

Yuriko Yamanaka

Dynamics of Religious Objects in *and outside* Museums: How Material Culture of Islam is ‘Framed’ in Japan

1 Introduction

Representation of Islam in museums in non-Muslim majority countries has become a subject of much debate in recent years. As pointed out by Virginie Rey, museums in the West are experiencing the third major phase of restructuring their Islamic collection displays. The first phase was in the 19th century, when artefacts were collected in the context of European imperial expansion into the Muslim world, and displayed in world fairs and archaeological, ethnological, or decorative art museums under the colonial gaze. The second major phase came in the 1960s and 1970s, when revisionist attempts were made to decolonise knowledge of Islamic heritage. Finally, in the last two decades, we have seen the third *rinascimento*, or growth, in Islamic-related initiatives in museums and renewal of exhibition space dedicated to Islam. Museums have taken up the agenda of defusing the rising tension between Islamophobia on the one hand and radicalisation of Muslim extremists on the other, by serving as a place of learning, and as a forum for intercultural, interreligious dialogue.¹ Muslim communities themselves have also started to play an increasingly active role in creating these new spaces: as curators, donors, source community informants, or participants in dialogue events.² Accordingly, there has been a recent boost in scholarly output related to Islam in the fields of museology, material culture studies, and heritage studies.³ However, most of the existing scholarship focuses on museums and outreach projects in Western Europe and North America, where the Muslim migrant

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- 1 John Reeve, “Islam and Museums: Learning and Outreach,” in *Religion in Museums: Global and Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Gretchen Buggeln et al. (London: Bloomsbury, 2017) and Virginie Rey, “Islam, Museums, and the Politics of Representation in the West,” *Material Religion* 15, no. 2 (2019).
 - 2 Mirjam Shatanawi, “Curating against Dissent,” in *Political and Cultural Representations of Muslims: Islam in the Plural*, ed. Christopher Flood et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 184–90; Mirjam Shatanawi, “Engaging Islam: Working with Muslim Communities in a Multicultural Society,” *Curator: The Museums Journal* 55, no. 1 (2012) and Klas Grinell, “Islam – Ein Aspekt zeitgenössischer Weltkultur,” in *Experimentierfeld Museum: Internationale Perspektiven auf Museum, Islam und Inklusion*, ed. Christine Gerbich and Susan Kamel (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2014).
 - 3 See Bigelow 2021; Grinell 2014, 2018, 2019 and 2020; Grinell et al. 2019; Junod et al. 2012; Kamel 2019; Kamel and Gerbich 2014; Macdonald 2019; Moors 2012; Naguib 2019; Norton-Wright

population is relatively high. This paper offers a Far Eastern perspective on the subject by presenting a case study from the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka, Japan.

In comparison to Europe, North America or Australia, Japan's contact with Islam has been less direct and intense. However, being one of the G7 countries, it is, of course, an active player in global politics involving the Middle East. Additionally, in recent years, there has been an increasingly visible presence of Muslims (especially from Southeast Asia) in Japan. Muslims have come to Japan to study, do vocational training, or work. This trend stems from revisions to Japan's hitherto restrictive immigration policies in an effort to resolve labour shortage problems arising from negative population growth.⁴ Although social tension between Muslims and non-Muslims is less acute than in Europe or in North America, it has become increasingly important for socioeconomic reasons for the Japanese to 'understand' and accommodate the needs of Muslims in public spaces – and in private spheres as well, since many Muslim migrant care workers and trainees now provide nursing and hospice services to the elderly.⁵

The surge in publications of various 'introduction to Islam' and 'understanding the Islamic world' books (even *manga* versions!) in Japan reflects this increasing demand. These textbooks and reference books sometimes fall into the trap of generalisations and essentialism, however, leading to another form of stereotyping: that all Muslims adhere to very strict religious observances dictated in the *Qur'an* and *Hadith*. For many Japanese people, who have neither the opportunity to travel extensively nor personal or professional contacts with Muslims, it is difficult to grasp the various hues of Islamic practices across the globe, according to region, denomination, social class, age, gender, family traditions or simply individual choice.

The National Museum of Ethnology (*Kokuritsu minzokugaku hakubutsukan*) thus plays an important role in informing the Japanese public about Islam through the presentation of material culture. Commonly known by its Japanese acronym Minpaku (henceforth Minpaku), it is the only institute in Japan with a permanent display of everyday objects used by Muslims from all over the world, which also

2019; Reeve 2017; Rey 2019; Rico 2019; Rico and Engmann 2019; Shatanawi 2012a, 2012b and 2019; Tropenmuseum and Shatanawi 2014; Vernoit 2020 and Yamanaka 2018.

