

Children's Media between Grooming and Persuasion: Religious Vision in the Case of Korea

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I. Introduction

Islam is one of the fastest growing religions in Korea. The number of Muslims in Korea is estimated to be about 45,000 in addition to some 105,000 foreign workers from Muslim countries. There are eight permanent mosques, eight Muslim community centers, and 61 prayer rooms (musala) around the country. Especially in the 21st century, it is expected that the number of Muslims in Korea will increase further with the influx of Muslim workers.

With the increase of the number of Muslims, several communities have appeared in various places. Among them, the most well-known area is Itaewon located just south of the Seoul city center. From Japanese colonial times, Itaewon has been a major residential area for people from abroad. It once housed Japanese army barracks, and after 1945 a large compound in the district became the property of the U.S. army. Its neighborhood developed as a magnet for all kinds of foreign residential activity in Seoul (Kim 2008, 148).

Now it can be said that this district has been taken over by Muslims. Itaewon is dominated by a building that is unmistakably a mosque. This impressive building is a reminder of the resurgence of the Muslim community here. The first permanent mosque was established in Itaewon, constructed with a grant provided by Saudi Arabia and opened in 1976. The existence of the central mosque, cohabitation of Muslims based on nationalities, and business-oriented mind of early foreign Muslims have contributed to the rapid formation and settling-down of Muslim community in the central area of Seoul (Park, 2008, 21)

The Muslim community in Itaewon has more and more enlarged itself in terms of the number of residents and Islam-related shops and restaurants. In this process, there have erupted some conflicts with the existing Korean residents who have deep-rooted economic interests and religions other than Islam (Ahn 2008, 104).

At the same time, the increase of Muslims has brought some worries in the Korean society especially from the Christian circle. The most well-known case is the de facto closure of the Korean Center for Arab and Islamic Culture in December 2008. The Center, which was launched at Incheon Metropolitan City in October 2007, was the first cultural center of its kind in Korea dedicated to Arab and Islamic civilization (Oh 2008, 77). However, Incheon City suddenly decided to shut it down after around one year of its activities.

The city's excuse for closing the place down was vague, only claiming that it needed to build something called as a 'global center' in its place. But the alleged reason behind the closure was the pressure from some circles of other religion in Incheon City. It has been revealed that some

leaders of the circles in the city described the center as a vanguard organization for Muslim missionaries. It is no wonder that Arab countries criticized the decision. Ambassadors from Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries called on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade and argued that the closure would not only seriously tarnish South Korea's image in the Arab world but also deal a blow to Seoul's economic cooperation with Arab states.

Dealing with this incident as a symbolic phenomenon, this research will examine the transformation process of Korean public opinion from anti-Islamism to the so-called Islamophobia. Even before the 9/11 attack, anti-Islamic or anti-Arab sentiment had been widespread in Korea due to the dynamic activities of various circles of other religion as well as the misunderstanding or ignorance of the remote region. Nevertheless, the US-led war on terrorism and Korea's participation in it has triggered a stronger anti-Islamism and consequently Islamophobia. Upon the US request or pressure, the Korean government has sent its troops to the Middle East, Iraq and Afghanistan. It has resulted in several attacks against Koreans in the region. And eventually the more Korean, who have witnessed the antagonistic attacks by Islamists or opposition Middle Eastern groups, are likely to accept the paradigm of 'clash of civilizations' or other radical Christian views toward the Middle East.

To demonstrate the change of the public opinion, this study conducted a content analysis on the news article on Islam in Korean newspapers. In so doing, the research would demonstrate how the Korean public opinion has been changed in the 21st century. And suggesting how to cope with this trend, this paper will attempt to find possible answer from e-learning.

II. The Situation of Muslims in Korea

As it is well known, Korea is a country with only one nationality. However, there are a lot of religions. Buddhism, Protestant, and Catholic Christianity have held the leading position in the religious life of Korea for 50 years now. The roots of Islam in Korea are very ancient. The period of the V-X centuries A.D. was the time when Arab sailors set up the first commercial routes around Southeastern Asia and established sea trade with the Chinese empire and the Korean Peninsula. Arab merchants and sailors reached Korea, which was then governed by the Silla dynasty. The Arabs liked the country and its people, so they simply decided to settle there. They built their own trade settlements in Korea, and these settlements were later mentioned in Arab sailing directions of the 19th century. As it was written in these directions that Arabs called Korea Silla, the mountainous country, which was rich in gold. Many Muslims who came to Korea decided to stay there for good. They were flabbergasted with the beauty of the country. Beginning from the 19th century, Korean chronicles mention the mass resettlement of Arabs on the Korean peninsula.

