Mutual perceptions between Buddhists and Muslims,  
With special reference to Japanese Buddhists’ perspectives

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I. Buddhist-Muslim relations in Japan

1. Early period (753-1964)
The oldest recorded occasion of a Japanese-Muslim encounter dates back to 753, when a Japanese envoy to the court of T’ang China sat next to an Arab delegate at an official reception. A Tendai monk obtained a Persian document at the port of Quanzhou in 1217, which he believed to be a part of a Buddhist sutra from India. A few Japanese also encountered Muslims in Nagasaki during the period of national seclusion, such as Malays serving Dutch personnel stationed there and Persian-speaking Muslim merchants coming from Ayutthaya. The Japanese had no direct collective involvement with Muslims.

The Japanese obtained information on Islam mainly via China, and later through Europeans, particularly the Portuguese and the Dutch. Observing practices performed by Malays at Nagasaki, one Japanese writer (in 1787) took ‘amin’ to mean ‘amida (Buddha),’ and the Muslims to be worshipping ‘arara,’ he elsewhere regards as ‘(frightening) divine spirit (J: kijin).’

2. Pre-modern period (1854-1912)
This period saw more Japanese involvement with the Islamic world, especially with Ottoman Empire. The major official contacts that Japan made with Muslim countries were mostly motivated by their common plight, namely the one-sided treaties it had made with Western countries. Among the delegates was Mokurai Shimaji (1838-1911), a Buddhist monk of the Jōdo-shin school, from Nishi Honganji. The connection between Ottoman Turkey and Japan was especially strengthened by the so-called Erçuğrul incident in 1889, when an envoy to Japan led by Osman Pasha were shipwrecked on their way back home after meeting with the Emperor.
After support and donations had been collected from the Japanese, the survivors were sent back to their homeland in 1892. This event gave rise to the first Japanese convert to Islam, Shōtarō Noda (1868-1904).

Japan’s victory in the Russo-Japanese War, in 1905, brought much excitement to Muslims. This led to an increase of Muslim visitors to Japan. Keen contact was also made between Pan-Islamicists such as Abdürreşid Ibrahim (1857-1944) and Pan-Asianist Japanese. They sought to collaborate against Western imperialism and promoted the spread of Islam in Japan. This originated the first Japanese pilgrim, Kōtarō Yamaoka (1880-1959), who travelled with Ibrahim in 1909.

There are three major ways in which the Japanese of this period perceived Muslims. The earliest views on Islam were negative as Japanese intellectuals, including Christian thinkers, were regurgitating European prejudices. Then a sympathetic view was expressed briefly when the Japanese regarded Muslims in the Middle East as fellow Asians struggling under European hegemony. This was then followed by another negative trend in views about Islam, this time from a colonialist perspective. Some of the writings from this trend attributed the perceived backwardness of the Middle East, and its struggle under the European dominance, to Islam.

Most pre-modern Japanese writers did not have a comprehensive knowledge of Islam. For example, a member of the second delegation sent out before the Restoration notes, when visiting a mosque in Cairo, a ‘Buddha statue’ located in the back of the hall. He also mentions undecipherable ‘Sanskrit’ writings in a golden frame, and that seated people were ‘sutra-chanting,’ not unlike that found in Japan. The unknown religion was seen from a Buddhist perspective.

The first Japanese pilgrim to Mecca, Kōtarō Yamaoka (1880-1959), did not have much knowledge of Islam or sympathy for Muslims at the time of his journey. He understood in the framework of Japanese spirituality. Struggling to figure out what the Muslim object of worship is, he asked where the physical representation of God (J: goshintai) was located, and was told by his Muslim host that God as the Creator of the universe does not have the Trinity or idols attached to Him. Yamaoka concludes that the phrase ‘allāhu akbar’ (God is great) means Amaterasu ōmikami (the great kami Amaterasu),’ and that the object of Muslim worship is nothing but the ultimate ancestor of the Imperial family.
He declares, in much the same way as many Asianist writers did, that it is the duty of the Japanese to spread Shinto to edify West Asians.