4 International Organization for Migration, *World Migration Report 2020* (Geneva: International Organization for Migration, 2019), 79–81, https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/wmr_2020.pdf.

5 B. Bryan Barber, *Japan's Relations with Muslim Asia* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 41–42.

offers temporary exhibitions and other public outreach programmes related to the Islamic world.

This paper applies the concept of ‘framing’, which Grinell employs to analyse representations of Islam in European museums,⁶ and examines the various levels in which Islam is ‘framed’ at Minpaku. The paper presents the different museological frameworks, methods and tools that are chosen to collect, organise, and present the material culture of Islam at Minpaku, with the aim of enabling a comparative perspective in studies being conducted in Europe, and highlighting how a non-monotheistic attitude towards religion might be influencing the representation of religions in a museum in Japan.⁷

2 Material Culture of Islam on Display at Minpaku

2.1 The outer frame: an ethnological museum

On the broadest level of framing, Minpaku is an ethnological museum, or a museum of world cultures, to use a more current term now being adopted in European museums. Although its collection includes skilfully made objects and pieces made by contemporary artists, it is not an art museum. The visitor will not encounter ‘masterpieces of Islamic art’ or archaeological artefacts,⁸ but rather objects that represent people’s daily lives. The museum is at the same time an Inter-University Research Institute offering doctoral courses, consisting of about 60 faculty members specialising in cultural anthropology and related fields. In the sense that our exhibitions closely reflect our research and fieldwork, the institution’s structure is very similar to the musée-laboratoire concept of the Musée de l’Homme in Paris.

The conception of the founding of a national ethnological museum was linked to the preparations for Expo ’70, the universal exposition which took place in Osaka in 1970. The National Museum of Ethnology as an institution was founded in 1974, and the museum built inside the former Expo ’70 grounds (which is

6 Klas Grinell, “Framing Islam at the World of Islam Festival,” *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 7, no. 1 (1976): 73–76 and Klas Grinell, “Muhammad at the Museum: Or, Why the Prophet Is not Present,” *Religions* 10, no. 12 (2019): 665.

7 A Swedish Research Council funded project ‘Museological Framings of Islam in Europe’, coordinated by Klas Grinell of Gothenburg University, is surveying and analysing different ways in which European museums are displaying Islam and Muslims (Klas Grinell et al., “Museological Framings of Islam in Europe,” *Material Religion* 15, no. 3 (2019)).

8 The following museums in Japan house Pre-Islamic and Islamic art collections: Okayama Orient Museum in Okayama city <http://www.orientmuseum.jp/>, MIHO MUSEUM in Shiga Prefecture, <http://www.miho.or.jp/>, and the Middle Eastern Culture Center in Japan <http://www.meccj.or.jp/museum/> (visit by reservation only).

now the Expo '70 Commemoration Park in Suita city, north of downtown Osaka) opened to the public in 1977.⁹

At the time of its founding, the museum inherited ethnological collections previously owned by the former Ministry of Education Archive as well as part of the collection of the anthropology department of the University of Tokyo. These older collections included objects which were gathered in the context of Japan's colonial expansion into Asia and the Pacific, as well as Ainu objects. Thus, the collection is not completely without link to a colonialist past, but it is perhaps linked to a lesser degree than in the case of European ethnological museums founded in the 19th century. The late Tadao Umesao, the driving force behind the establishment of Minpaku and its first Director-General, emphasised the fact that "our ethnology is not an ethnology rooted in colonialist rule. It is rather coupled with Japan's post-war economic and political expansion into the world since the 60s."¹⁰ The bulk of the acquisitions are what Umesao endearingly called "*garakuta*" (junk), commonplace objects representing people's lives and cultures, which have been collected continuously since the 1970s. Currently, the museum holds around 345,000 objects from around the world, and, with a total floor space of 51,225 m², is one of the largest ethnological museums in the world.

2.2 The frame within the frame: West Asia, not Middle East

The main exhibition hall consists of twelve regional galleries – Oceania, Americas, Europe, Africa, West Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, Central and North Asia, and East Asia (subdivided into Culture of the Korean Peninsula, Regional Cultures of China, Culture of Japan, and Ainu Culture galleries) – and two transcultural thematic galleries on Music and Languages.

