belonging within society.

Another example Daye Jeon provides is that of a commercial by Yonhap news in which “Two men appear in suicide bomber outfits. One of them then pushes the camera away, saying ‘You can find everything at Yonhap News.’ The men’s clothes framed against the backdrop resemble the popular stereotype of a terrorism video.”<sup>134</sup> This is another image that paints the Arab and the Muslim as dangerous, a threat, an “other” that cannot be trusted. With the intent of promoting their news service, Yonhap News is also

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid, 101

<sup>133</sup> Jeon Daye, “The Consumption of the Diabolic Arab Image in ‘Oriental’ Korea: ‘the Other’ Enjoying the Image of ‘the Other?’” 101.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid, 102.

propagating the stereotype of the volatile Arab or Muslim, since the two are one and the same in either of the above examples given. These examples from 2005 and 2009 are only a few of the examples that are available to illustrate the various images that are prevalent in Korean media and pop culture.

In 2009, the drama *You're Beautiful*, aired on SBS starring Park Shin Hye as Go Mi Nyeo, a nun in training, who later impersonates her brother Go Mi Nam in order to join a boy band in an attempt to find her mother. Before making the decision to join the group, she is asked by his manager to impersonate him for a day to ensure that he gets the contract. After completing her task she informs the manager that she is going to Rome, much to his chagrin since he needs her for another month. Go Mi Nyeo refuses and prepares to leave for Rome. At the airport she runs into one of the members (Tae Kyung) of the boy band, in her rush to get away, so as not to be recognized, she rushes off without her ticket. Tae Kyung tries to find her, wanting to help the nun, and enlists the help of the other two band members. Almost being found by the three, Go Mi Nyeo escapes into a crowd of women in white *hijab* and light blue *abaya*, much like her habit.

Though there may be older shows that depict Muslims or Arabs, *You're Beautiful*, seems to be the earliest depiction of Muslims in a drama from the 2000's. The presence of Muslim women in this episode is brief and is used as a tool for the heroine's escape. The women have no characterization; they simply walk together, taking no notice of Go Mi Nyeo, and effectively hide her from the band members. Not much can be garnered of the women, except, perhaps, that they are rather fashionable in their high heels and hand bags. The presence of these women could be playing into the idea that Muslim women look identical in their religious or cultural clothing, on the other hand their presence

could be likened to that of Christian religious dress, making the dress just as acceptable, but their presence is so brief (just a few seconds of screen time) that this could only be speculation.

On August 4<sup>th</sup>, 2011 SBS aired the second episode of *Protect the Boss*.<sup>135</sup> The heroine of the show, No Eun Seol, had just begun her first professional job as an administrative assistant. On her first day of the job she is fired by the director. Later that night she laments to a friend that she had prayed every day to get a job, the scene cuts to her visiting a church, a Buddhist temple, and a mosque, each time praying to get hired, yet she keeps landing bad jobs or cannot keep the job. That night she decides to return to work the next day, regardless of being fired.

Like the Muslim women in *You're Beautiful*, the mosque scene is equally as brief. In the scene No Eun Seol sits behind two bearded Muslim men wearing a *gutra* and *iqal*,<sup>136</sup> while she is wearing a white *hijab*. It appears that the casting director wanted the Muslims to appear Arab, even though the majority of South Korea's Muslims are of South Asian and South East Asian descent. Arabs are a minority among the Muslim population, and it is very unlikely to find a South Asian or South East Asian in Arabian dress. Though the scene is very short and the only words heard are the men's prayers in Arabic as well as No Eun Seol's plea for a job, the reason for the men being Arab could be that the show runners see Arab culture as being synonymous with Islam

Another example from the last two years is an episode of *Star King*, "18 year old girl from Saudi Arabia, Ruby's dream," in which a young Korean-American girl who was

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<sup>135</sup> SBS Entertainment, *Protect the Boss*, episode 2, August 4, 2011.

<sup>136</sup> A gulf style headdress that is popular in Saudi Arabia that consists of a squared cloth (*gutra*) that is held in place by double wrapped rope (*iqal*).

living in Saudi Arabia sings. The scene begins with the host speaking to the audience, following his introduction a group of women in *niqab*, all black except for the one in the middle wearing purple, come on to the stage to the sound of Middle Eastern music playing. The one in purple hands the sign she is carrying in Arabic and Korean to the host and then rushes away with her entourage to ensure they do not touch. A man then approaches them with a stuffed microphone and the young lady in purple, Ruby<sup>137</sup>, reaches for it while clinging to her scarf, fighting for it. She finally gets it and falls and checks to make sure her veil is still covering her face; she then proceeds to get up and pulls a real microphone out of the plush toy. Piano music starts and she takes off her head scarf and begins to sing “Think of Me” from *Phantom of the Opera*. After the first stanza she takes off her *abaya* to reveal a short white dress and then continues to sing. Interestingly none of these scenes elicit any complaint from the Muslim community – not even the complaint that not all Saudi women wear the *niqab*. One could say that even the first half of the skit of the show plays into the stereotype, and perhaps even the fetishizing of Arab/Muslim women in which the mystery beneath the veil needs to be revealed. Though the first portion of the skit is rife with potential for controversy, it is actually the following scene that has caused uproar among netizens,<sup>138</sup> who viewed the scene as belittling Saudi culture by promoting stereotypes of Arab culture/Islam.

In the controversial scene, after Ruby finishes singing the song, the host approaches her and she pokes him away with what looks like a miniature light saber, suddenly a man wearing a *thobe* comes running forward from stage right with an AK47

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<sup>137</sup> Ruby is a Korean American who was living in Saudi Arabia at the time according to websites dedicated to reporting on Korean pop culture.