It goes without saying that the vast majority of Arab merchants were Muslims. They brought their religion to Korea along with their goods. However, the change of the political situation in the XV century eventually resulted in the weakening of contacts between Korea and the countries of the Middle East. Some time later, these contacts vanished completely. Muslim immigrants were gradually assimilated by the Koreans, and then they dissolved in the local

population. 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.

In 1950 the Korean War broke out. The UN sent troops to Korea to fight against the North Korean communists. As part of the war effort the nation of Turkey sent a battalion of soldiers to Korea. It sent around 15 thousand soldiers to the Korean peninsula, and they proved to be rather good soldiers. This was the beginning of first modern contacts of Koreans with Muslims. Two Turkish imams came with their fellow soldiers and began propagating Islam to war weary Koreans through education, in the Chung Jin private learning institute. Within a couple of years two Koreans became Muslims through their efforts. It is said that there are now more than 45,000 ethnic-Korean Muslims since the first two Korean converts in 1955. Korean Muslims built their first mosque, called Central Masjid, at Itaewon in Seoul with financial help from Muslim countries. Now there are more than 8 mosques and 61 prayer centers throughout the country.

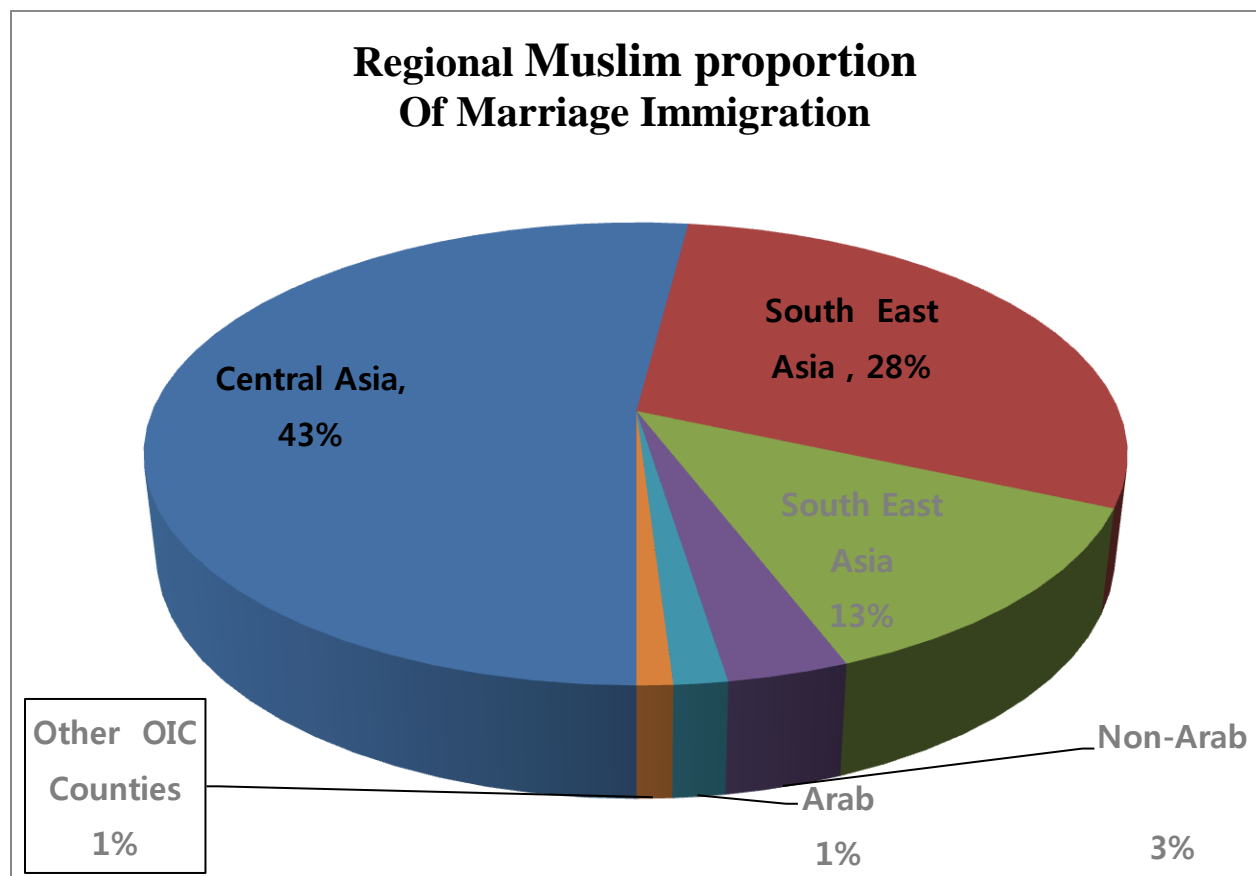
Korean Muslims have started to get attention from society because of their gradual growth in Korea. Although full statistics are lacking their numbers apparently has been gradually growing in recent years. In addition more foreign Muslims are making their appearance in Korea. By 2009 there were about 105,000 expatriate Muslims in South Korea from: Indonesia, 37% Uzbekistan, 26% Bangladesh, 21% Pakistan, 16%.