In terms of 'framing', an important factor that must be pointed out is that 'West Asia' is used as the regional label and not 'Middle East', even though the region is more commonly referred to as the 'Middle East' in Japanese media, and the two major academic societies dealing with the area are called the Japan Association for Middle East Studies (Nihon Chūtō Gakkai) and The Society for Near Eastern Studies in Japan (Nihon Oriento Gakkai).

The label of 'West Asia' reflects the clear geopolitical stance of the founders of Minpaku, who stressed that it was a museum situated in Japan. The region called

9 For a brief history of Minpaku in English, see: <https://www.minpaku.ac.jp/english/aboutus/history>.

10 Tadao Umesao, *Kokuritu Minzokugaku Hakubutsukan no Jūnen* (Suita: National Museum of Ethnology, 1984), 47.

the 'Middle East' or the 'Orient' from the European perspective is, from the Japanese standpoint, actually in the western part of the Eurasian continent. By making visitors aware of this simple and obvious, but neglected fact, they strived to present a different anthropological paradigm that would relativise Eurocentric scholarly trajectories.

2.3 Interconnecting the geographical frames: Islam around the world

The 'West Asia' gallery consists of four sections which highlight religious practices, nomadic life, women's dress, performing arts, and cultural contacts with Japan. The 'Religion' section of the gallery displays objects associated with Islam, covering the basics, such as the Qur'an, the *qibla* compass, prayer rugs, prayer beads, amulets, and women's clothing. A distinctive piece which stands out is the *kiswah*, a large black cloth with gold and silver embroidering of Qur'anic verses, that actually covered the Kaaba in Mecca in 1386 A. H. (1966–67) and was brought to Japan to be displayed in the Saudi Arabia pavilion during Expo '70, and then gifted afterwards to be used for educational purposes.

Near the *kiswah*, one finds a unique feature of this section: a set of hanging scrolls that were collected in China, with Qur'anic verses in Arabic script but adapted to a Chinese style of calligraphy.¹¹ The juxtaposition of these scrolls with the *kiswah* is intended to show that while the Arabic Qur'an, praying towards Mecca, and pilgrimage are common factors shared by Muslims all over the world, the religion has taken on local forms wherever it has taken root.

The 'West Asia' gallery is not the only gallery in Minpaku which displays material culture of Islam. Africa, South Asia, parts of China, Central Asia and Southeast Asia are regions in which Muslim presence has had a historical, cultural, and social significance. In more recent decades, Muslim migrant populations have also been growing in Europe and North America. Since a major renovation of the main exhibition hall, carried out between 2007–2017, nine out of the twelve regional galleries also display objects used by Muslims, alongside objects related to other religions prevalent in each region.

For example, the 'Prayer' section in the 'Africa' gallery displays a wooden board from Cameroon, used to practise Arabic writing, and a glass painting from Senegal, depicting a Qur'an school. These objects illustrate this region's distinctive forms of traditional Islamic education. In the 'Europe' gallery and the 'Americas'

11 The galleries can be visited virtually. <http://test-minpaku.com/panorama/honkan2018/panorama.html>.

gallery, one can find objects that reflect how Muslim immigrants are integrated into a non-Muslim majority society, such as textbooks and guides to everyday life for immigrants in Persian and other languages, or a calendar combining the Hijri (Islamic lunar calendar) and Western dates. The ‘Religion – Tradition and Diversity’ section of the ‘South Asia’ gallery includes a wooden door from a mosque in Gujarat, as well as protective charms for Muslims, depicting the Kaaba and the Mosque of the Prophet. These present a contrast to the various images of Hindu gods. In the ‘Southeast Asia’ gallery, we see a great variety of *hijab*, which are not only proper clothing for devout women, but are enjoyed as fashion items. The ‘Central Asia’ gallery includes exhibits of carpets, ceramics, woodwork, and miniature paintings, all with exquisite designs showing the influence of Persianate culture, and a revival of traditions that were suppressed during Soviet rule. Clothing related to Muslim rites of passage are also displayed. In the ‘Religion and Writing’ section of the ‘Regional Cultures of China’ gallery, there is a hanging scroll with a saying attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, in Arabic script, stating “Patriotism is part of religious faith”. This artefact reflects the situation of Muslims living under the Chinese Communist Party’s religious policy. Finally, in the ‘Culture of Japan’ gallery, the ‘Multiethnic Japan’ section features objects representing various migrant communities, including clothing Muslims wear when they attend religious occasions, and learning material for Muslim children.