<sup>138</sup> A word referring to people belonging to the internet community.

and starts to push the host away. Both the “Saudi” man and Ruby begin to force the man to back away by walking forward and jabbing the air with their gun and toy sword, respectively. After some yelling, Ruby explains in English that, “it is against the law for a man and woman to be very close in Saudi Arabia.”<sup>139</sup> The actors on stage then begin to talk to the audience, in Korean, about Saudi Arabia and proceed to show videos of the country. They then proceeded to show picture of a Weather woman in *Chadari*<sup>140</sup>, which is typically worn in Central Asian countries, such as Afghanistan, not Saudi Arabia. Upon seeing this photo, the audience laughs. After seeing the second half of the skits, many Arab and Muslims fans of Korean pop culture (and those who are not fans, as well) made complaints via the internet and the Star King crew released an apology on their official homepage.

In their apology (August 15, 2011) Star King apologized for their misinterpretation and had only meant to showcase Ruby’s talent and “desire for singing.” They realized that they had made a mistake by unintentionally belittling Saudi Arabian culture and promised, “We will take extreme measures from now on so that we don’t bring about any further misunderstandings over our depictions and interpretations of different religions and cultures featured in our program.”<sup>141</sup> One of the actors on the show, Mighty Mouth’s Shorry J, also issued an apology to fans via his twitter page stating, “A thousand apologies for my behavior on Star King. It was very wrong of me to

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<sup>139</sup> SBS Entertainment, ““18 year old girl from Saudi Arabia, Ruby’s dream,” *Star King*, August 13, 2011.

<sup>140</sup> A type of Islamic dress which covers all of the body including the eyes. One can still see through the headpiece due to the lattice work over the eye area.

<sup>141</sup> Ramham424, ‘Star King’ apologizes for distorting Muslims in its latest episode,” *AllKpop*, August 15, 2011, <http://www.allkpop.com/2011/08/star-king-apologizes-for-distorting-muslims-in-its-latest-episode>

play the role of an Arabian police. I didn't mean that Arabians are terrorists... I'm not racist, and I have no prejudice feelings against the Arabian culture. Sorry for my disrespectful behavior once again."<sup>142</sup>

Following the apologies, *Star King* edited the skit to remove all the controversial content, leaving the singing sections for the most part, and followed up with another apology on August 21<sup>st</sup> on their Youtube account, written in Arabic. It is interesting to note that both *Alkkarira News* and this *Star King* episode was broadcast on SBS, but unlike the *Alkkarira News* team, the *Star King* team acknowledged their mistake, which will be expanded upon in greater detail later on in the study.

Much of what was controversial in the show was described in the apologies, but this is demonstrative of the kinds of images that permeate Korean society in regards to what Arab and Muslim culture is. For many Koreans, Arab and Muslim women must be covered up; men and women cannot get close to each other, let alone touch, and the men are often depicted as aggressive and domineering. The image of Shorry J in a *thobe* wielding an AK47 reminded many of images of terrorists from the desert. Though it was meant to showcase both Ruby's talent and Saudi Arabia, the initial airing only helped to solidify stereotypical images of Islam and Arabs as conservative, backward, and aggressive.

Later in the year SBS aired another program with Muslim characters. *Scnet of a Woman*<sup>143</sup> featured an ethnically Korean Muslim pianist by the name of Wilson. The Show's heroine is Yeon-jae, a meek office worker who is constantly ordered about at

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<sup>142</sup> Shorry J, Twitter account @soddong01, August 19, 2011.

<sup>143</sup> SBS Entertainment, *Scnet of a Woman*, episodes 1, 4, and 7.

work, and who had recently been diagnosed with a tumor in her gallbladder. One day, she takes on task to escorting her boss's fiance's (Sae-Kyung) VVIP client, Wilson, a job nobody wants, in order to get a day off to go to the hospital. Yeon-jae takes Wilson and his wife on a tour of the county side; Wilson appears uninterested, claiming that he has seen better. His wife explains to Yeon-jae, that he is actually enjoying his time and that he has just been particularly grumpy on this trip and that she should not take it personally. She goes on to explain that Wilson is adopted and has been longing to see his mother country. Wilson is characterized as a little difficult and his wife, who is not visibly Muslim, is good natured.

In ensuring that Wilson's stay is a pleasant one, Yeon-jae needs to make sure that Wilson is given *halal* food. She finds a Muslim owned farm that provides *halal* food, helping to catch the chicken and then watches the *dhabihah*<sup>144</sup> be performed, and finds a high end restaurant that can prepare a chicken for them. The trip is going well until they arrive at the restaurant for lunch and find it closed due to the owner being the hospital. Yeon-jae sneaks inside to get the *halal* chicken and they relocated to another restaurant, where she tells the owners to be careful with the chicken. Despite the warning, the restaurant manages to mix up the chicken with pork, leading Wilson and his wife to leave the restaurant offended.

Back at the hotel Wilson is already in a bad mood over the pork, when his ring gets caught in Yeon-jae's sweater as she leaves, snapping that she should be careful. When she returns she brings with her a box of Wilson's favorite pastries, and he is moved at her efforts. All seems to be getting better until the next morning when Sae-kyung calls

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<sup>144</sup> Method of slaughter.

her in to accuse her of stealing Wilson's diamond ring. Yeon-jae protests, but no one believes her since CCTV footage shows that she was the only person to enter Wilson's hotel room the day before. Wilson's leaves for the airport, cancelling his performance, but finds his ring after going through the metal detector. It had gotten caught on his sweater and he appears to be remorseful of accusations he and Sae-kyung made against Yeon-jae.