A remarkable amount of positive attention was paid to Prophet Muhammad by Japanese writers from the early twentieth century. They followed Thomas Carlyle’s (1795-1881) On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History (1841), which denounces the negative view of the Prophet that was widespread in the Christian world and attempts to shed a more favorable light on Islam by reevaluating various aspects of Prophet Muhammad’s life. Re-interpretation of the traditional Christian view of Islam in the Japanese works on Muhammad is most notable in the way they accord a positive meaning to an aggressive aspect of his life, or the concept of Islam having been spread with a sword. Kaiten Nukariya (1867-1934), a Soto Zen monk-scholar who has substantial experience in both Europe and the US, also appreciates the multi-faceted nature of Muhammad’s life, a life full of earthly aspects such as military activities and family life. He contrasts it with the secluded religious life of the historical Buddha and Christ, as practical/realistic versus idealistic.

Such Buddhist interest in the active political aspects of the Prophet’s life also seems to have been motivated by political circumstances of that period. In his Mahometto no Sensōshugi (The militarism of Muhammad, 1903), Hannosuke Ikemoto (years unknown) takes the Prophet to be the role model for the Japanese in actively fighting actively fight against European powers. Ikemoto compares the Prophet directly with Nichiren (1222-1282), founder of the Buddhist movement now known as the Nichiren school. He regards both as reformers of the religious landscape of their times, and holds that both men ‘came from heaven,’ in response to the need for remedy to the degenerate tendencies of society.

3. War period (1912-1945)
Japanese involvement with Muslims increased drastically in the war period, with an ongoing influx of Muslim émigrés. Da’wah (missionary) activities were conducted with much zeal, and a number of research institutions were set up to investigate the Islamic world, especially after the Manchurian State was founded in 1932. The activities of those Muslims were often supported by Japanese converts to Islam, many of whom had extensive experience in China or Russia. The Kobe Mosque was built in 1935. It is the oldest surviving mosque in Japan.
The Tokyo Mosque, which was opened in 1938, was the centerpiece of war-time Japanese-Muslim involvement.

Research organisations established as part of Japan’s kaikyō seisaku (Islam-policy) around this time include Kaikyōken Kenkūjo and Dai Nippon Kaikyō Kyōkai, both officially set up in 1938.
Dai Nippon Kaikyō Kyōkai was an official Islamic organisation dedicated to promoting Islamic studies and Japanese-Muslim relations.
Kaikyōken Kenkūjo, a research institution headed by Kōji Ōkubo (1887-1947), had on board such Japanese scholars as Toshihiko Izutsu (1914-1993).
As the war progressed, Japanese authorities extended the sphere of their ‘Islam-project’ under the slogan of ‘The Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere’ into Southeast Asia (mainly Indonesia and Malaya).

Islam-related literature from this period is more comprehensive. Most works clearly express the political relevance that the tradition has for Japan, and the writers from this period are generally sympathetic to Islam. They are also highly keen to go beyond Western interpretations of Islam and to establish their own tradition of Islamic studies.
Longstanding negative views about Islam that are addressed in these works include it having been spread with a sword and that it oppresses women.
Their publication also led to the first Japanese translations of the Qur’an, although only a few writers were conversant in Islamic languages.

Many of the accounts on Islam published during this period were written from the standpoint of the (state) Shinto-based Japanese worldview, and its imperialist agenda. This tendency is also found among Japanese converts to Islam. Ippei Tanaka (1882-1934) equates Allah and His ninety-nine names with Amenō-minakanushi and other deities (J: yaoyoruzu no kami, eight million gods) respectively.
His gokyo ki-itsu ron, the theory that five religions are one and the same, recognises Confucius, Laozi, Shaka (i.e. the historical Buddha), Christ, and Muhammad as saints of the Big Way (J: taidō), namely, the Shinto-based Japanese spirituality.
His theory seems to reflect shintō hi shukyō ron (theory of Shinto as non-religion), which regards (state) Shinto as transcending a normal religion.

Although less engaged in political activities, Bunhachirō Ariga (1868-1946), an ex-Christian who resided in India, also attempts to understand Islam in accordance with his country’s imperialistic agenda.
Ariga is critical of Buddhism, and maintains that the Buddhist stance against killing even an insect is not compatible with the mentality of the Japanese. He claims that Islam ‘naturally best suited for the traditional Japanese spirit’ as it ‘does not avoid fighting nor is afraid of death.’ Like Tanaka, Ariga regards Ameno-minakanushi as identical to Allah. As ‘the ritual is unsuitable for Japan,’ he ‘has decided to change the practice and format of the (Islamic) prayer.’ He argues for praying with two hands together (as is done at Shinto shrines) and in Japanese instead of repeating the same Arabic phrases. He also urges (potential) Japanese converts to uphold the duties of admiring the Emperor and Empress, and of visiting family graves.