There was no deliberate or coordinated strategy to include Islam in all these galleries, but rather it was an unanticipated consequence of the 2007–2017 renovation that enabled various manifestations of Islam as a world religion to be shown in different local contexts. During the renewal process, each gallery was curated by a team of researchers specialising in the region or theme. Since each project team was to work autonomously on the selection of materials and the construction of the narrative for each gallery, basic guidelines and key concepts were set out in the ‘Basic Exhibition Concept 2007’ at the outset of the renovation in order to maintain coherence in the design of the museum as a whole.¹² This blueprint contained core concepts such as ‘the museum as a forum’, ‘glocalisation’, ‘universal design’, ‘cultural revival of indigenous peoples’, and ‘contact with Japan’.

Indeed, through the Islam-related objects in the galleries, one can observe the dynamics of glocalisation, the interplay of cultural homogeneity and heteroge-

12 Sudo, 2017 reflects on the transformation in exhibition style before and after the renovation: Ken’ichi Sudo, “Honkan tenji no shinkōchiku to sono kokoro: yonjūnen buri no kaihen wo oete,” *Bulletin of the National Museum of Ethnology* 41, no. 4 (2017). See also Yamanaka 2017 for the multilingualization process: Yuriko Yamanaka, “Multilingualization of Displays at Minpaku,” *Minpaku Anthropology Newsletter* 45 (December 2017).

neity.¹³ Not only can one note, for example, all the local varieties of amulets with Qur'anic verses, we can also explore the complexities of the global market for products catering to Muslims: a prayer rug used by Muslims in Japan may be manufactured in China, or *halal* instant ramen noodles sold in an Asian food shop in Europe may actually be a Japanese product.

2.4 Take-home material: worksheets and guidebook

For the average Japanese visitor, it may not be easy to grasp the thread that interconnects the objects mentioned above. The Islam-related displays are dispersed through different galleries, and sometimes hidden to the uninitiated eye. An alternative narrative to the regional categorisation was needed to explicitly point out the links.

One medium which Minpaku devised was a worksheet for school children. 'Let's explore Minpaku! Islam edition' (*Minpaku wo tanken shiyō! Isurāmu hen*) is a worksheet for students, with a map of the galleries in the main exhibition hall, showing where objects related to Islam can be found (Fig. 1). The objects are categorised into four main themes, 'prayer', 'education', 'clothing', and 'food', with each theme denoted by an icon, so that the students can compare and contrast items according to category. These worksheets are distributed free of charge to school groups that visit the museum (they can also be downloaded) to guide the students on a 'treasure hunt' to discover these objects. The students answer simple questions or take notes along the way. There is also an accompanying booklet for teachers with more detailed background explanations, as well as a suggested bibliography, so that the teachers can continue the exploration later in classroom discussions.

Another piece of take-home material is the *National Museum of Ethnology Exhibition Guide*, which is the official 230-page guidebook of Minpaku sold at the museum shop. The Japanese edition was published in 2017, and the English edition came out in 2018. The first part of this book is a gallery-by-gallery guide explaining the environmental and historical background of each region, and highlighting the characteristics of its material culture. The second part consists of fourteen essays on seven cross-cultural themes: 'Clothing', 'Food', 'Housing', 'Livelihoods', 'Recreation', 'Rites of Passage', and 'Religion'. These essays invite the visitors to see the exhibits in a transregional framework, such as 'Portable and Mobile

13 For the origin and application of the term 'glocalisation', see Min Han and Nelson Graburn, ed., *Tourism and Glocalization: Perspectives on East Asian Societies*, *Senri Ethnological Studies* 76 (Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology and Han/Graburn 2010), 12.


祈り (いのり)

めがね、西アジアのモスクのアラビア語にある部
布で、ムスリムにとってとても大切な装飾です。

HO2000000 緑茶番号
E003 | 電子ガイド番号

1 (西アジア展示場) キスフ

K006982 E027



キスフとよばれるこの美しい頭巾は、
なにかにうたがめものモチーフ?


2 ？あてはまることばを入れよう!

にある 神聖をおうためのもの

アラビア文字がしめしめられているよ。
毎年取り替えられているんだって。

2 (西アジア展示場) ムスリム腕時計


E028



みてみて! メガネの方向をみて、時計の
情報を知らる腕時計が一体に
なれたものもあるよ!


