



Reinterpretation of Migrant Muslims' History in Korea during the Japanese Colonial Period: *Records and Legacies of Turk-Tatar Muslims*

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Abstract

This study analyzes the push-pull factors of migration and re-migration of Tatar Muslims living in Korea between 1920 and 1945 and their lives during this period. The research examines the relationship Tatar Muslims had with Japan, their views on Koreans, and their positions within the changing international context of expanding and intensifying Japanese imperialism. Tatar Muslims migrated to Korea due to Russia's anti-Islamic policies, famine, and Japan's pro-Islamic policies aimed at expanding its imperialism. Under Japanese rule, the Tatar Muslim community fully assimilated into Japan's colonial project, supporting anti-communist policies, teaching Japanese language and history, and providing military support. Simultaneously, they maintained their Islamic and Tatar ethnic identity by establishing mosques and Islamic schools, organizing religious gatherings, publishing the Qur'an, inviting ethnic leaders, and sustaining their communities. This behavior led to indifference or ignorance of Korean aspirations for independence. Their consistent pro-Japanese stance and the spread of socialism were major factors in their departure from Korea after Japan's defeat. The history of Tatar migrant Muslims exemplifies the strategic choices minority migrant groups made to survive amidst the maelstrom of 20th-century imperialism.

Keywords: Tatar migrant Muslims, Muslims in Korea, minorities, Islam in Korea, Muslims in Northeast Asia

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Introduction

In May 1956, Kobayashi Masaru published his novel *Ford 1927 (Fōdo senkyūhyakunijūnana-nen)* and it met with sufficient acclaim to be nominated for the Akutagawa Prize the following year. The narrative, set along the Nakdong River in southeastern Korea, portrays a friendly Turk (Muslim) operating a kimono shop akin to a tailor's (Kobayashi 1956). Choi Bum-soon's analysis of the work suggests there was significant Korean interest in Turkey at the time, confirmed by the historical presence of Turkish Muslims on the peninsula, implying Kobayashi's awareness of these interactions (Choi 2018, 16; Sibel 2017). Unlike the novel, this study begins with a discussion of Muslims in Korea during the Japanese colonial period. While extensive research exists on Arab-Korean exchanges and perceptions of Muslims during the Silla period (H. Lee 2012, 62–109; Lim 2022; C. Kim 2006), as well as Korea's contemporary Muslim community (Yi 2020, 2021, 2022a, 2022b; An 2015; H. Cho et al. 2008; H. Kim 2022), studies on migrant Muslims during the Japanese occupation are scarce (Dündar 2018, 182). This suggests a research gap in understanding their lives during this period.

This study analyzes the causes of migration, settlement, adaptation, and departure of Tatar migrant Muslims living in Korea during the Japanese colonial period from the perspective of those Tatar migrant Muslims and the changes in international dynamics that influenced these trends. It identifies the relationships and perspectives of various actors in this history—the Japanese government, migrant Muslims, and Koreans—towards each other. The migration of Tatar Muslims, their choice of new settlements, and their departure and re-migration from the Korean Peninsula were greatly influenced by the changing policies of Russia and Japan and the international situation. In particular, the spread of socialism in the 20th century and Japan's policies of support for Islam were important yet under-researched factors that influenced the mobility of Tatar Muslims on the Korean Peninsula. Furthermore, using primary sources, this study examines the lives of Tatar migrant Muslims in terms of geography and economic activities, religious activities, educational activities, and pro-Japanese stance. Based on the findings, this article classifies the relationship

between Tatar migrant Muslims and Koreans who lived together on the Korean Peninsula in terms of Tatar migrants' views of Koreans, Korean nationalism, and the Korean independence movement.

Literature Review and Research Sources

Existing studies on migrant Muslims during the Japanese colonial period in Korea are scant, focusing primarily on Turkic-Tatar (Tatar) migrants who moved from Russia via China. Tatars, ethnic Turks speaking the Tatar language and practicing Islam, are thought to have originated from Russia's Volga-Ural region and entered China following the construction of the Chinese Eastern Railway (Numata 2013 132; Wang 1925; Norton 1930). Analyzing Tatar Muslims is crucial for understanding the migrant Muslim community in Korea during this period. Despite robust research on the Tatar Muslims' settlement and social impact in China and Japan, the Korean case remains underexplored, as underscored by Dündar's 2018 study on Northeast Asian migrant Muslims (Dündar 2018, 182).

Lee Heesoo (2012) extensively researched migrant Muslims in Korea during the Japanese colonial period, notably in his book *Islam and Korean Culture*. Research on this subject from outside Korea mainly falls into two categories. The first focuses on Abdurreshid Ibrahim, a Tatar and Ottoman Empire official from Russia who settled in Korea via Japan in 1909, exploring his influence and the resulting social changes in Northeast Asia, including Korea (Brandenburg 2018; Komatsu 2006; Weller 2014; Barlak 2022), primarily between 1909 and the 1920s. Unlike this study's broader examination of Tatar migrant Muslims and their overall situation, these works zoom in on individual negotiations with the Japanese government. This present study emphasizes the period from the 1930s through the 1940s, detailing the migration and settlement of Tatar Muslims in Korea and their post-1945 exodus. Dündar emerges as a pivotal scholar in this regard, having translated critical sources from the Japanese colonial era into English and Turkic, and provided insights into the experiences of Tatar Muslims in Korea during the 1930s (Dündar 2016; 2018). While his work mainly

concerns translations, it has laid essential groundwork without delving deeply into analytical discourse. Usmanova's subsequent studies examined Tatar Muslims in Northeast Asia during the 1940s, using *Milli Bairağ*, a newspaper from the Japanese colonial period, to articulate the experiences of Tatar Muslim communities in Korea, China, and Japan. Though her thesis predominantly addresses the Japanese and Chinese contexts, including the Korean cases, facilitated by the English translation of the *Milli Bairağ*, marks a significant contribution to historical documentation (Usmanova 2007). Numata explores the re-migration phenomenon following Japan's defeat in World War II, conducting interviews with Tatar Muslim descendants who moved from Japan to Turkey, the United States, and Australia, among other places. This exploration also captures the narratives of those who left Korea for third countries, offering rare insights into the global migration paths of Tatar Muslims from Korea (Numata 2013, 135).