The incident is largely ignored until episode 4, in which Sae-kyung wants to sue Yeon-jae for damages over the Wilson incident. Wilson does not reappear until episode 7, when Yeon-jae spots a picture of him in a magazine with his ring on his finger. Yeon-jae begins calling Wilson repeatedly until she finally gets through to his manager. When she asks about the ring he claims that ring is an identical that was made to replace the original. When they hang up, the manager suggests to Wilson that he come clean about the whole ordeal. Wilson, stressed, exclaims that he can't, asking how could admit to the mistake with the ordeal getting so out of hand. The scene finishes with him sighing in exasperation, wondering why he went to the interview with the ring on. Although Wilson is not making the choice to clear up the misunderstanding, he is not being presented as a villain. Instead, he is a conflicted character, both prideful and embarrassed over the false accusation.

Yeon-jae's boss, Ji-wook also calls Wilson in order to prove Yeon-jae's innocence. He manages to trick Wilson into saying that the ring was made by the same famous jeweler, only to tell him that said jeweler had died (a lie), in order to catch him in his lie. Wilson, in another fit of nervousness, hangs up on Ji-wook, who in turn buys a plane ticket to visit Wilson. Yeon-jae goes to court, and just as it seems that she will have

to pay the 100 million won, Wilson comes through the door, looking meaningfully at Yeon-jae he then turns to the judge to state that the meeting is pointless because he never lost his ring. He and Yeon-jae then go out for coffee and she asks him how he could have let her be falsely accused. Wilson, looking guilty, says that he sincerely apologizes. She tells him that he should have called to clear the misunderstanding, and he exclaims, flustered, that he couldn't sleep after the incident. Yeon-jae exclaims that if that were the case, then he should have just called and then asks why he came anyway. Wilson replies that he was threatened by her boss, Ji-wook. The last time the audience sees Wilson is when he is about to leave for the airport. Ji-wook accompanies him to his car; before getting in Wilson hands Ji-wook a box asking him if he could pass it along to Yeon-jae, saying that he was so flustered that he forgot to do so when he saw her. Wilson notices that Ji-wook helped Yeon-jae because he has feelings for her, and he then goes on to explain the sort of crazy things he did to gain his wife's favor, giving the audience a glimpse of his softer side. Wilson wishes Ji-wook luck, saying that Yeon-jae is a good woman, before leaving.

SBS's *Scent of a Woman* is the only drama presented that has a reoccurring Muslim character. The only time the audience is made aware of Wilson's religious beliefs is in regards to food, which is only brought up in the first episode and in the court room scene. Neither he nor his wife appear outwardly Muslim, nor do they bring up their religion in any of their conversations, unless it was related to the restaurant incident. Wilson's wife is presented as good natured and understanding. Wilson on the other hand is a little more complex; he is stubborn, prideful, and a bit immature. Even with these negative traits, he is still capable of feeling remorse, he is observant, and under all the

gruffness, he has a heart. His personality is not the result of his religion, nor is it presented as such. Wilson is not reduced to his religion nor is he ridiculed for it, being Muslim is only an aspect of who he is. In this drama, Wilson is not a stereotype, nor is he representative of any trope, save for that of a humorous and predominantly benign antagonist. Even though he is a reason for Yeon-jae's problems, he does do his part, if begrudgingly, to help her in the end and recognizes that she is, in fact, a good person. It is interesting to note, that even though Wilson is an antagonist in his own way, he is not presented as the main antagonist; it is actually Sae-kyung who is presented as Yeon-jae's true antagonist and rival. Wilson (and the Muslim owned farm) is arguably, SBS's best portrayal of a Muslim character and of Muslim customs.

In another program by SBS which, thus far, has not garnered as much criticism as the previously mentioned programs consists two episodes of *Full House Take 2* (2012). There have been some comments on Korean drama news outlets, but no such out pouring of criticism to illicit an apology from the producers. The episodes in question are episodes two and three in which the female protagonist (Man-ok) appears wearing a *niqab* in order to disguise herself in order to get a job as a personal stylist for a K-pop duo. One of the members (Kang-hwi) of this duo helps her to pass off the ruse by telling his notoriously picky partner (Tae-ik) that because he is so picky they had to look outside of the country for a stylist. He explains that she can speak a little Korean and a little English, so they can get by. She then explains later in car when Tae-ik tries to sneak a

peek at her, in broken English, that Tae-ik cannot look at her, because if he does, per tradition in her country, “I die, you die, we die!”<sup>145</sup>

There have been a few comments here and there stating that portrayal was insulting to Islam, but at the same time there are comments by others who claim to be Muslim or Arab and did not find the scene offensive. One of those claimants said that she did not find it offensive because the same trope is used in Egyptian films.<sup>146</sup> The reasons why someone could find this scene offensive is that they could take it as a commentary of Arab or Islamic culture, in which a woman is subservient to man and must be covered up. This is another instance of a show not intending to be insulting, but definitely buying into the stereotype of Arabs and Muslims. It is not overtly offensive in the sense that they are not actively criticizing Islamic society, but it is representative of how Arab and Muslim cultures are sometimes presented in Korean media. The reason that this show did not garner as much criticism from universities or netizens may be because of the commonality of the trope even in Middle Eastern popular culture, alternately it could be because Man-ok’s character was not from a specific country, and she therefore represented a vague concept of the Middle East.<sup>147</sup> Or, just simply, many saw the use of *niqab* as just a disguise and the warnings as a precaution to detection. Additionally, religion was not a part of the warning that Man-ok gave, it was presented as a cultural aspect of her “country.” Any number of these reasons may have worked together to prevent a large outcry of criticism to the episodes in question, but it is still representative

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<sup>145</sup> SBS Entertainment, “Full House: Take 2,” episodes 2 and 3.