3 (西アジア展示場) コーラン

H0227156 E027



なめて? (アフリカ展示場) コーラン

H0227156




(西アジア展示場) 教範

H0100215 E027

5 (アメリカ展示場) カレンダー

H0268834




異文化用のカレンダーは、日本の際
限や1日5日の月の特徴が
わかるようになっています。

6 (南アジア展示場) 運転席のお守り

(カフアン神像と預言者モスク)


H0200684



この小さな飾物はムスリム
が祈りするための尊厳。
モスクをたどったものだ。
ムスリムの祈りや、
神さまの像はなほ。

7 (中国地域文化展示場) アラビア文字書道作品

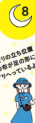
H0268169



この飾り軸は、アラビア文
字の書道だよ。アラビア
文字の書道は、神聖と
とされるコーランを美しく
書くという祈り上の目的か
ら発達したよ。

8 (中央・北アジア展示場) 礼拝用敷物


H0189102



祈りのための敷物
の準備が完了!
準備が完了!

9 (日本の文化展示場) 礼拝用マットと方位磁石

H0275134, H0275135




教育

ムスリムの子どもはイスラームについてのど
よに学んでいるのでしょうか。

1 (アフリカ展示場) ガラス絵

「コーラン学校」


H0222910



みてみて! これは、ガラスに描かれた絵だよ。
本がムスリムの子どもが描いて
いる絵子が描かれている。いつも
ムスリムが描いている絵や、つかっ
ている飾物、アートなどはこの場かな?


2 (アフリカ展示場) 文房具

H0227069



3 (西アジア展示場) 子どものイスラーム歴史本

H0144131

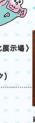


日本に住むムスリムの子ども
がつくった絵だよ。

4 (日本の文化展示場) 貼り紙

(行儀モスク)

H0274970




貼り紙をとおして
アラビア文字を学
んでいるだね。

身だしなみ

ムスリムの女性は、顔と手以外の露出以外の
男性に隠れてはいけないと考える人も多いよ。

1 (西アジア展示場) アフガニスタンのムスリム女性服

H0263321, H0253758 E028



西アジア展示場にあるムスリム女性の装束
をよく見てみよう!

どのような特徴がありますか?

答え

2 (東南アジア展示場) ペール

E028

1 共通していること (それぞれ地域の特徴)


2 国や地域の名前

3 ものの名前

4 特徴


3 (中央・北アジア展示場) 女性用頭被い


H0106922 E028



4 (日本の文化展示場) 男性用衣装


H0270139, H0275141





4 (中国地域文化展示場) ムスリム食品表示プレート

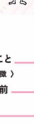
H0268181



ここにも、ムスリムが食べてもいい
食品を示すプレートが貼られています!

5 (南アジア展示場) ハラル認証マーク

E028



このマークはハララムマークといって、
ムスリムが口にしない、飲まない、
触れないと認められた商品につけられるよ。
実際にどのような食品がハララムの食品
として決められているかな。


1 展示場で探してみよう!

2 国や地域の名前

3 ものの名前

6 (日本の文化展示場) 女性用頭被い

H0106922 E028



これは、日本人が
お祈りのときに
履くんだよ。

日本でもよく見る女性用
ハラルマークをつけて
お祈りしているよ。


色々なヘッドカバー

飲食

ムスリムは、口にしているものだけではない
ものの色にも気を付けているよ。

7 (南アジア展示場) ハラル認証マーク

E028



このマークはハララムマークといって、
ムスリムが口にしない、飲まない、
触れないと認められた商品につけられるよ。
実際にどのような食品がハララムの食品
として決められているかな。


1 展示場で探してみよう!

2 国や地域の名前

3 ものの名前

8 (日本の文化展示場) 女性用頭被い

H0106922 E028



これは、日本人が
お祈りのときに
履くんだよ。

日本でもよく見る女性用
ハラルマークをつけて
お祈りしているよ。

色々なヘッドカバー

Figure 1: "Let's explore Minpaku! Islam edition" worksheet. © National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka.