Research on the 1930s and 1940s has predominantly examined newspaper articles and other published data, focusing on three leading newspapers relevant to Korea: *Yanga yapon muhbiri* (New Japanese Courier; YYM) and *Milli Bairağ* (MB). Non-newspaper sources like the Mosque and School "Numani" Regulation (MMNN) also provide valuable insights. Given the variety of primary sources and the lack of a comprehensive cross-analysis, this study primarily engages with YYM, MB, and MMNN. YYM, a successor to *Yapon muhbiri*, was published by the Tokyo Muslim Printing House to inform global Muslims about their Northeast Asian counterparts (Dündar 2018, 182–183). Running from 1931 to 1938 with 60 issues, it ceased following the outbreak of World War II. YYM notably covered 1930s Tatar Muslims in Korea. Meanwhile, MB, running from 1935 to 1945, became the preferred publication for Tatar migrants in Northeast Asia (Usmanova 2007, 224–344; 2009, 45). This present study predominantly uses YYM and MB for early-century accounts, while additional insights into Seoul's (Keijō) Muslim community during the colonial period were gleaned from MMNN.¹ Furthermore, the analysis extends into early 1900s

1. All translations from *Milli bairağ* come from Usmanova (2007), while all translations from *Yanga Yapon Muhbiri* are from Dündar (2018). In these works, the periodical issue

newspapers in Korea

Previous studies have attributed the migration of Tatar Muslims to Korea during the Japanese colonial period to Soviet anti-Islam policies, Turkic-Tatar nationalism, and the role of the Chinese Eastern Railway. This study aims to categorize their migration into stages to better understand the motives over time, drawing on the work of Nadir Devlet, Lee Heesoo, and Larissa Usmanova. Devlet focuses on the railway's impact and the geopolitical changes in early 20th-century Northeast Asia as catalysts for Tatar migration (Devlet 2005, 66–68). Lee proposes a four-phase model for this migration period, while Usmanova suggests a five-phase division, offering a nuanced look at the migration patterns and their historical contexts (H. Lee 2012, 325–326; Usmanova 2007, 45). Devlet, Lee, and Usmanova analyze ethnic migrations impacted by Russia's Islamic policies and their effects across Northeast Asia, including Korea. Usmanova provides a detailed account of the Tatar Muslims' journey, emphasizing the region's context but with a limited focus on Korea. Lee's research delves into the causes of migration from Russia, shedding light on its impact on Korea but not fully addressing the migrants' preference for Northeast Asia or their pro-Japanese orientation. Therefore, this paper analyzes the Japanese pull factor that played an important role in the migration of Tatar Muslims, which has not been addressed by previous research and categorizes aspects of the lives of the migrant Muslim community in Korea. Based on this analysis, this article will identify the attitudes and positions that the migrant Muslims took towards Korea, which was then a victim of imperialism and colonization. This study will be valuable as it addresses a gap in the existing literature.

Drawing from primary sources and prior research, this study is structured as follows: 1) Exploration of the origins and defining features of Tatar Muslims; 2) Examination of Russia's Islamic policies in the early 20th century; 3) Investigation of Japan's Islamic policy in the early 20th century; 4) Analysis of the Tatar Muslim acculturation in Korea and their views on Korean colonization; 5) Study of the re-migration triggered by Japan's defeat

number but not date is given, and so that is followed here as well.

and the ensuing rise of socialism.

Tatar Muslims Who Settled in Korea

Defining “Tatar” has been a nuanced endeavor, historically spanning many Turkic peoples across Eastern Europe and Asia. Presently, it generally denotes diverse Turkic groups, yet precisely identifying these groups or their genetic connections remains elusive (Balanovskaya et al. 2016, 75–80). The 13th-century Mongol invasion of Central Asia marked a critical phase of ethnic blending. Significantly, the Muslim faith and Mongol kinship became central to Tatar identity, leading to a collective identification of Mongols and Tatars under a single term, signifying a blend of their identities (J. Lee 2020; Ushnitsky 2009, 14–29). This moment underscored the Tatars’ distinct place in the confluence of the Islamic and Mongol worlds. By the 15th century, the term “Tatar” broadly applied to non-Slavic groups in present-day western Russia, becoming a catchall for Muslims and Turks in Russia today (Schamiloglu 2006, 1–2; Pow 2019).

Tatars are classified based on their residence, ethnicity, and other factors (Iskhakov 2004, 8–10). The Volga (Idil)-Ural Tatars, who migrated to Korea early in the 20th century, are often collectively called Volga or Ural Tatars. Not until the 19th century did Muslims in the Volga region begin solidifying their identity as Volga-Ural Tatars (Schamiloglu 2006, 3–4). The 19th century marked a pivotal moment for these Muslims, as they began distinguishing themselves from Slavs and Christians, asserting their identity as indigenous, Turkic-Islamic peoples of the Volga region. This assertion was accompanied by the reorganization of the Tatar language and a flourishing of Tatar literature (Yémelianova 1997, 543–572). By the turn of the 20th century, they had established a distinct ethnic identity, contrasting with the Slavic, Russian Orthodox mainstream in Russian society. Consequently, Volga-Ural Tatars, commonly known as Tatars, have become Russia’s second-largest ethnic group. Within the Volga Federal District and with Kazan as its capital, Tatarstan is its cultural and political center.