<sup>146</sup> Genger, commenting on <http://mydramalist.com/korean-drama/3147/full-house-2>, February 6, 2013.

<sup>147</sup> This could play out the other way as being seen as partaking in Orientalism in which Arabs or Muslims are seen as an anonymous mass of strange people.

of how a seemingly innocent joke can play host to stereotypical images of Islamic and Arab culture.

### **Why are These Images so Prevalent?**

There are various reasons why these images of Islam and Arabic culture are so common throughout Korean Pop culture. A reason that Daye Jeon presents is that Korea is partaking in Orientalism. He writes, “It could be argued that the ‘Oriental’ Korean public tries to identify as ‘Western’ when they consume and reproduce the image of ‘the Arab people’ as their ‘Other.’”<sup>148</sup> Orientalism can be defined as outsider, or Western, views of the Middle East and Asia, that can often be shaped by ideas of imperialism and superiority. Through the various polls and shows demonstrated above, one can see how South Korean citizens indulge in the concept of Arabs and Muslims as Others, as well as being unable to distinguish between the two. Jeon sees Korea’s participation in Orientalism as trying to be more western or to appear more civilized than the Arab. “Koreans are more civilized—that is, closer to the West. However, just as blacks from the Antilles or Martinique were treated as merely the same in the West, Korean culture is still Oriental.”<sup>149</sup> It may be because Korea is part of the “Orient” that their conception of Arabs is slightly different from traditional Orientalism. Jeon cites a poll in which 98% of the participants views Arabs as masculine, not feminine – the traditional view of Arabs within the scope of Orientalism; additionally Koreans feel more fear toward Arabs and

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<sup>148</sup> Jeon Daye, “The Consumption of the Diabolic Arab Image in ‘Oriental’ Korea: ‘the Other’ Enjoying the Image of ‘the Other?’” 99

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, 107

Islam rather than the need to dominate, control, and rule over them.<sup>150</sup> Additional sources, such as Nam's, also maintain this view of South Korea orientalizing Arabs and Muslims in which they become an anonymous "Other."<sup>151</sup>

Another reason for these images, which is briefly mentioned, is what Nam calls, "an ignorance of their own history."<sup>152</sup> Part of this ignorance may be due to the 'one culture' policy of the Joseon period, a time in which Muslim communities would have assimilated into Korean culture and religious practices. Even though Muslim groups would begin to migrate to Korea in the early twentieth century, they did not make a lasting presence due to low numbers as well as being scattered across Korea. Many likely lived in and around Seoul, but most in this period did not aim to convert Koreans to Islam and the majority of Koreans likely did not come into contact with any Muslims. Due to this lack of contact with Muslims, even during the Japanese occupation which saw an influx of Muslims coming into the country, the arrival of Muslims during the Korean War would be seen as South Korea's 'first contact' with Islam by the general populace.

In addition to Korea's one culture policy, the meaning of what it is to be a Korean changed. As discussed in the previous chapters, Muslims were able to be integrated into Korean society in the past, but that began to change in the Joseon dynasty. As long as a foreigner adopted Korean customs they would be accepted into Korean society. During the beginning of the nineteenth century, Korea began to adopt the notion that Koreanness was based on shared blood and language and thus the myth of Dangun changed from that

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid, 107

<sup>151</sup> Nam Jiyun Camilla, "Islam, Itaewon, Muslims, and Koslms: Inter-cultural Dynamics in the Muslim Neighborhood of Seoul," *Situations* 6 (2012), p. 48.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

of a political leader to the father of the Korean people. This new concept of Koreanness became ever more popular during the Japanese occupation and would last well into the twenty-first century.

This ‘forgetfulness,’ coupled with Korean ethno-nationalism, leaves room for concepts such as Orientalism to set in. Because Islam and Arabs are seen as being new to South Korea, it is easier to see them as an “Other.” Prior to the September 11 attacks, Muslims and Arabs were likely to be seen as strange and exotic “Others,” but not necessarily threatening. It would be after the September 11 attacks that Muslims and Arab would be seen as a dangerous and threatening “Other” that should be feared. It is from this image that many misconceptions arise, which are not alleviated by news sources that report on South West and Central Asia.<sup>153</sup> Although South Korea borrows from Western conceptions of the Middle East and other predominantly Muslim regions, their portrayal of Muslims within South Korea is different from their coverage of Muslims and Arabs outside of South Korea. This exoticizing of Muslim and Arab peoples, though having heavy Western influences (especially since the Korean War, from American television shows and news provided by the U.S. military television station) also retains some aspects of Korea’s own indigenous beliefs which help to inform Korea’s idea of racial and ethnic hierarchies.

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<sup>153</sup> Coverage of the Middle East, Central Asia, and North Africa largely falls into place with how they are presented in US, European, and Japanese news sources. The similarities may, in part, be due to alliance with the United States, which in turn garners sympathy for their initiatives in the region. It can also be due to South Korea’s experiences with these regions, such as instances when South Koreans are taken hostage by extremist factions.