Kōtarō Yamaoka, who equated Allah with Amaterasu ōmikami at the time of his pilgrimage, later seems to have come to identify Allah with Amida Nyorai (Skt: tathāghata, i.e. Buddha), viewing Jōdo-shin Buddhism and Islam as identical. Regarding the terms ‘islām’ and ‘namu’ in Jōdo-shin Buddhism as meaning ‘ki-e’ (taking refuge, submission), he identifies the ‘Muslim prayer of submitting to Allah’ (takbīr) with the nenbutsu ‘namu amida butsu.’ Yamaoka was probably familiar with Jodo-shin Buddhism prior to his conversion.

While Japanese spirituality of the time was mainly represented in terms of Shinto, or Emperor worship, Buddhist terminology was used more prevalently than that of Shinto to describe Islamic concepts in both Japanese works on Islam and translations of the Qur’an. Examples include such practice-related terms as ‘ji-in’ (temple, for mosque), ‘kyōten’ or ‘kyōmon’ (sutras, for the holy scripture), ‘kisha’ (alms-giving, for zakāt), ‘fuse’ (offering, for ṣadaqah), ‘daimoku’ (the name of (Lotus) Sutra to be chanted, for takbīr, i.e. ‘allāhu akbar’), ‘shōmyō (chanting the name of the Buddha, for dhikr),’ ‘jōdo’ or ‘gokuraku’ (the Pure Land, for paradise), ‘jīhi’ (compassion, or ji and hi separately, for Arabic words of the root ra-ha-ma, mercy), and ‘ki-e’ (taking refuge, for submission).

Shinto is perhaps much more conducive to comparisons with of Islam in the sense that both share a concept of there being a highest deity, while Buddhist terms were used out of convenience to describe Islam.

Some writers directly compare Islamic and Buddhist teachings. For example, Kanshi Kagamishima (1912-1945), a Soto monk and scholar who worked at Kaikyōken Kenkūjo, identifies the importance of observing religious rules (J: kairitsu) in Islam with the spirit of Dōgen (1200-1253)’s words: ‘igi soku buppō, sahō kore shūshi.’ Kagamishima also draws direct parallels between Islam’s emphasis on the correspondence of belief and deed, and the main stances of such Buddhist masters as ‘Kyōgō shinshō’ by Shinran (1173-1263), and ‘shushō ichinuyo’ by Dōgen.
He also argues that the shahāda (confession of Islamic faith) ‘has a similar significance to that attributed to passages of repentance (J: zangemon) and of ‘taking refuge in the three jewels (J: ki-e sanpō)’ in Buddhism. Kagamishima makes conscious attempts to highlight commonalities between Buddhism and Islam, yet he does not elaborate them further.

II. Buddhist-Muslim perceptions in the contemporary period

Although mutual reference between Buddhists and Muslims have been increasing, systematic discussions are still rare. Compared with Buddhist-Christian dialogue, Buddhist-Muslim dialogue is still new, and rarely take up doctrinal issues (as pointed out by Prof. Perry Schmidt Leukel). However, there have emerged attempts to rectify this situation by discussing Buddhism and Islam through a doctrinal perspective. ‘Parallelism’ refers to a perspective focused on discussing similarities (parallels) between the major concepts and doctrinal tenets of two or more religions. Parallels are presented as possible bases of dialogue and mutual understanding. Unlike pluralists, parallelists do not argue ostensibly that all religions point to the same thing, but leave it up to others to decide for themselves how the concepts in question are ultimately related to each other, or whether they refer to the same thing at all.

In the context of Buddhist perceptions of Islam, Buddhist parallelists typically seek to address the question of God, which has often been seen as a ‘stumbling block’ in Buddhist-Muslim dialogue, by suggesting, a Buddhist equivalent of God, thereby drawing parallels between God and a major concept in Buddhism. A good example is Alexander Berzin (1944-), a Tibetan Buddhist scholar and teacher, who has advised and translated for the 14th Dalai Lama and has been actively engaged in Buddhist-Muslim dialogue. While he is clear that ‘the Buddha is not an omnipotent God,’ Berzin advocates it best to avoid mentioning the atheistic nature of Buddhism directly to Muslims when in dialogue.