While there were different ways to refer to migrant Muslims in the early

20th century, and it is possible that the ethnic and national identities of migrant Muslims in Korea were diverse, this study assumes that the largest migrant Muslim community of the time, and the one that had the most impact on Korean society, was the Tatar migrant Muslim community. The reasons for this assumption are as follows: 1) periodicals published by the Tatar Muslim community, such as *YYM* and *MB*, included the story of the migrant Muslim community in Korea as a story of the same ethnicity (*MB* no. 250; *YYM* no. 4); 2) events related to Tukay, the national hero of the Tatar community, were held in Seoul (*MB* no. 347) the *MMNN* referred to itself as the Idil-Ural Turk Tatar Muslim school and used the term “ethnic school” (民族學教) (*MMNN* 1943, title page); 4) a person (Karim Suleyman) who lived in Korea and acted as a leader of the Muslim community there moved to Japan and gave an interview in which he referred to himself as a Tatar.² In other words, the migrant Muslims living in Korea identified themselves with the Tatar ethnicity, originating from the Volga-Idil region. Therefore, it should be assumed that the migrant Muslims who settled in Korea during the Japanese colonial period were generally Tatar Muslims.

Russian Policies Towards Islam and Causes of the Tatar Exodus

Analyzing Russian policies towards Islam in the late 19th and early 20th centuries helps elucidate why Tatar Muslims in Russia at that time chose to emigrate. Significant geopolitical shifts marked this period: the fall of the Ottoman Empire, rising Western and Japanese imperialism, and the impactful Sino-Japanese (1894–1895) and Russo-Japanese (1904–1905) wars. Russia underwent profound changes with the downfall of the Czarist system and the swift rise of socialism inspired by Lenin and Marxist principles, culminating in the 1905 Russian Revolution and the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. These events, coupled with the persecution of Muslims, precipitated a mass departure of Muslims unable to remain in the

2. *Gyeongseong Ilbo*, “Jūkyūnen no nihonjin” 十九年の日本人 (Nineteen Years as a Japanese), June 15, 1939.

Volga region (H. Lee 2012; Devlet 2005; Usmanova 2007, 2009). Key factors driving this migration included the construction of the Chinese Eastern Railway and the Bolshevik Revolution, as highlighted by previous studies, in addition to Czarist Russia's Islam policies and the devastating Tatar Great Famine of 1921–1922.

In the 19th century, Russian policies towards Islam, initiated under Alexander I with the establishment of the Ministry of Religion in 1804, aimed to centralize control over non-Orthodox religions, including Islam (Speransky 1961; Arapov 2001). Both Slavs and Westerners perceived Islamic culture as obstructive to national unity, leading to increased oppression of Islam. The Russian Orthodox Church sought to unify Slavs, casting Islam as a threat to national cohesion (Batunsky 2003; Jung 2010). During the Soviet era, the government's approach to Islam was primarily oppressive, influenced by Lenin's view of religion as detrimental to society (Lenin 1905, 83–87). The Soviet regime considered politically motivated Islamic groups as extreme factions to be eradicated from Russian society (Jung 2010, 444). The Stalin regime intensified anti-Islamic measures. Stalin perceived Russians' relationship with Muslims as fundamentally incompatible due to religious, ethnic, linguistic, social, and cultural differences between the two. After quelling the Ba'athist movement, Stalin enacted more aggressive policies: closing mosques, abolishing Sharia courts in 1924, repressing Muslim clerics, and banning Muslim educational institutions and the Arabic script (Hosking 2012, 97–111;). The number of mosques in the Soviet Union plummeted from 26,274 in 1912 to just 1,312 by 1942 (Rahman 1979, 37). The League of the Militant Godless, active under Stalin, specifically targeted Muslims for persecution, branding them as counter-revolutionaries (Broxup 1989, 195). Stalin's governance was marked by the oppression of ethnic minorities and a strong emphasis on Russian nationalism (Rees 1998, 77–106), further marginalizing the Muslim population and their cultural practices. The famine of 1921–1922 in the Crimea and Volga-Ural region played a significant role in prompting Tatar Muslim migration. This period was marked by war, drought, and famine that devastated the agricultural ecosystem in the Volga-Ural region (Engelstein 2015, 121). The focus of Soviet leadership was more on

consolidating state power and control over the Muslim region than genuinely addressing the famine's impact on the population (Rebitschek 2022, 233–237). This famine emerged as a critical factor driving Tatars in Russia to seek better living conditions abroad and to escape starvation (Biktimirov et al. 2014, 269).

In the early 20th century, Tatar Muslims from Russia found themselves compelled to emigrate due to oppressive policies by the Czarist and later Soviet governments. They dispersed across the globe, seeking refuge and new beginnings in countries as varied as Turkey, China, Germany, Finland, Japan, and Korea, driven by a desire to escape persecution and maintain their cultural and religious identities (Klimeš 2015, 80; Gilyazov 2013, 158–159; Williams 2002, 323–347). Despite the geographical spread, these Tatar migrants were united in their efforts to preserve their native language, religion, and cultural practices. This diaspora nurtured networks and communities, evident in their vibrant periodical publications like *YYM* and *MB*, which not only served as cultural lifelines but also as platforms for cooperation and support among Tatar Muslims globally (*YYM* nos. 26, 45, 46; *MB* no. 89). The Tatar communities in Northeast Asia exhibited remarkable interconnectedness, exemplified by the network between the Tatar Muslims in Harbin and their counterparts in Tokyo, which even extended support as far as Berlin. This cooperation transcended social and geographical boundaries, encompassing political collaboration among leaders across different regions, including within the Soviet Union, to safeguard their community's welfare and survival (Guseva 2013; Muratov et al. 2018). The migration of Tatar Muslims was a direct response to the existential threat they faced in their homeland. Thus, finding a haven where they could freely practice their religion and preserve their cultural heritage was paramount. The socio-political conditions in Russia during the 19th and early 20th centuries not only forced Tatar Muslims into migration but also shaped their objectives—survival, preservation of their Islamic identity, and a life of solidarity and cooperation with local authorities to safeguard their community's future.