## **Are Images Changing? Who is Changing Those Images?**

Images of Islam appear to have been changing, slowly but surely. News articles have been produced that present Muslims in a more sympathetic light, predominantly that of a struggling minority within Korean society. *Korea Times* has produced a number of articles that give a voice to Muslims in South Korea, present their accomplishments, or their hard ships. In an article from 2007, *Korea Times* reported Muslim in Korea do face discrimination, especially after the September 11 attacks. Within the same article, they quoted a Korean Muslim, Hasna Bae, “She explained that her religion bans any violence and the terrorists are in fact criminals regardless of their religious beliefs. ‘Now people get astonished; but soon show more curiosity than hostility. That’s better.’”<sup>154</sup> Although Muslims continue to face discrimination, some Koreans are becoming more interested in learning about Islam and the various cultures it encompasses. With the numbers of Muslims growing, knowledge on Islam and Muslim societies becomes more readily available to the public.

The *Korea Herald* reported in 2012 that Muslims in Korea encounter stereotypes from their Korean counter-parts, but very little discrimination or prejudice. Navid Ejaz, one of those interviewed for the piece, saw events such as the Arab Spring as being responsible for Korean’s interest in Islam and Arab culture. He explains, “I think one year ago when I came here I felt that people I met had little knowledge of these concepts [jihad and Islamic extremism],” he said, contrasting them to Western nations who have “been inundated with such information, particularly since the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks...

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<sup>154</sup> Bae Ji-sook, “Life is Very Hard for Korean Muslims,” *Korea Times*, August 10, 2007. [http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2007/08/117\\_8104.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2007/08/117_8104.html)

But because of the events of the last one year, now they are getting more and more interested.”<sup>155</sup>

Additionally it was reported last year that religion is starting to be considered when giving jobs to foreign employees. “The National Human Rights Commission said Tuesday that a Muslim worker filed a petition to the agency last month claiming that his employer refused to transfer him to a different post from one making *soondae* (Korean-style blood sausage).”<sup>156</sup> Once the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) got involved the employee’s job was transferred to one in which he does not have to handle pork. The NHRC also made a statement advising businesses to take employees’ religions into consideration when assigning jobs or when transfers are needed. With articles such as this one, which talks about human rights, discrimination in the work place can be diminished. With groups such as the NHRC advocating the rights of Muslims in job placement, attitudes toward Muslims and Arabs in Korea could become more positive and accepting.

The Korean Herald reported in April of 2013 that a forum was to be held to discuss the problems that international students face, such as English taught classes being in Korean, inability to graduate, useless school websites in English, and a lack of *halal* food for Muslim students.<sup>157</sup> The forum was led by the Korea International Students’

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<sup>155</sup> Rob York, Korea’s Muslims encounter stereotypes but little prejudice,” *The Korea Herald*, April 24, 2012. <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20120424001113>

<sup>156</sup> Yun Suh-young, “Employees’ religions to be considered for job assignment,” *Korea Times*, April 3, 2013. [http://koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2012/04/113\\_108286.html](http://koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2012/04/113_108286.html)

<sup>157</sup> Paul Kerry, “Forum to discuss problems faced by international students,” *The Korea Herald*, April 2, 2013 <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20130402001060>

Support Association, so in this case, Muslims and non-Muslims are working together to improve the living and study conditions of all international students.

News sources such as online newspapers and news stations have been major contributors to the changing image of Muslim and Arabs within Korea. Arirang TV, which provides Korea News in English,<sup>158</sup> has produced numerous television snippets that introduced the audience to Muslim customs, such as preparations for Ramadan, as well as to Middle Eastern cuisine by visiting a local bakery in Itaewon and learning how to make baklava, as well as reporting on the growing interest in *halal* food in Korea.<sup>159</sup> In explaining how the meaning of *halal* has changed for non-Muslims, Arirang reports that Koreans see *halal* as being natural and good for one's health.<sup>160</sup> Because of how *halal* is perceived by non-Muslims, it is becoming increasingly popular. Reporting on the Muslim community and their cultures helps to normalize the presence of Muslims in Korea, as well as popularize various aspects of Muslim and Middle Eastern culture.

Korean universities have also been working to make living in Korea easier for their students. Hanyang University opened their first *halal* food court, which is open for two days a week, in 2013. An official from the school was quoted, saying, "Through the food court, we hope to provide true globalization to our students so they can experience Korean and international cultures in depth."<sup>161</sup> At Ewha Woman's University, incoming international students are sent a food guide that provides information on *Halal* and

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<sup>158</sup> Arirang TV also has a third channel called Arirang Arab.

<sup>159</sup> Arirang Issue, "Korea Today – Growing interest in Halal Food," *Arirang TV*, August 18, 2013. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VhukV4oFjEE>

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Lee Sang-ju, "Hanyang University opens halal food court," *The Korean Herald*, March 13, 2013. <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20130313000646>

vegetarian restaurant options throughout Seoul and Korea. The guide can also be found on the Korea Tourism Organization website, which also provides information on mosques in Korea. Korean universities, though sometimes problematic, have helped to introduce their students to Arab and Muslim culture through seminars, food, classes, and book exhibitions.