Berzin compares the Muslim understanding of God to the concept of Adi Buddha, put forward by Indonesian (Mahayana) Buddhists as a direct equivalent of God. In Indonesia, official recognition is given to several religions alongside Islam. They should have One Supreme God, Prophets and Holy Scriptures. To meet these requirements, Indonesian Buddhists from the Mahayana strand, have put forward Adi Buddha, the primordial Buddha, who is considered to be the source of all things, as their Supreme God.
Cf. Theravada Buddhists have instead interpreted ‘God’ as referring to the Unconditional or Absolute, i.e. the Three Jewels. According to Berzin, Adi Buddha is ‘the creator of our appearances, what we perceive.’ He further holds that Adi Buddha being ‘beyond words, beyond concepts, unimaginable’ is something Muslims could easily relate to, on the ground that, in Islam, Allah is not personified, but ultimately unknown.

Commitment to promoting dialogue through parallelism is also found among Muslims. The foremost example is Imtiyaz Yusuf, a Bangkok-based scholar who has been actively writing about Buddhist-Muslim relations, and promoting dialogue between the two communities in Southeast Asia. He has pointed out a number of parallels between Buddhist and Islamic concepts, such as tathāgata (‘one who has thus gone,’ an epithet for the Buddha) and nūr muhammadī (light of Muhammad, the ‘Muhammad quality’), regarding them as possible useful ‘tools’ of dialogue, the ‘medium’ of mutual understanding.

Such attempts to make doctrinal parallels between Buddhism and Islam are still limited in number. In Buddhism, in particular, those who suggest a Buddhist equivalent of God can be criticized for compromising the traditional doctrinal framework. However, this development is noteworthy as the parallelist scholars attempt to overcome the traditional doctrinal framework with a clear agenda of promoting inter-religious harmony.

III. Islam in contemporary Japan and Japanese Buddhists’ views of Islam

1. Situations surrounding Muslims in Japan
As World War II drew to a close with the defeat of Japan in 1945, the Japanese involvement with and research on the Islamic world were abandoned. Post-war Japanese interest in Islam has generally been low, and has emerged only at times of major events like the Oil Crisis in the 1970s, the Islamic Revolution in Iran, and the Gulf war. More recently, public attention tends to be drawn to Islam through the 9/11 incident, and the activities of ‘radial Muslims’ such as so-called Islamic State. On the other hand, the country’s improved economy has brought many Muslims to Japan, from such countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iran in the 1980s, and more recently from Southeast Asian countries, such as Indonesia.
The number of Muslims residing in Japan is estimated at around one hundred and ten thousand, i.e., less than 0.1 per cent of the entire population of Japan. About ten per cent of the Muslims residing in Japan are usually considered to be ‘ethnic Japanese’ Muslims, the majority of whom are considered to be Japanese married to migrant Muslims, mainly women married to non-Japanese Muslim men. Thus, Muslims constitute an extremely small minority in Japan.

Being made up with many communities of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, Japan’s Muslim community is more like a collection of communities rather than one single community. These communities tend to cater for the needs of specific ethnic or linguistic groups, although many do have mixed congregations. For example, Nihon Musurimu Kyōkai (Japan Muslim Association) caters mainly for the needs of Japanese Muslims, and does not function as an umbrella organisation representing all Muslims residing in Japan.

There are approximately 100 Islamic places of worship (i.e. mosques and musallas) in Japan. The oldest is the Kobe Muslim Mosque. The Tokyo mosque was demolished due to its decrepit condition in 1986, and Tokyo Camii (Mosque) was opened in 2000. Developments on the international political arena have been known to affect the image of Islam and the reputation of Muslims living in Japan. This usually takes place when so-called terrorist activities are committed by Islamic groups abroad. Such incidents tend to have a negative impact on the everyday life of Muslims residing in Japan, where the consequences range from being placed under police surveillance, to receiving messages of censure and threat, to being avoided or taunted in public. However, such developments abroad have not triggered any persistent communal confrontations between Muslim and non-Muslim residents, and relationships between the Muslim community and the wider society have generally been trouble-free.