Japan's Policies towards Islam and the Causes of Tatar Migration

As Japan aimed for hegemony over Asia, it endeavored to support the Islamic world in resisting Western influence by fostering close relationships with Muslim communities oppressed by Western imperialism (Esenbel 2011, 1142–1143). From 1900 to 1945, encompassing the peak and then defeat of Japanese imperialism, Muslims viewed Japan as a “savior of Islam” from Western imperialism and colonialism (Esenbel 2011, 1140–1141). Largely unexplored is the question of why Tatar migrant Muslims, who were forced to leave Russia, chose Northeast Asia. A primary factor is that they were influenced by Japan's pro-Islamic policies and believed that Japanese imperialism would allow them to maintain their Islamic identity and eventually establish an independent state. This sentiment was not limited to a specific region. However, it was shared among Muslims of diverse ethnicities residing across regions where Islam was prevalent, including East Asia, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Central Asia (Allan and Sugihara 1993; Fujitani et al. 2001).

In 1944, a *Yomiuri Shimbun* column stated that there were 500,000 Muslims in Manchuria.³ Based on records from the 1920s, when mosques were first known to have been built in major cities in Northeast Asia, the number of Muslims in Harbin increased from 500 in 1905 to 2,000 by August 1937. There were 200 Muslims in Mukden in 1923, 200 in Shanghai in 1922, 100 in Seoul in 1926, 50 in Busan in 1923, 800 in Tokyo in 1925, 600 in Kobe in 1923, 50 in Nagoya in 1935, and 50 in Kumamoto in 1935. In other Northeast Asian cities besides those above, there were approximately 7,540 Tatar migrant Muslims in the 1920s (Devlet 2008, 75; Usmanova 2007, 81–198). They interacted by sending representatives to each other's events in their respective regions. For instance, a representative of the Tatar Muslim community living in Tokyo traveled to Manchuria to visit Muslim communities there (Usmanova 2007, 176–177). Under the auspices of Japanese imperialism, migrant Muslim settlements were established in the

3. *Yomiuri Shimbun* 読売新聞, “Sekai-no Isuramu kyōto funki-seyo” 世界のイスラム教徒奮起よ!(Wake Up, Muslims of the World!), April 26, 1944.

area connecting Manchuria to Japan. The migrant Muslim community, centered in Tokyo, formed an international network that strongly sympathized with Japan's notion of a Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere (大東亞共榮圈) and its anti-communist policies.⁴

In the early 20th century, Japan exhibited an acute awareness of racial discrimination and the imperative for equality, which was prominently demonstrated through its engagement at the Paris Peace Conference as a principal nation (Shimazu 2019, 8–11). Paradoxically, Japan, despite its imperialistic ambitions in Asia, became a sanctuary for activists from India and the Middle East fleeing the clutches of Western imperialism, championing Pan-Asianism as a protective mantle (Nakanishi 2020, 6–8). This epoch saw the Japanese intelligentsia and governance advocating against racial discrimination, challenging the Western-centric world order epitomized by powers such as the United Kingdom and the United States, a stance poignantly encapsulated in Prince Konoe's piece, "Reject Anglo-American Pacifism" (1918). During the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, Japan proactively proposed amendments advocating racial and religious equality, though these proposals were rebuffed. The motivations behind Japan's emphasis on equality at international fora were multifaceted, spanning the protection of immigrants, endorsement of racial equality's universal value, aspirations for major power status, leverage in diplomatic negotiations, and internal political considerations (Shimazu 1998, 1–14). In its unique position as Asia's sole imperial power amidst rampant Western imperialism, Japan leveraged Pan-Asianism to amplify its influence and consolidate its imperialist and hegemonic ambitions, distinctively aligning itself with Islam and the broader Asian community.

Driven by the repressive regimes of Western colonial powers, Czarist Russia, and Ottoman Turkey, Pan-Islamists committed to a Muslim

4. *Joseon sinmun*, "Gyounsung hoegyodan" 京城回教團 (Announcement of Muslim Community in Keijō [Seoul]), February 17, 1942; *Chosun Ilbo*, "Bangong hoegyodo daehoe-e joseon cheukdo daepyo pagyeon" (Joseon Sends Representatives to Muslim Convention to Oppose Communism), May 5, 1938; *Gyeongseong Ilbo*, "Akai tsume-wa dame" 千人針, 赤い爪は駄目叱るトルコ娘 (Angry Turks with Red Nails for the Thousand Needles), February 20, 1944.

renaissance and liberation from Western dominance. Tokyo became a strategic hub for these efforts (Esenbel 2011). Japan's annexation of Manchuria in 1931 offered refuge to Tatar Muslims fleeing Soviet persecution (Kamozawa 1982), marking a significant phase of Tatar settlement in Northeast Asia. Nishihara Yukio has suggested Japan used Muslim solidarity as part of its anti-Soviet strategy (Nishihara 1980), while Tatar aspirations for an independent state received Japanese backing (Esenbel 2011). The escalation of Japan's pan-Asianist policies in 1933 attracted more Muslims, with Ayaz Ishaki founding the Idil-Ural Society of Japan, emphasizing Tatar identity preservation while fully cooperating with Japan (Saveliev 2005). This partnership between Japanese pan-Asianists and Muslims formed a united front against communism,⁵ leveraging Tatar Muslims' strategic importance to Japan's geopolitical objectives against Russia and China. Emerging later in the imperialistic sphere dominated by Western powers, Japan harnessed Islam to carve out a realm for its imperial interests, adeptly navigating the oversights of the West (Hammond 2017). While advocating Pan-Asianism and critiquing Western practices, Japan's engagement with Islam mirrored the imperial strategies of Western nations, utilizing insights and affiliations within the Islamic world to bolster its global influence (Teow 2020). The spectrum of interpretations regarding Japan's collaboration with and utilization of Muslim communities in the early 20th century is broad. This analysis refrains from evaluating such dynamics extensively. Nonetheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that Japan's favorable Islamic policies significantly influenced the migration patterns of Tatar Muslim communities, fostering their settlement across strategic locales from Manchuria to Korea. Consequently, the confluence of Russia's Islamic policies and Japan's welcoming stance towards Muslims orchestrated a significant movement of Tatar Muslims in this era, underscoring Japan's role in shaping Northeast Asia's demographic and cultural landscape in the early 20th century.