The Muslim community also opened a primary school in Itaewon with the goal of not only giving their children an Islamic education (that also meets Korean standards) but of also being a gateway for Korean society to learn about Islam.<sup>162</sup> All classes at the school are taught in English and they also provide Islamic Studies and Arabic classes. The school accepts children of all nationalities and religions, and does not require that all students pray.<sup>163</sup> In addition to newspapers and human rights organizations presenting different perspectives on Islam in Korea, the Muslim community had also been working to improve their image and their relations with the Korean community. At Seoul Central Mosque one can find a number of booklets and pamphlets in English and Korean that explain the basic tenants of Islam and address certain issues that non-Muslims may be interested in. In addition to these reading materials one can also find advertisements for classes provided by Salam Nuri (Peaceful World) whose aim, according to said advertisement, is to foster understanding between Korean society and the Muslim community. The classes they offer include Korean Language, Arabic Language, and Quranic study.

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<sup>162</sup> Park Si-soo, "First Muslim School to Open Next Year," *Korea Times*, March 14, 2008. [http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2008/03/117\\_20746.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2008/03/117_20746.html)

<sup>163</sup>Ibid.

One also cannot ignore the influence of the Muslim fans outside of Korea. Without their viewership and voice, shows such as *Star King* and *Alkkarira News*, and by extension entertainment companies such as SBS, would not learn from their mistakes and consequentially evolve. Although those in academia have also called out television shows for prejudiced or stereotypical depictions of Muslims and Arabs, they are not so readily listened to, as was the case with *Alkkarira News*, which did not issue an apology, but did change the skit – if only slightly veiled, with everything staying the same, save for the costume. With the popularity of Kpop and Kdramas in South East Asia as well as the Middle East, Muslim fans have the opportunity to engage with these entertainment industries via the internet, voice their opinion *en masse*, as was the case with *Star King*. In an age in which the world is so easily connected via social media, it is much easier for fans to have a say in what is acceptable in the media they are consuming.

Television is another outlet that can be seen as improving the image of Islam in a few cases. KBS produced a documentary on Islam and Ramadan in Korea, which can help to educate the Korean populace about their Muslim community. Also, in cases such as the *Star King* controversy, popular Korean television shows are beginning to learn the dos and don'ts of presenting Islam in their programs. The fact that *Star King* issued an apology demonstrates that popular television programs want to keep their growing Muslim fan base, which can be found around the world. *Star King*, through their mistake, is also learning how to better represent different cultures for when they do want to showcase them in an episode. Step by step the image of Islam and Arabs in South Korea can improve. Through their experience with feedback from both fans and academia, programs on SBS seem to have become better able to present more real or human

depictions of Muslims and Arabs, whether that is at an official level or at a more local or team based decision.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

#### How the Study can be Expanded

There are many other aspects of this topic that could be explored. Though this study focuses solely on images of Muslims and Arabs in Korean TV, it could be expanded to look into Korean music, Korean film, and Korean graphic novels, once the latter two become more widely available outside of Korea. There have been a few instances in which each of these categories have depicted some aspect of Muslim or Arab culture. One such example was the use of the *adhan*, or call to prayer, in a song by the band Jaurim. On November 18, 2008, allkpop.com posted an article about the reaction some Muslim fans had toward the song. Quoted within the article is a letter sent to allkpop.com by one of their Muslim readers, calling for the manager of Jaurim to make an apology for the use of the *adhan* within a pop song. The author of the letter, found the use disrespectful and insulting to Islam.<sup>164</sup> Though this instance gained some attention, it does not appear that an apology was issued, or that the issue was addressed in any way. This is but one instance in which the appropriation of Islamic culture is evident in the Kpop scene, but without additional examples it is difficult to ascertain how prevalent the practice is (thus far it seems scarce), as well as the reason as to why certain aspects of Islamic culture are being appropriated.

One instance of Arab culture being depicted in a Korean graphic novel is a scene in Park Soo Hee's *Goong*, in which one of the main characters (who comes from a wealthy family) lies to the heroine about running away so that she can stay the night with

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<sup>164</sup> "Muslims angry at Korean band Jaurim," *Allkpop*, November 18, 2008, <http://www.allkpop.com/article/2008/11/muslims-angry-at-korean-band-jaurim#axzz2hfJcd6vQ>

her in order to find out information. She cries that her father wants to marry her off to a Saudi Prince named Abdullah. Below the illustration of Oh Mi Roo lamenting her father's decision is a depiction of what she imagines her life would be like. Just above the illustration of Mi Roo lounging in a generic belly dancer/harem costume, smoking a pipe, is the title "Abdullah's Twelveth Wife."<sup>165</sup> This image is blatantly Orientalist, presenting the image of the erotic and sexually uncontrollable Arab, highlighted by the thought blurb of Mi Roo wondering which wife her husband is with that night. Although this is a obvious instance of an Arab stereotype, particularly Orientalist, that can be compared alongside Korean dramas and variety shows, it would be better served alongside other graphic novels. Unfortunately, Korean graphic novels are not as popular as those from Japan and, therefore, are not readily available in the United States.

In the last few years there have been various movies to come out in Korea that include a Muslim or Arab character, and, increasingly more so, migrant workers. Movies such as "Bandhobi" (2009) and "He's on Duty" (2010) appear to have Muslim characters that are presented in a more sympathetic light, especially so in these two movies which highlight the hardships migrant workers face in Korea. These movies also present an opportunity to examine the differences between the depictions of Muslims and Arabs on Korean television versus Korean cinema. Whereas Korean dramas and variety shows often need to cater to more comedic means, especially in the case of romantic comedies (which all of the dramas presented were of that genre) where Muslim or Arab culture can be used as a joke or plot device, movie makers may not be as obligated or inclined to do so. Although these films present the opportunity for comparison, they, like the graphic

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<sup>165</sup> Park Soo Hee, *Goong*, Vol. 18 pg. 140. April, 2010.

novels, are not readily available outside of Asia. As a result, this study could greatly benefit from further research once these sources are more readily available, or by traveling to Korea where they are easy to obtain.