2. Dialogue
Perhaps reflecting the extremely small Muslim presence in the country, Buddhist-Muslim dialogues are still rare, and tend to be on a small scale. On the other hand, most sessions are conducted in a friendly atmosphere created by the sense of solidarity between co-religionists, perhaps there is no need of serious ‘negotiation’ to improve the communal relations within Japan. The oldest recorded occasion of Buddhist-Muslim dialogue in Japan dates back to 1976, when Niwano Nikkyō (1906-1999), (then) president of Risshō Kösei Kai, A. R. Siddiqui from
Saudi Arabia, and Sekihei Saitō (1908-1998), ex-president of the Japan Muslim Association met. They discussed, amongst other things, major practices of Buddhism and Islam, such as prayer, alms-giving/zakat, objects of worship, and cooperation among religions, noting differences and similarities between Buddhism and Islam.

Niwano was particularly active in pointing out similarities between Buddhism and Islam. For example, in response to Saitō’s question about the object of worship in Buddhism, Niwano said, ‘Shakyamuni and the Dharma he taught, noting that the eternal Buddha, who is the dharmakaya, appeared in India as Shakyamuni.

To this, Sidiqqui said, ‘In that respect, Islam is very clear. Allah is Allah, and Muhammed is completely human [or: a perfect human],’ thus emphasizing the distinction made in Islam between Allah and the prophet.

However, Niwano further elaborated on this, saying:

‘I would not say he is a prophet, but the position of Shakyamuni is similar to that [of Muhammed]. In Buddhism, we say the eternal Buddha [kuon-jitsujō no honbutsu], in Christianity they say God who art in Heaven, and in Islam they say Allah. From our side it looks the Buddha, and from the Islamic side, Allah…’

This can be categorized as pluralist in terms of the theology of religions.

3. Japanese Buddhists’ views of Islam

In contemporary Japan, only two Buddhist scholars, Rikyū Kono (1931-) and Ryūshin Azuma (1935-) have published works that are dedicated to discussing Buddhism and Islam from a Buddhist perspective.

There are also academics of a Buddhist background who have written on Islam, such as Toshihiko Izutsu (1914-1993), a renowned scholar of Islam who worked at Kaikyōken Kenkyūjo, and Kōsei Morimoto (1934-), ex-abbot (J: bettō) of Todaiji (the headquarters of the Kegon school) and specialist in Islamic history.

They are not included in my discussion today. Izutsu is said to have been a Zen practitioner, but did not discuss Islam publicly as Buddhist.

Morimoto has participated in inter-religious sessions representing Buddhism, but, does not have a publication in which he discusses Islam from a Buddhist perspective.

Rikyū Kono (1931-) is a Jodo-shin monk and scholar whose expertise covers English literature and comparative cultures.

He is currently a professor emeritus at Muroran Institute of Technology, Hokkaido, and was previously the abbot of the Kajunji temple, in Date, where he is originally from.
Kono became interested in Islam through his exchange with a Muslim host family when he lived in London in the 1970s. Given the sense of connection he experienced with Muslims, he focuses on comparing the two traditions from the Jodo-shin perspective. He initially published his observations in academic publications, but later shared his views of Islam with lay followers of the Jodo-shin school through talks and popular books.

Kono’s discussion focuses on doctrinal issues, especially on drawing parallels between Allah and (Amida) Nyorai. He regards both as the one and only saviour, to be submitted to and worshipped by their followers. They are also said to share characteristics such as being formless, colourless and having many names to show their different attributes. Kono places particular emphasis on jihi (mercy, compassion) as an attribute common to Allah and Amida Buddha. He says that the originally colourless and formless Amitābha appears to his followers as a ‘personified God ... merciful and compassionate,’ as if he was Allah.

He also identifies attitudes of Muslims with those of Jodo-Shin followers. For example, he views the Islamic notion of ‘abdullāh (servant of God)’ to be in line with the idea in the Jodo-shin tradition of becoming a slave (J: dorei) to Nyorai. Regarding ‘islām’ and ‘kimyō,’ as meaning the same attitude, Kono further suggests that (Jodo-shin) Buddhism be recognised as genuine by Muslims on the basis of the Qur’anic statement: the only genuine religion is “islam” (3:19).

While Kono’s approach is mostly parallelistic in that he emphasizes commonalities between Islam and (Jodo-shin) Buddhism, he occasionally makes inclusivistic remarks. In the preface to his book *Yudaya Kirisuto Isurāmu Shinran* (Judaism, Christ(ianity), Islam, Shinran)(2003), Kono expresses his personal belief thus: ‘I find the works of Amida Nyorai in foreign cultures, where He embodies Himself sometimes as Allah and sometimes as Jesus. Therefore, I do not feel uncomfortable when I live abroad (p.ix).’