5. *Chosun Ilbo*, "Bangong hoegyodo daehoe-e joseon cheukdo daepyo payyeon" (Joseon Sends Representatives to Muslim Convention to Oppose Communism), May 5, 1938.

Tatar Muslim Acculturation in Korea and Views on Korean Colonization

To determine the acculturation status of migrant Muslims who settled in Korea, we need to examine two factors: 1) the culture (Japanese or Korean) that the migrant Muslims adopted and adapted to at the time, and 2) the extent to which they maintained their Islamic identity (Berry 1997). Based on this, this study examines the lives of those in the Tatar Muslim community in Korea to better understand how they viewed Korea and Koreans and how they perceived the international community at the time.

Geographic and Economic Activities

According to a 1938 newspaper article, approximately 150 Muslims were living in Korea at that time.⁶ This is merely one estimation of the number of Muslims in Korea at this time, for the number varies slightly in accounts from YYM, MB, and earlier studies. Numerous geographical designations across Korea are mentioned in the archival documents of YYM and MB preserved by Tatar Muslims. These locales, now recognized as major urban centers, were predominantly early maritime hubs or strategic cities along the Gyeongbu railway line, constructed post-1905. The cities of Seoul, Daegu, and Busan feature prominently in these records (YYM nos. 4, 35, 47). Lee Heesoo's (2012, 325) research identified Seoul, Busan, Daegu, Incheon, Mokpo, Daejeon, Pyongyang, Sinuiju, Cheongjin, and Heungnam as locales for Tatar Muslim communities during the Japanese colonial era. Predominantly engaged in commerce, these communities operated approximately 60 retail outlets nationwide, with records indicating the existence of mosques, schools, and libraries by 1936 (Gajnetdinov 1997, 39). The MB further corroborates the presence of the Muslim communities in additional Korean cities, including Ansan, Andong, Suwon, and Donghae, among others (MB nos. 15, 21, 183). Commencing in the early 1920s, Tatar

6. *Chosun Ilbo*, "Bangong hoegyodo daehoe-e joseon cheukdo daepyo paygeon" (Joseon Sends Representatives to Muslim Convention to Oppose Communism), May 5, 1938.

Muslims engaging in the trade, commerce, and textile sectors amassed considerable wealth (H. Lee 2012, 327), precipitating the establishment of community infrastructures and activities in the 1930s (Devlet 2005, 66–68). A notable assembly on February 2, 1935 unified these communities at the national level (*Joseon sinmun*, February 2, 1935).⁷ Retail establishments proliferated, often named after their proprietors' places of origin, with inventories primarily comprised of garments sourced from Japan (*Katan jurnal* 1970).⁸ The names of their shops were often related to their hometowns: Altay, Nur, Kazan, Kama, or Baikal (*Katan jurnal* 1970).

Religious Activities

The encounter between Islam and Korea after the 19th century is considered to have been triggered by the migration of approximately one million Koreans to Manchuria between 1895 and 1928 (G. Kim 2002). It is believed that some of the Koreans who migrated to Manchuria were interested in Islam, and their connections with Tatar Muslim missionaries who were headed to Japan led to their stay on the Korean Peninsula (Kim 2002). This analysis is reasonable given that the Korean Muslim Missionary Association (Hanguk hoegyo jeondohoe 韓國回教傳道會) was founded in Shanghai in 1924, with the aim of establishing mosques and spreading Islam on the Korean Peninsula.⁹ According to some records, a mosque was already built in Seoul (called Keijō at that time) in 1926, and its congregation numbered around a hundred (Devlet 2005, 75). In 1943, a mosque-school called Numaniyya was established in Mugyo-dong, Seoul, succeeding a nearby mosque that had been in operation since 1926 (MMNN 1943; *Katan jurnal*

7. See also, *JoongAng Ilbo*, “Tatar hoegyodo minjokdaehoe-reul gaechoe” 타탈 회教徒 民族大會를開催 (Holding of a Tatar Muslim Ethnic Convention), February 2, 1935.

8. See also, *Chosun Ilbo*, “Kaikyōto dantai shukuga kitōkai” 회教徒團體祝賀祈禱會 (Celebratory Prayers Organized by Muslims), November 13, 1937; “Bangong hoegyodo daehoe-e joseon cheukdo daepyo pagyeon” (Joseon Sends Representatives to Muslim Convention to Oppose Communism), May 5, 1938; “Bangong jidoja gwiguk” 防共指導者歸國 (Anti-Communist Leader Returns to the Country), June 15, 1939.

9. *Chosun Ilbo*, “Sanghae-e hoegyo jeondo” (Evangelization in Shanghai), April 12, 1924.

1970). At the time there was also the Dongpa Mosque in Chodong, now part of Seoul, whose members were referred to as White Russian émigrés.¹⁰ Within the corpus of documents preserved by Tatar Muslims in Korea, particularly the YYM and MD, the 1930s are highlighted as a period rich in religious activities. Notably, significant financial contributions were made towards the publication of the Quran, including donations of 600 yen from Seoul and 50 yen from Daegu, underscoring the pivotal role of Korean Muslims in supporting Islamic publishing endeavors in Northeast Asia (YYM no. 17; MB no. 15). The YYM intricately describes a ceremonial event in Seoul to celebrate the Quran's printing in Tokyo, meticulously noting the attendees and the organization of the event (YYM nos. 17, 18), illustrating the communal importance placed on this spiritual milestone. The distribution of the Tokyo-published Quran to Muslims in Korea further signifies the deep-rooted connections within the Islamic community across regional borders (YYM no. 26). Tatar Muslims also attended and interacted with the opening of a mosque in Tokyo (*Chosun Ilbo*, May 13, 1938), and held prayer meetings in support of Japan's anti-communist line.¹¹ In other words, by maintaining their religious identity as Muslims and utilizing that identity to align with Japan's political line, they were able to sustain their Islamic faith.