Table 1. Total Number of Immigrant Muslims

Total number	104,427
Arab	2,828
Non-Arab (Turkey, Iran)	3,814
Central Asia	20,327
South Asia	42,623
South East Asia	34,835

However, due to the lack of Korean understanding of Islam and its culture, Muslims seem to be mistreated and discriminated against culturally in factories and schools. Culturally eating pork seems to be almost unavoidable while living in Korea. For example, one Muslim Uzbek worker who came to Korea as a trainee worker under a South Korean government's training program for

Asians. He was unfortunately assigned to a pig farm for training even though Muslims are forbidden to raise pigs for slaughter according to their religion.



III. Upsurge of Anti-Islamic Discourse

It is, moreover, important to understand how production processes work if one is to understand the eventual form and content of the discourse. In his study on the language of news media, Allan Bell suggests six circular discourse production processes of a group: 1) assessment of backgrounds; 2) relational identification (the exclusion-inclusion or association-dissociation process through definition of Us and Them); 3) co-ordination of internal interests; 4) activation – that is, production of texts and speeches for legitimisation-de-legitimisation purposes; 5) evaluation of feed-back; and 6) consolidation of the positions and interests of the group (Bell 1991, 33-35).

On the basis of Bell's idea on discourse production, I analyzed media responses on how the above-mentioned concern of the circles of other religion and has been materialized. I measured the degree of the interest paid by media through examining the number of articles dealing with Islam in the Korean newspapers between 2006 and 2009. I collected the articles, which has been published since January 2006 in order to follow the fluctuation of interest in Islam before and after the closure of the Korean Center for Arab and Islamic Culture at the end of 2008.

Articles, which contains the word 'Islam' were collected and analyzed quantitatively. The contents of the articles are treated in terms of three thematic categories: (1) how they interpreted

the reasons and intentions behind the spread of Islam; (2) how they evaluated the consequences of the phenomenon; and (3) what solutions were suggested by them to face the phenomenon. The reason why this research selected the above newspaper is that it is the first nation-wide newspaper in Korea.

Table 2. The Number of Articles including the Word of Islam

Year	2006	2007	2008	2009	Total
Number of Article	85	160	197	232	674

Source: Korean Newspapers 2006-2009

Table 1, which shows the sheer number of articles which appear in the newspaper and contain the word of 'Islam,' indicates that the growing interest of the circles of other religion increase dramatically. The number of articles increased three times during the period from 85 in 2006 to 232 in 2009. It means that the issue of Islam has more and more brought the interest or fear and anxiety from the circles of other religion.