Dwellings’, or ‘Why do People Dance?’ For the theme of religion, I contributed the essay on ‘Islam Around the World’, in which I pointed out the regional variation in the Islam-related items in the different galleries as mentioned above.¹⁴

3 The Mobile Frame: Rental Learning Kit ‘Min-Pack’

Finally, I would like to call attention to how this frame is exported outside of the museum in the form of a learning kit, the ‘Min-Pack’. This museum-in-a-suitcase outreach programme was developed two decades ago when the ‘integrated studies’ concept was introduced into the public-school curriculum. Teachers had to devise activities to engage students in civic studies in a proactive, creative, and cooperative manner, to promote a deeper understanding of foreign cultures, ecology, and social welfare. Consequently, the demand from schools for object loans increased. For conservation reasons, however, artefacts from the collection could not be used too freely outside the museum. As a solution, everyday items, such as new garments and musical instruments, were collected from around the world, and packed into separate themed suitcases, together with explanations about the people who use the objects and their cultural background, and information cards for each item in the pack.

School teachers (as well as teaching staff of universities and other educational institutions) can reserve a pack, to be shipped to them through a commercial delivery service. The school only needs to pay the parcel delivery costs and there are no extra rental fees. Unlike most museum displays, the Min-Pack offers a hands-on, multi-sensory experience, and can also reach schools in areas remote from Osaka that do not have access to the museum. After each use, the pack is checked for damaged or missing contents, the clothing dry-cleaned, and, if necessary, pieces are repaired or replaced. A member of staff is exclusively responsible for the daily Min-Pack operation.

Two of the earlier packs that went into circulation with Islam-related themes were ‘Islam and the Arab World’ (2002, revised in 2012) and ‘The World of the Arabian Nights’ (2006).¹⁵ The former pack contained clothing, prayer beads and other objects mainly collected in Saudi Arabia (with some later additions from Lebanon);

14 Yuriko Yamanaka, “Islam around the World,” in *National Museum of Ethnology Exhibition Guide*, ed. Yuriko Yamanaka et al. (Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology, 2018).

15 The contents of each pack can be seen on the following websites: “Islam and the Arab World,” Minpaku, 2012, <https://www.minpaku.ac.jp/research/sc/teacher/minpack/arab/index> and “The World of the Arabian Nights,” Minpaku, 2006, <https://www.minpaku.ac.jp/research/sc/teacher/minpack/arabiannights/index>.

the latter pack aimed to familiarise students with Arab history, literature, and the Arabic script, through spices, picture books, and writing tools collected in Egypt, Lebanon, and France.

3.1 Conception of the ‘Muslims around the World’ packs

The above two packs were in constant high demand over the years. There was, however, a concern that they could be fostering the ‘Islam = Arabs’ stereotype, whereas the diverse material culture of the non-Arab Muslims of the world had become more visible in the regional galleries of the museum after its renovation. The idea came to me that similar objects representing this diversity could be collected and framed as a Min-Pack, so that students could compare the objects from different countries side by side in the classroom.

In 2016, I launched a two-year project involving fifteen researchers and doctoral students, who worked on various regions around the globe.¹⁶ The first year was dedicated to collecting the objects. In the second year, we deliberated on how to fit everything into a coherent and comprehensible learning scheme, and into the limited space of a suitcase.

Colleagues and students in the project team were asked to purchase objects reflecting the faith of Muslims during their research missions in Japan, China, Malaysia, Indonesia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, India, Iran, Germany, England, and Senegal.

3.2 Cooperation from Muslim communities

Merchandise commonly available in local shops, such as books, fashion magazines and *halal* products were bought, but the acquisition process also provided an opportunity for various forms of collaboration with local religious communities. Some of the project members had ties to source communities in their field research and were able to acquire items that were less readily available in shops. For example, alms envelopes and incense used in mosques in Xi’an, China, or school uniforms for Muslim girls in Indonesia were obtained through the cooperation of local friends and family. Some of the items were purchased at shops catering to Muslim communities. For example, the educational material and children’s games for German Muslims with migrant backgrounds were bought in the

16 The project members were: Hatsuki Aishima, Tōko Fujimoto, Shōta Fukuoka, Hiroyuki Imamura, Takafumi Imanaka, Kenji Kuroda, Minoru Mio, Teiko Mishima, Toshihiro Nobuta, Akiko Sugase, Hirofumi Teramura, Atsuko Tsubakihara, Hiroko Yokoyama, Noboru Yoshioka, and Yuriko Yamanaka.

bookshop run by DITIB (*Diyanet İşleri Türk-İslam Birliği* [Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs]), which is associated with the Cologne Central Mosque.

Other items were obtained at our request by local collaborators, and subsequently shipped to us. One such item was a wooden tablet from Senegal, used to practise writing Qur'anic verses, which even came with a bucket full of murky water that turned out to be the ink that had been washed off the tablet. Because it had been used in practising writing sacred verses, the inky water was also considered sacred, and the informant thought it important to include it in the package. Unfortunately, some of the water had leaked during transport and could not be included in the final Min-Pack.