Educational Activities

Scholarly discussions continued over the establishment year of Korea's first Islamic School (madrasa). The *Katan jurnal* (1970) revealed that in 1926, a two-story building was procured in Keijō (Seoul) to establish a school, which was later named Numaniyya in honor of Abdulkhak Numan's contributions. Dündar (2018) cites a 1931 edition of YYM to argue that the local government's decision to reopen a closed Islamic school suggests that

10. *Chosun Ilbo*, "Hoehoegyodoga heongeum" (Muslims Make an Offering), May 14, 1938.

11. *Chosun Ilbo*, "Keijō kaikyōto-dan bōkyō kyōtei shukuga" 京城回教徒團防共協定祝賀 (Muslim Community in Keijō [Seoul] Celebrates Anti-communist Pact), November 13, 1937.

school's presence in Seoul by 1931–1932. However, scholars diverge on the founding year: Gajnetdinov (1997) suggests 1936, while Lee Heesoo (2012) suggests a 1941 establishment, posthumously fulfilling Numan's wishes. Devlet (2005) discovered a 1926 Seoul madrasa serving 5–10 pupils. Despite these insights, primary sources before 1943 are scarce. Numaniyya was an educational facility operated in Korea at the time, and its founding records, curriculum, operating policies, and activities have been preserved (MMNN 1943).¹²

Originally, Numaniyya's curriculum encompassed Islamic culture and history alongside Tatar heritage and linguistics. However, by 1944, a shift towards Japanese cultural and linguistic predominance was observed in adherence with Japan's intensified monolingual policy near the end of the colonial period (Tsuyoshi 1939, 8–9). This shift mandated that Japanese history and culture be taught with Japanese as the primary language of instruction (MMNN 1943).¹³ This educational transition, alongside bylaws mandating compliance with Japanese legal and gubernatorial directives, signifies the Tatar Muslim migrant community's pro-Japanese orientation. This stance, reflective of continuous engagement with Ayaz Ishaki, a proponent of Japan's pro-Islamic policies since the 1930s, underpins the educational and communal ethos of Tatar Muslims in Korea.

Pro-Japanese Stance

The religious strategy of the Japanese colonial administration in Korea was marked by stringent control and discrimination, continuing Japan's policy of curtailing religious freedoms (Je 2018). Despite a general restriction on religious practices, the Japanese government exhibited a notable leniency towards Islam, recognizing its potential to bolster Japanese imperial interests and the pan-Asian ideology (Esenbel 2011; Nakanishi 2019). This period

12. See also, *Gyeongseong Ilbo*, "Zaijō torukojin setsuritsu" 在城トルコ人設立 (Turks Found A Japanese Language School), September 9, 1943.

13. See also, *Gyeongseong Ilbo*, "Zaijō torukojin setsuritsu" (Turks Found a Japanese Language School), September 9, 1943.

saw Muslim leaders across Russia, the Middle East, India, and Central Asia viewing Japan as a sanctuary and aspiring for permanent resettlement, influenced by Japan's comparative religious tolerance (Kamozawa 1982; *Joseon sinmun*, November 13, 1937). The relatively favorable stance towards Islam was in evident contrast to the treatment of Christianity and Buddhism, highlighted by the persecution of the Holiness Church and restrictive policies on temple constructions while promoting Shinto (S. Kim 2006; Je 2018). Mosques and madrasas, notably, received differential treatment, with significant events such as the inauguration of the new Numaniyya marked by ceremonies celebrating Islamic and Japanese imperial figures, underscoring the mutual respect and support between the Muslim community and the Japanese government (Usmanova 2007; MB no. 360). This symbiotic relationship extended to education within mosque-madrasas, adhering strictly to the curricular directives from the Government-General of Korea, incorporating Japanese language and culture as central elements of instruction (MMNN 1943). This alignment not only facilitated a Japanese identity among Muslim children but also reflected the Muslim community's proactive contributions to Japanese military efforts, with significant donations and cultural performances supporting the war effort (MB nos. 6, 190, 395; Usmanova 2007, 182).¹⁴ Thus, the interaction between the Japanese government and the Muslim community during the colonial period was characterized by reciprocal favorability, with Islam enjoying a unique position of patronage that facilitated both religious practice and cultural integration within the imperial context.

Tatar Muslim Views of Korean Colonization

Tatar Muslims, who began to make their presence felt in Korean society in

14. See also, *Gyeongseong Ilbo*, "Kaikaikyō no sekisei, hyaku jūni en kenkin" 回回教の赤誠, 百十二圓献金 (Sincere Muslims, Give 120 Yen as an Offering), February 22, 1939; *Maeil sinbo*, "Hoehoegyodo-deul hulbyeonggeum baegwon heonnap" 回回教徒皆 恤兵金百圓献納 (A Muslim Donates 100 Won to the War Fund), May 4, 1939; *Gyeongseong Ilbo*, "Akai tsume-wa dame" (Angry Turks with Red Nails for the Thousand Needles), February 20, 1944.

the late 1920s, reached their highest numbers in the 1930s. By the 1940s, they had fully embraced Japanese rule but retained their Islamic religiosity, living in Korea as a pro-Japanese group before disappearing from history with Japan's defeat. Since Tatar Muslims were clearly present in Korean history for 25 years, it is worth discussing the traces and values they left in our society by living as a pro-Japanese group within it. Contradiction is the keyword this study chooses to analyze the lives of Tatar migrant Muslims during the Japanese colonial period. Tatar Muslims migrated to escape coercive Russian and Soviet policies and the spread of imperialism. Although they dreamed of their own independent nation, they showed no signs of supporting Korean independence. It is contradictory that they were in awe of Japan, another imperialist country, and were not interested in the Koreans who dreamed of independence, even though they must have understood the plight of oppressed peoples and wanted to build an independent nation. Possible explanations for this include the fact that Tatar Muslims had no concern about the independence of other peoples, believed in the possibility of establishing their own independent state in Japanese-occupied territory, or viewed Korea at the time as a completely Japanese possession rather than an independent nation or people. The presence of a religious leader who traveled between Japan, Korea, and Manchuria (Usmanova 2007, 177), and the strong interaction and common pro-Japanese line among the communities in these regions, suggest that Tatar Muslims viewed the Korean Peninsula as an extension of Japanese territory, not as an independent nation. In other words, Tatar Muslims viewed Seoul as a stopover point on the way to Japan and considered it to be a different part of the same country. Therefore, there was no difference in social status between Muslims living in mainland Japan and those living in Korea. Since they were migrant Muslims living in Japanese territory, they were free to move about, and a Muslim who was a leader in Seoul could move to Tokyo and continue to serve as a leader there.¹⁵ If there had been a hierarchical class structure based on geography in the home country versus the colonies, it would have been difficult for migrant Muslims who lived in the colonies

15. *Gyeongseong Ilbo*, "Jūkyūnen no nihonjin" (Nineteen Years as a Japanese), June 15, 1939.

to integrate into the mainland and take on leadership roles in the community.