### **How do Korean Images Compare to Japanese Images?**

This study could also benefit from a comparison of these changing images of Muslims and Arabs in Korea to those in Japan, another country that has a fairly short history of contact with Muslims and Arabs. Although Korea has a longer history of contact with Muslims and Arabs, their perceived initial contact would not be for several decades after the Japanese. Like Korea, Japan has featured Muslims in their own television shows.

Prior to the attacks on September 11, a popular TV drama, *Ikebukuro West Gate Park*, introduces several characters by the name Ali and one by the name Muhammed. In the scene the main character, Makoto goes to Ali's house on business and though the character is depicted in a sympathetic and friendly light, he and his friends are depicted as illegal immigrants living in cramped housing. The Ali who opens the door eventually gets deported. Though a sympathetic view of Muslims in Japan; the scene "still contributes to an image of people of Middle Eastern appearances being 'illegals.'"<sup>166</sup>

In addition to the depiction of the group as illegals, one thing that Vestre does not mention, but only hints at, is that all but one of the six men are named Ali. This scene can be interpreted as playing into the idea that all Muslims are the same strange mass. They are an anonymous group with funny sounding names and funny habits and customs, but there is nothing truly special about them. By giving them all the same name, the scene

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<sup>166</sup> Eskil O. Vestre, "Japan as a Multicultural Society," 79.

plays into this trope; it shows how all Muslims are the same in Japanese eyes. Their name makes them almost interchangeable and unimportant. As nice as Ali is, he still gets deported and another illegal Muslim is likely to take his place.

In 2008 an anime by the name *JoJo's Bizarre Adventure*, had sparked some controversy among its Muslim viewers. The anime, which was originally a manga published by Shueisha Inc., aired a scene in which the villain is reading the Quran while ordering the death of the hero and his friends. After the episode was subtitled in Arabic in 2007, it had received multiple comments on the scene, stating that by using the Quran the anime was insinuating that Muslims are terrorists. Shueisha claimed that they had no intention of insulting the Muslim community or Islam. What had happened, they said, was that since the episode took place in the Arab world, one of the staff members thought that the book should be in Arabic; without being able to read Arabic the staff member just so happened to pick some text from the Quran.<sup>167</sup> The scene kicked up so much controversy that “Sheikh Abdul Hamid Attrash, chairman of the Fatwa ... Committee at Al-Azhar, the highest Sunni authority, based in Cairo, called the cartoon an insult to Islam. ‘This scene depicts Muslims as terrorists, which is not true at all,’ he said. ‘This is an insult to the religion, and the producers would be considered to be enemies of Islam.’”<sup>168</sup>

After the above statement was released, Shueisha Inc., much like the *Star King* team, issued an apology letter, in which they claimed the use of the Quran as a mistake and stated that they would be more careful in the future to insure that they do not insult

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<sup>167</sup> Shueisha Inc. Letter of Apology, [http://www.shueisha.co.jp/info/index\\_e.html](http://www.shueisha.co.jp/info/index_e.html)

<sup>168</sup> “‘Anime’ stokes ire of Muslims” *The Japan Times*, May 23, 2008.  
<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2008/05/23/national/anime-stokes-ire-of-muslims/#.UX4KJrVQE69>

other religions or cultures.<sup>169</sup> This incident is demonstrative of how, one can play into Muslim stereotypes without meaning to. It is possible that even if the book was not the Quran, the scene could have still been insulting, at least to Arabs so long as the book was in Arabic and in the hands of the villain. The apology helped to calm the issue, but the incident is still indicative of how prevalent images of Arabs and Muslims as terrorists can be in Japan, even if by accident.

Like Korea, though a number of Japanese television shows may depict stereotypical images of Muslims and Arabs, Japanese universities, restaurants, and even malls are making life easier for Muslims with the adoption of halal menus in the case of the former two, and the addition of prayer rooms in the latter. Like Korean new sources, Japanese sources are also lending voices to local Muslims, providing readers alternative images to that of a violent or aggressive Muslim or Arab. There are many other ways in which the two can be compared if the scope of the study is broadened to include movies, graphic novel, and perhaps even music.

### **The Images of Muslims and Arabs in South Korea**

Even though this study could benefit from an expansion in the type of sources examined or a comparison of countries, the analysis of the images of Arabs and Muslims present in Korea dramas and variety shows, does demonstrate how these images appear to have been changing over time. It is also interesting to note that all of the examples, with the exception of the Yonhap commercial, come from the same entertainment company, SBS. Though, it is possible that other entertainment companies, such as KBS, do have the occasional Arab character; they are usually portrayed as a politician or a businessman

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<sup>169</sup> Shueisha Inc. Letter of Apology, [http://www.shueisha.co.jp/info/index\\_e.html](http://www.shueisha.co.jp/info/index_e.html)

with little to no lines and offer essentially nothing to the plot; nothing, thus far, has warranted any attention. Their characters have no characterization outside of a handshake or some pleasantries, and seem to be there merely for visual effect. SBS on the other hand has depicted varying images of Muslim and Arabs, some stereotypical, and others, such as Wilson, as more realistic and human. From 2005 to 2012, one can see how programs on SBS seem to have changed in their depictions of Muslims over time, from dismissive to more aware, even with the slight digression that is *Full House: Take Two*.