When the educational purpose of the project was explained, the Japanese Muslim community was also very happy to cooperate, and even graciously donated material such as clothing they wear to prayer at the mosque, community newsletters and other material for religious education. These were particularly useful because the information written on them was already in Japanese.

3.3 Designing, editing

Thanks to the enthusiastic acquisition work of colleagues, as well as the generous donations, after a year we had collected a very rich variety of material. In fact, we had accumulated more than would fit into a suitcase. Unlike a museum display, the objects in the Min-Pack are not fixed in a specific physical setting. Once they are unpacked in a classroom, chaos could reign unless handling guidelines are suggested for the teachers, though any such guidelines should nonetheless allow a certain amount of freedom for the users to be creative. It was crucial to thoroughly discuss what to include, how to organise and label the items, what cultural information to provide, and how much instruction to give. The idea of the Min-Pack is to give the basic building blocks, but what to build in the classroom is up to the users. Our goal was not to present an overly detailed scenario or a step-by-step manual, but rather to provide just enough hints and information so that the users could stage their own lessons, workshops, dialogues, or games. These could be adapted to the age of the students, size and structure of the class (individual investigation or group activity), and background knowledge on the part of both the students and the teachers.

After discussions with the project team members, and trial runs with the cooperation of the Minpaku Museum Partners (a volunteer museum support group), we decided to make two packs, each with a slightly different theme, plus a dupli-



Figure 2a: "Muslims around the World-1: Daily Prayers" Min-Pack. © National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka.



Figure 2b: "Muslims around the World-2: Contemporary Life" Min-Pack. © National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka.

cate of each to act as a spare in case of high demand; thus, a total of four packs. The two themes were 'Muslims around the World-1: Daily Prayers' and 'Muslims around the World-2: Contemporary Life'.¹⁷ (Fig. 2a, 2b)

The first pack, focusing on 'Daily Prayers', contains the Qur'an, prayer mats, prayer beads, clothing, amulets, tools for ablution and other religious practices, Islamic calendars and posters, and materials used in religious education from the twelve non-Arab countries mentioned at the end of section 3.1. The intention for this pack was to show that Muslims around the world share certain common practices (ablution, prayer, pilgrimage, Arabic script, veiling of women, giving alms), but that objects fulfilling essentially the same religious function can vary in material and form, according to region.

The second pack, 'Contemporary Life', aims to instil awareness of the fact that the context of the contemporary world is shared by Muslims and non-Muslims everywhere. The object of this pack, in other words, is to foster a sense of familiarity with Muslims as contemporaries. Among other things, the pack contains items which are made by or used by Muslims living in or visiting Japan: Arabic-Japanese Qur'an, booklets published by major mosques and Islamic cultural centres informing non-Muslims about Islam in Japanese, pamphlets and guide maps in English for Muslim visitors to Japan. Other objects in this pack – such as the fashion magazines with the latest style of wearing the hijab, religious pop music CDs, or a manga-style graphic novel about a teenage Indonesian Muslim girl who decides to express her identity by wearing the veil – imply that Muslim youth in different countries may have interests and concerns that are very relatable to youth in Japan. The pack also contains items which illustrate the global flow of products catering to Muslims, such as various *halal* food packages or Uniqlo hijabs designed by a Japanese Muslim designer. Games and toys (some of them in English or in both English and Arabic) are included that reflect how migrant or convert Muslim children in non-Muslim majority societies learn about Islam, as well as children's books for readers of all faiths which inspire tolerance and coexistence.

As already mentioned, when the pack is unpacked, the objects are like scattered building blocks. The users themselves must find an order or meaning to them. There are two basic ways to categorise the items: one could group the objects according to geographical region, or according to function and form. We tried

17 'Muslims around the World-1: Daily Prayers': <https://www.minpaku.ac.jp/research/sc/teacher/minpack/muslim1/index>

'Muslims around the World-2: Contemporary Life': <https://www.minpaku.ac.jp/research/sc/teacher/minpack/muslim2/index>.

to indicate these baselines with a set of concise explanatory texts on the history of Islam in each region, and another set of topic essays on certain practices and concepts such as ‘pilgrimage’, ‘halal industry’, ‘popular culture’, etc. Each object is also accompanied by an ‘object information card’ (*Mono jōhō kādo*) with a country flag to mark its provenance, as well as several lines of description, and a message from the researcher who collected it. We also included an album of field photos in the pack.