Tatar Muslim perceptions of Korea and pro-Japanese views became equally negative and aggressive, respectively (seen from the Korean perspective) as Japanese colonial policy became more violent. Tatar Muslims were as enthusiastic about collaborating with anti-communist policies as they were about fleeing socialism (*Joseon sinmun*, April 28, 1938). They also defined themselves as Asians and fully sympathized with Japan's Greater East Asian Co-operation (*Joseon sinmun*, February 17, 1942). This manifested itself in a fierce antipathy toward Western imperialism (*Gyeongseong Ilbo*, September 24, 1942). In 1942, a Tatar schoolgirl, who was only 19 years old, joined the Korean Federation of National Power (國民總力朝鮮聯盟), an organization that monitored and prosecuted those who attempted to adhere to Korean culture at the local level. This is evidenced in an interview she gave to a Japanese journalist while filling out documents for foreigners in Japan regarding restrictions on foreign travel. "As an Asian, it is a great joy to live in the midst of Japan's victory, and my duty is to defend the home front as a citizen of the Empire," she said.¹⁶ Researchers have not found any direct references by Tatar Muslims to the Korean independence movement or colonization. However, the Tatar Muslims mentioned in this study praised Japan (*Joseon sinmun*, February 17, 1942),¹⁷ were fully assimilated into Japanese policies, used Japanese in education (MMNN 1943),¹⁸ and were impressed and in awe of living in Japan.¹⁹ It can be concluded that Tatar Muslims were not sympathetic to the possibility of an independent Korean state or to nationalist movements. Rather, Tatar Muslims were an integrated group of Japanese migrants who actively

16. *Gyeongseong Ilbo*, "Senshō nihon-e sasageru kansha" 戦捷日本へ捧げる感謝 (Gratitude to "Victorious Japan"), February 28, 1942.

17. See also, *Maeil sinbo*, "Hwangeun-e gamsa: Iseullam gyodo-deul banchuchukguk-e bangam" 皇恩에 感謝: 이슬람教徒들 反樞軸國에 反感 (Thanking the Emperor for His Grace: Muslims Turn Anti-Communist), March 23, 1943.

18. See also, *Gyeongseong Ilbo*, "Zaijō torukojin setsuritsu" (Turks Found a Japanese Language School), September 9, 1943.

19. *Gyeongseong Ilbo*, "Jūkyūnen no nihonjin" (Nineteen Years as a Japanese), June 15, 1939.

intervened in Japanese policy and governance, assisting Japan on Korean soil.

In return for their unconditional loyalty to Japan, the Tatar migrant Muslims received the security of life and residence, as well as the maintenance of their religious and ethnic identities. In fact, one newspaper account notes how migrant Muslims “settled in Seoul in search of a comfortable place to live.”²⁰ Also, as mentioned earlier, compared to other religion groups, the Tatar Muslim community was located in the center of Seoul, on one of its busiest streets.²¹ Furthermore, Islam was elevated to the status of an officially recognized religion by the Japanese government.²² It is believed that there were at least two mosques operating in the center of Seoul (*Gyeonseong sinmun*, May 14, 1938),²³ and Muslims traveled freely between Japan and Korea for religious events.²⁴ Although they lived as citizens under Japanese imperialism, they maintained a strong Muslim identity (*Joseon sinmun*, April 29, 1938), and as a result, religion was not a major obstacle in their lives. Naturally, this phenomenon does not reflect the benevolence of Japanese imperialism but rather how Japan strategically utilized Russian migrants in its anti-Bolshevik campaign (I. Kim 2019). Tatar Muslims exhibited an integrated form of acculturation in Japanese-occupied lands, adopting the dominant mainstream Japanese culture while maintaining their religious and cultural identity. Interestingly, the migrant Muslim communities of the 20th century exhibited the so-called *ideal* form

20. *Chosun Ilbo*, “Keijō kaikyōto-dan bōkyō kyōtei shukuga” (Muslim Community in Keijō [Seoul] Celebrates Anti-communist Pact), November 13, 1937.

21. See also, *Chosun Ilbo*, “Keijō kaikyōto-dan bōkyō kyōtei shukuga” (Muslim Community in Keijō [Seoul] Celebrates Anti-communist Pact), November 13, 1937; “Hoehoegyodoga heongeum” (Muslims Make an Offering), May 14, 1938; “Banggong jidoja gwiguk” (Anti-Communist Leader Returns to the Country), June 15, 1939.

22. *Chosun Ilbo*, “Jonggyo danchebeop andeung gageol gwijok wonbonhoe-ui gyeonggwā” (Passage of the Religious Organizations Bill, Progress of the Plenary Session of the House of Lords), February 19, 1939; “Hoegyō injeong munje-e hwangmok munsang eonmyeong” (Addressing Islamic Recognition Issues), March 24, 1939.

23. See also, *Gyeongseong Ilbo*, “Zaijō torukojin setsuritsu” (Turks Found a Japanese Language School), September 9, 1943.

24. *Chosun Ilbo*, “Banggong hoegyodo daehoe-e joseon cheukdo daepyo paygeon” (Joseon Sends Representatives to Muslim Convention to Oppose Communism), May 5, 1938.

of settlement that we have begun to discuss in the 21st century.