The fact that this statement is made in the preface, and not in the main text, of the book can be said to reflect Kono’s parallelist agenda, that is, his commitment to emphasizing doctrinal similarities between Buddhism and Islam, in order to promote mutual understanding and inter-religious harmony between Buddhists and Muslims.

Ryūshin Azuma (1935-) is a Soto Zen monk-scholar. He was the President of Komazawa Women’s University, where he is currently a professor emeritus.
Azuma is the abbot of the Daijōji temple, which is one of the most important Soto centres for ascetic training, situated in Ishikawa prefecture in the north-west of Japan. Azuma’s interest in Islam dates back to 1996, when he delivered a speech on the role of Buddhism in contemporary Japan at the University of Aleppo, Syria. In 2002, he published a book entitled Nihon no Bukkyō to Isurāmu [Japanese Buddhism and Islam], in which he discusses topics such as research on Islam conducted by Japanese Buddhists (especially those with a Soto background), Japanese translations of the Qur’an, and prospects for Buddhist-Muslim dialogue. Azuma also once accepted a young female Muslim from Azerbaijan who expressed keen interest in having Zen training to reside in Daijōji and train with other monastics, all of whom are male Japanese trainees.

Like Kono, Azuma has been committed to publicly speaking on Islam from a Buddhist perspective, with a view to enhancing mutual understanding between Buddhists and Muslims. Azuma says his ultimate goal is to realise ‘world peace,’ expressing his determination to fulfil his mission thus:

‘It may take 100, even 200, years, but that will not discourage me (p.9).’

On the other hand, unlike Kono, Azuma is highly reluctant to suggest parallels between major Buddhist and Islamic concepts. In his work, Azuma tends to emphasize differences between Buddhism and Islam, pointing out only a few similarities. The similarities are mentioned in the last chapter, which is an essay on Zen and Sufism, and none of them are doctrinal. They include the practice of head-shaving and the nature of master-disciple relationship, which he regards as incidental similarities. They are not presented as possible bases of dialogue or mutual understanding between Buddhists and Muslims.

Azuma is critical of Japanese scholars who use Buddhist terms to explain Islam. On the term ‘jihi’ (Skt: maitri-karuna, often translated into English as loving-kindness and compassion respectively), which is commonly used to translate the attribute of Allah, he says:

‘Jihi, or taijitaihi (great ji great hi), is a Buddhist term which represents the most important Buddhist doctrine and practice. It is not appropriate to apply this term to Allah in Islam, which has an entirely different nature and doctrines (p.185).’

That Azuma is reluctant to draw parallels is also clearly seen in the way he deals with the suggestion made by Sekihei Saitō, the Japanese Muslim participant of the 1976 dialogue. Azuma quotes Saitō:
‘Within each religion, too, there are different strands, and there naturally emerge differences of opinions. We just cannot help it. There is no end to the discussion if we keep on taking about differences. In order to achieve the big goal of humanity, that is, peace, we need to find commonalities among our traditions and collaborate with one another on the basis of these. For example, Islam has quite a few commonalities with Buddhism and Shinto (p.200).’

While Azuma shares Saitō’s goal of establishing world peace, he does not comment on the importance of finding commonalities between Buddhism and Islam which Saitō emphasizes.

Why is Azuma so cautious about drawing parallels between Buddhism and Islam?
His perception of Islam as being radically different from Buddhism may have prevented him from drawing parallels between them. Indeed, Azuma has said when discussing Buddhism and Islam that Zen does not have faith like the Jodo-shin faith in Amida Buddha, i.e. Zen does not have a monotheistic idea.

Some of the sources on Islam he has drawn on are dated and/or biased against Islam. This may have given him a negative impression about Islam and Muslims.

It may also be attributable to the absence of extensive experience he has of living abroad or communicating with Muslims outside Japan on everyday contexts.

However, it is not possible to explain away Azuma’s reluctance to suggest parallels between Buddhism and Islam with the above-mentioned factors.

Doing so would lead to the assumptions that willingness to draw parallels is an internationally-minded attitude, and that ‘correct’ knowledge of Islam naturally enables one to find similarities between Buddhism and Islam.

The question of whether or not to focus on commonalities may be an important point of contention in the future Buddhist-Muslim dialogue in Japan.

Main sources:


—— *Yudaya Kirisuto Isurāmu Shinran* (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 2003)
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