Finding a strategy for labelling and packing all the objects, so that the users could instinctively unpack and repack them without breaking or losing parts of the content, was a challenge as the packs were becoming so dense. A professional display designer, Mariko Ue, who designed the first generation of Min-Packs, was involved at this point to solve this conundrum. She used labels with codes corresponding to each object, which, along with the use of small nets, managed to bring order to the packaging. Special attention is paid to how the Qur’an is packed. In a previous incident reported by a teacher, a Muslim girl had become very upset that her non-Muslim classmates were treating the Qur’an very casually. Since then, we have placed the Qur’an in a box together with white gloves to signal that it should be handled with respect.

3.4 User experience

There have been so many different creative ways that the Min-Pack has been utilised in classroom settings; the topic of user experience could be the subject of a paper in itself. Here are a few examples that are reported on the museum website:¹⁸

<https://www.minpaku.ac.jp/research/sc/teacher/minpack/case/senri03>: This is an example of a school renting the ‘Islam and the Arab World’ pack. The school invited a student from Jordan to give a lecture on culture and life in her own country. The Jordanian student talked about differences in food, beliefs, clothing, and language using objects in the pack.

<https://www.minpaku.ac.jp/research/sc/teacher/minpack/case/kokagakuen>: These are examples of a geography class of 12 to 13-year-olds, and a world history class of 15 to 16-year-olds, using the ‘Muslims around the World-2: Contemporary Life’ pack to enhance what they had previously studied. Students first observed the objects, and tried things on, before reading the explanations. The

18 The reports are only in Japanese, but there are photos. Those interested can use the auto-translation function of their browser to get a rough idea.

curious first encounter with an unfamiliar culture, eventually turned into recognition of similarities with their own lives.

<https://www.minpaku.ac.jp/research/sc/teacher/minpack/case/kindai>: In this example, the lecturer himself was a specialist in Islamic material culture. He used the 'Muslims around the World-2: Contemporary Life' pack during his first and second classes of a 15-week university term on 'Cultural History of the Orient' as a way to capture students' interest. Each student chose their favourite object in the first week, researched it, and reported on it to the class in the second week.

Thus, the Min-Pack is a mobile and versatile framework which provides the user with physical, sensory and intellectual contact with objects. It creates a stimulating opportunity for a multilateral learning process through which students (and teachers) can gain an appreciation of the diversity of the material culture of Islam, as well as a sense of familiarity with Muslims as contemporaries.

4 Conclusion

We have seen how Minpaku provides various frames, inside and outside of the museum, for encountering Islam through material culture.¹⁹ In comparing this with Islam-related displays and activities in European museums, one must keep in mind the difference in social backdrop. Most Japanese have little daily contact with Muslims, and coexistence with Muslim communities has not yet become an urgent socio-political agenda for educators and policymakers. Islam is still a remote and abstract concept to most Japanese, whose main source of information on the topic is what they read or see in the media. The Japanese attitude towards religion in general is also very different to that of people who adhere to monotheistic faiths.²⁰ Except on ceremonial occasions such as funerals, people are usually less conscious of their own religious beliefs or denomination. Perhaps it is precisely because Japanese society is more distanced from Islam, that a pluralistic presentation of the heterogeneity of its material culture, as described

19 At Minpaku, there are also temporary frameworks, such as special exhibitions and thematic exhibitions, some of which have dealt with the subject of Islam. In this paper, however, I have only mentioned exhibits and contents offered on a permanent basis.

20 For the latest survey on the Japanese attitude towards religion, conducted by the NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute from October to November 2018, see Toshiyuki Kobayashi, "How Have Japanese Attitudes and Behavior on Religion Changed? From the ISSP Survey on Religion: Survey Results in Japan," *NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute Japan Broadcasting Corporation*, April 1, 2019, https://www.nhk.or.jp/bunken/research/yoron/pdf/20190401_7.pdf.

above, is possible. Muslim communities residing in Japan are themselves very heterogeneous, and no group claims more authority than another.

With the revised Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act, which came into effect in April 2019, the Muslim population in Japan is projected to rise in the immigrant workforce as well as in schools. This will make the role of the museum even more vital, in raising awareness of stereotypes and prejudices about Islam, promoting greater recognition of Islam's diversity of regional cultures and sectarian differences, and fostering a better understanding of its importance in global history and the economy.

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