Re-migration after the Defeat of Japan and the Spread of Socialism

The exodus of the Tatar Muslim community from Korea following Japan's defeat can be understood through two principal factors. Firstly, the disintegration of Japan's control led to the dissolution of the socio-political support system for the Muslims. Secondly, the rapid spread of socialism and communism in neighboring Russia and China following Japan's defeat, posed a significant threat to their religious freedoms, compelling their relocation to escape potential oppression. The deep-seated loyalty of Muslims living in Korea, Manchuria, and Japan towards Japanese rule, seen as a protector against Western domination, underscores this affinity. This allegiance is vividly illustrated in a statement from the leader of the Turkmen-Tatar Cultural Association: "We are blue-eyed and white-skinned, but we have the blood of the Asiatic race running through our veins, which we inherited from our ancestors....We have been so favored with respect for our ethnic and religious pride that we have been allowed to build schools and to practice our religion, and we feel that we are more than happy to be at home. We are not strong enough at present to cooperate fully, but I believe that the descendants of our blood will surely repay this favor and cooperate....We wish the Emperor good fortune, long life, and the completion of the crusade."²⁵ This profound respect and adoration for Japan meant that remaining in Korea after Japan's withdrawal became untenable, propelling the community to seek a new sanctuary for their religious and cultural integrity.

The rise of socialist movements in 1920s Korea, intertwined with the independence movement, marked a pivotal ideological shift among Koreans, who viewed socialism as a pathway to national liberation (Shim 2004). This shift intensified in the late 1930s amidst the erosion of Korea's traditional

25. *Maeil sinbo*, "Hwangeun-e gamsa: Iseullam gyodo-deul banchuchukguk-e bangam" (Thanking the Emperor for His Grace: Muslims Turn Anti-Communist), March 23, 1943.

social structures. Under Japanese sway, the southern half of the peninsula contrasted with the emerging socialism and communism in the northern half, influenced by China, Russia, and new industrial and social dynamics. The Soviet Union's military actions in North Korea in 1945, prior to the atomic bombings in Japan, garnered significant Korean support due to visible Soviet opposition to Japanese occupation (Lensen 1972; Kwon 1997). The Tatar Muslim community's deep-seated aversion to socialism stemmed from its forced migration from the Volga region due to Soviet repression. Their disdain for socialism and broader skepticism towards Western powers and the Allies in World War II was rooted in the community's experience of oppression.²⁶ A Tatar celebration of the 1937 Anti-Comintern Pact, documented with photographs (*Joseon sinmun*, November 13, 1937; *Maeil sinbo*, November 17, 1937), and a 1938 defense alliance in Manchuria, highlighting Japan's support (*Joseon sinmun*, April 29, 1938), demonstrated the Japan-Tatar alignment against socialism. Following Japan's defeat and socialism's rise, especially in areas adjacent to Korea and Japan, the Tatar Muslims migrated once more, aiming to safeguard their religious identity against potential socialist oppression (Numata 2013). This migration, around 1945, reflected their continued quest for a secure environment to practice their faith amidst shifting political terrains.

Conclusion

This study analyzed the Tatar migrant Muslim community in Korea during the Japanese occupation. It examined the motivation of Tatar Muslims to come to Korea, their acculturation process, the causes of their re-exodus, and the life of Tatar Muslims in Korea at that time. They settled in Korea due to Russia's repressive policies against Islam and the Great Famine as push factors, and Japan's policy of favoring Islam as a pull factor. Tatar Muslims lived in Korea between 1920 and 1945, assimilating to Japanese colonial

26. *Maeil sinbo*, "Hwangeun-e gamsa: Iseullam gyodo-deul banchuchukguk-e bangam" (Thanking the Emperor for His Grace: Muslims Turn Anti-Communist), March 23, 1943.

policies while maintaining their Islamic and Tatar ethnic identities. From a modern perspective, they represented an idealized form of immigrant integration into mainstream society. This can be seen through their support for Japan's anti-communist policies, acceptance of the Japanese priority policy, their efforts to raise funds for Japan's war effort, holding celebratory prayers in response to Japan's victories or establishment of international cooperation, operating more than one mosque in Seoul, publishing Quranic texts in conjunction with Japan, and inviting religious leaders to Korea. In other words, Tatar Muslims who settled in Korea were more focused on securing their independence and existence by aligning with Japan's policies and revering them than recognizing Korea as a country that, like the Tatar nation, deserved independence and lending their support toward such a goal. With the defeat of Japan and the spread of socialism in the northern Korean Peninsula, Tatar Muslims felt their survival once more threatened, and felt they could no longer remain in Korea because they had no connection with Koreans but had led lives there sympathetic to Japan. Therefore, after 1945, Tatar Muslims began to leave Korea, even as the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 brought a new group of Muslims to the peninsula: the Turkish contingent. The history of migrant Muslims during the Japanese colonial period is not connected to the history of migrant Muslims in Korea, nor has it been carried over into subsequent history. Tatar migrant Muslims exist as an island in Korean history. However, the attitudes of migrant Muslims toward Japan, the dominant power at the time, and Koreans, who had to exist as a social minority in the context of migration and colonization by Japanese imperialism, provide a glimpse into the strategies migrants had to employ to survive. Migrant history is often considered a minor field in mainstream historiography. Interestingly, even within this minor field, the history of large diasporas, of migrants in Western countries, and of various migration-related conflicts in modern societies receive much attention. In contrast, topics such as the history of migrant Muslims in Korea receive little attention. However, these histories are of great significance in the lives of the people who lived them and provide a valuable glimpse into the times. The lives of Tatar migrant Muslims reflect the trajectory of Western imperialism since the 20th century, the Japanese

imperialism that sought to defeat it, and the oppression of Islam. The Tatar experience in Korea and Japan also provides insight into and how one victim of imperialism sees another victim. This study has taken a macro-level approach to the lives of Tatar Muslims in Korea and painted a picture in broad strokes. The task ahead is to dig deeper into the Tatar Muslim community and reconstruct the microcosm of their lives based on the data we have collected and continue to discover.

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