Certain aspects of Middle Eastern culture are also becoming more popular or normalized within Korean society. *Halal* food has been a growing market in Korea, with some seeing it as a healthy alternative, while others see it as a way to expand their market. Universities have begun to serve halal food, and there are a plethora of West Asian and South Asian restaurants around Seoul, especially in the region of Itaewon. Belly dancing has also become very popular in South Korea, with many talent shows, such as *Korea's Got Talent*, showcasing belly dancing contestants. Belly dancing classes have also become more common in Korea, as in many other countries, such as the United States.

Although a few aspects of Arab and Islamic culture have become more normalized, stereotypical images have remained. Looking back at the variety shows and dramas, one can see a gradual change toward less stereotypical depictions of Arabs and Muslims. With *Alkarira News*, the audience is presented with a blatantly racist depiction of Muslims and Arabs, through the ridiculing of the Arabic language. The commercial by Yonhap news is another example of obvious stereotyping.

Perhaps learning from the *Alkkarira news* incident, SBS had, for the most part, not included overtly prejudiced or stereotypical images of Muslims or Arabs in their dramas. Their next two depictions in *You're Beautiful* and in *Save the Boss*, the Muslim characters make short cameos without doing anything except walk in the former and pray in the latter. SBS's most fleshed out portrayal of a Muslim character was that of Wilson in *Scent of a Woman*, in which he was presented as a cantankerous and stubborn character, who happens to be Muslim and who also has a softer side. Although he is a humorous character, he is never ridiculed over his religion, nor is he ever belittled. The only instance of negativity toward the character was that of the heroine coloring in his teeth in a photo because she was upset over the ring lawsuit; but his religion was never made a reason as to why he acted the way he did. In his various appearances the audience is witness to his pride and embarrassment, as well as his moments of kindness and encouragement in the end.

With Wilson's character it would seem that Muslim characters are being presented in a more realistic, less stereotypical light, but SBS has had some setbacks. Prior to airing *Scent of a Woman*, SBS aired an episode of *Star King* that featured Saudi Arabian characters. Their aim was to entertain the audience with Ruby's singing, as well as to supposedly educate the audience about Saudi Arabia. Although their intention was benign, the actual execution of the skit caused an uproar among the Muslim community, worldwide. With the stereotypical image of a volatile Muslim, as well as the possible eroticizing of the *niqab*, the *Star King* team issued an apology and edited the skit to only contain singing, removing all of the offending scenes. *Star King*, realized their mistake and made amends, but a year later SBS would air another Korean drama that features the

*niqab*. Perhaps, because of previous instances SBS may have made sure that the wearing of the *niqab*-like costume was not attributed to a religion, though one could infer which religion or culture the clothing belongs to. Though there had been some comments about the offensiveness of the scene, it did not illicit an uproar. It remains unclear as to why the use of the *niqab* did not cause much reaction; it could be the use of the trope in Middle Eastern movies; it could be that the show just did not get as much viewership as other shows on the list. *Full House: Take Two* appears to be incongruent with the trajectory that SBS has been on with their depictions of Muslims and Arabs. It is possible that SBS will continue their trajectory with more fleshed out and realistic Muslim or Arab characters, but likewise it could digress as it did with *Full House: Take Two*.

Although SBS's trajectory could go either way, it is likely that images of Muslims and Arabs in Korea are likely to develop in a way that presents more humanity. Korea is gradually becoming more diverse. As was discussed in chapter two, ideas of what it means to be a Korean are changing. Maintaining a Korean bloodline is no longer the most important aspect of what it means to be a Korean. More and more people are beginning to value Korean language and nationality over purity of blood. Though South Korea is viewed as one of the most homogenous societies in the world, it is inevitable that Korea will become more diversified in the future and foreigners from around Asia may be more easily welcomed.

Images of Muslims and Arabs in Korean popular culture spring from the context of Islam in East Asia, as well as the creation of Korean ethno-nationalism. Prior to the adoption of ethno-nationalistic ideas in the final decades of the Joseon dynasty, Muslims in Korea had been relatively accepted in Korea, maintaining their religious ideals while

also being active members of society. By the rule of King Sejong, many Muslims in Korea would begin to further assimilate themselves into Korean culture, shedding their Muslim traditions for Confucian or Buddhist traditions. The number of Muslims in Korean society had steeply dwindled by the Nineteenth century, but never fully vanished. Due to this decline in Muslim numbers, it was unlikely that many Koreans would have come into contact with Muslims or Arabs until after the Korean War. Because of this, Islam and its practitioners were seen as a new and strange presence in Korea. Around the same time that Islam had virtually disappeared from Korean society, new ideas of what it meant to be a Korean were springing up. Korea began to see itself as homogenous, a nation made of one ethnic group that spanned centuries. These ideas of Koreanness would also cause the incoming Muslims and Arabs to be seen as outsiders, but since the influx of Muslims in Korea has been on the rise since the 1990s, these ideas have begun to change due to the representation of Muslims in Korean news (which present positive coverage of Muslim and Middle Eastern religion and culture), academia, as well the voices of Muslim viewers.

With a growing Muslim community in Korea, the images and the treatment of Muslims and Arabs appear to have improved and are bound to keep improving, though it may be a slow process. Although the general population of Korea is relatively ignorant of their country's history with Islam and has borrowed certain aspects of Orientalism, interest in Islam has increased. Through television, human rights groups, books, news sources, University events and classes, and even restaurants, Korean society is slowly but surely learning more about Islam and the Middle East and South Asia. Through more exposure to Islamic and Arab culture, whether through TV programs, cultural events, or

reading material, a dialogue of learning and acceptance can grow between the Muslim community and the larger Korean society.

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