Explaining the Reasons

Table 3. The Reasons behind the Spread of Islam

The reasons or causes	Frequency of articles	Percentage
Ambition to be a hegemonic power in the world	147	47
Religious fervor of Islam itself	57	18
Support of some Islamic countries in missionary activities	32	10
Influx of Muslim workers	45	15
Others	31	10
Total	312	100

Source: Korean Newspapers 2006-2009

Evaluating the Consequences

Table 4. The Consequences of the Spread of Islam

Consequences	Frequency of articles	Percentage
Islamization of Korea	108	50
Weakening the religious solidarity and national unity	34	16
Terrorist activities	28	13
Inviting foreign involvement	13	5
Possible conflicts with the Islamic world	9	4
Others	25	12
Total	217	100

Source: Korean Newspapers 2006-2009

Suggesting the Solutions

Table 5. The Solutions Suggested toward the Spread of Islam

The Solutions suggested	Frequency of articles	Percentage
Strengthening solidarity among Christians	78	75
Change of immigration policy	13	12
Upgrading missionary activities in the Islamic world	5	4
Watching out oil money or Islamic finance	3	3
Others	7	6
Total	106	100

Source: Korean Newspapers Daily 2006-2009

IV. Conclusion

I think we all got a very clear impression during this conference of how very different the situation in the countries. In some countries, religion in education in general is more or less absent from the public schools, while in other countries religious education is a subject of its own. That means that the different states also have different needs - according to what historical experiences they have.

Rare--perhaps even nonexistent--is the schooling system in which a child's formal learning experience is entirely silent, neutral or objective on transmitting messages about religion and values linked to religious traditions (Suárez-Orozco and Marcelo M. Suárez-Orozco 2001, 68-69). Moreover, it is difficult to identify a society like Korea in which a policy of separation of church and state, or a national policy of secular education, achieves a complete exclusion of religion in both policy and practice of schooling.

Particularly, in a post 9-11 era and globalized society, debate and dialogue is on the rise about how and to what extent the treatment of religion in schooling shapes an individual's self-concept and world view. How does schooling contribute to social tolerance or to intolerance, stereotypes and prejudice? In some countries like in Korea, there remain more fundamental struggles between proponents of including religion in schooling, often led by religious institutions, and those opponents who seek to "keep religion out" of schools.

Furthermore, increasing pluralism and secularism of societies and assertion of rights by minorities also call into question schooling policies that are seen to "ignore" or otherwise discriminate against minority religious traditions and values, insofar as religion and schooling are concerned (Hwang, Saenz, and Aguirre 1997, 198). The recent headscarf debate in France is the best known but by no means the only case of such controversy. In those secular States where confessional religious instruction is forbidden in public schools because it is unconstitutional, nonconfessional teaching about religions is one and perhaps the only way to ensure that children will be able to develop religious literacy in schools.

In this situation, it is very important to guarantee children of minority groups and general public in understanding their own and other religions (Coles 2006, 21-26). Thus, I do believe that we need somewhat a universal religious education and information due to the fact that there have been lots of different views. It is very confusing and complicated to catch what is the sound interpretation and understanding toward other religions (Berry, Phinney, Vedder & Liebkind 2006, 29).

In a nutshell, I strongly belief that e-learning would be a possible solution to guarantee minority groups the rights to learn about their own religion as well as to give sound information to the general public who want to know about the religion of others. For example, big companies in Korea such as Samsung, LG, Posco, and KT and so on and major religious organizations have intensified its training programs for employees and decided to choose e-Learning technology as methodology of the programs. E-learning applications and processes include Web-based learning, computer-based learning, virtual classroom opportunities and digital collaboration. Content is delivered via the Internet, intranet/extranet, audio or video tape, satellite TV, CD-ROM, and mobile phone without serious interference from the government institutions and law if they do not include something illegal or problematic (Li, Tu, Edward & Ming 2002, 80).

E-learning is now becoming a widely accepted method of training and education within schools, colleges, organizations and even non-governmental or minority groups through CBT (*Computer-Based Training*), IBT (*Internet-Based Training*) or WBT (*Web-Based Training*). Furthermore, wireless technology is beginning to appear in many more devices and this marks the start of a physically independent way of staying connected. The ability to access and participate in learning without the need for a physical connection will bring immeasurable benefits, with learners truly being able to learn at anyplace, anywhere. Emerging technologies such as wireless and 3G or FG will certainly enhance the penetration and flexibility of the medium, and the quality of content must be of superior quality in religious education for children.

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