Challenge to the West?
Awakening of the Muslim Immigrants in the Western Europe

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Summary

Today, Europe is not a continent for the native Europeans. Since the late 1960’s, most of the western European countries have recruited the immigrant workers from the surrounding Mediterranean countries. Among them, from Turkey, Tunisia, and Morocco, the Muslims emigrated to Germany, Netherlands, France, Sweden, Austria and Belgium. In the United Kingdom, many Muslim population immigrated from the former British colonies in South Asia, like Pakistan and Bangladesh. After the first Oil Crisis in 1973, most of the European countries suspended further recruitment of immigrant workers, however, the Muslim population in these countries have increased because of additional immigration which is allowed as a sort of human rights, family re-unification. Consequently, in several European countries, now Islam is the second religion and the Muslims are the second largest religious groups next to the Catholics or the Protestants.

During the first decade of immigration, the Muslim immigrants had little motivation for religious activities, they just earned money, saved, and sent it to their families in the mother countries. Since they have settled with their families in the mid 1970’s, Islam has revitalized as the norm and value of their life, for they were afraid that infiltration of the European life style and behavior into the Muslim youth seriously damage the unity of family which is the most precious value for the Muslim. In addition, racial, ethnic and cultural discrimination also accelerate to build a wall between host and immigrant society. Thus, Islam became the strongest ties of the Muslim immigrants, and it built stronger and broader networks among immigrants than ethnic ties.

After the immigrants experienced awakening as Muslims, their attitude toward the European society became more selective. In general, they do not hesitate to learn advanced technology, in fact, some Islamic organizations provide computer and classes for the Muslim children as well as the Qur’an courses. On the other hand, they deny to accept some religiously unsuitable phenomenon such as tolerance for alcoholics, narcotics, and homosexuals, and often claim education authorities to keep away their children from sex education and swimming class. These
attitudes are common among the Muslims in west European societies, and are regarded as objections against Western civilization of which progress was realized parallel to secularisation.

In the phase of social integration to receiving countries, the Muslim immigrants’ objections are focused in the principles of nation-states, in particular, definition of nation and membership of a state. In the case of Germany, self-definition of the nation is based upon *jus sanguinis*, and it implies denial of immigrant country. For this reason, even though Germans are living together with more than seven million immigrants from outside Germany, the Muslim immigrants without German nationality are still *Ausländer* (aliens), and their claims and objections are often neglected because their legal status is not recognised as full membership of the Federal Republic.

On the contrary, in France, the permanent residents those who accepted ideologies and principles of the Republic of France have rights to be French, and nationality is basically granted by *jus soli*. In other words, the immigrants’ ethnicity itself is not a controversial issue, for membership as French citizen is based upon a contract with the Republic. But, if the Muslim immigrants deny unsuitable rules which derived from basic principles of the Republic, they inevitably confront severe criticism. Veiling issue of the Muslim girls in public schools was a case which caused public censure because it violated the state principle of secularism (*laïcité*), democracy and human rights.

It is true that an immigrant receiving country which adopt multicultural policies can accommodate the Muslims avoiding friction. In fact, the Netherlands’ pillarization (*verzuiling*) is a model which could ease tension between host and immigrant society. Establishing a cultural pillar of the Muslims is a minority right, and is secured by the Dutch government, for it contributes to develop equal relationship with other pillars such as Catholics, Protestants, and the Liberals. The Muslims in the Netherlands also show remarkable awakening in their faith, notwithstanding tolerant attitude to the Islamic pillar in the Dutch society. Their awakening occurred not to counteract against xenophobia or denial of their membership, but to defend their family and community from undesirable phenomenon which are resulted by liberalism and secularism.

Every country in western Europe has transformed to multi-cultural society with the Islamic norm, and value system. Nevertheless self-definition of each European state did not assume coexistence with the Muslims, mutual understanding between Islam and the West is one of the urgent political agenda. For developing dialogue with the Muslims, two major prerequisites are
needed. Firstly, change in national self-definition of state in accordance with the Muslims’ norms should be discussed.

Secondly, Eurocentric attitude to the Muslims should be reconsidered, and a new paradigm for coexistence should be constructed based upon multi-cultural and multi-civilizational status quo. In this respect, it should be noted that mass media has paramount importance and is double edged sword which can cause both catastrophic and peaceful relations. Dialogue of civilizations can not develop from relationship between teacher and student, between doctor and patient, and between missionary and indigenous people. Through reconsideration of Eurocentricism, the West will find an answer to the question why the Muslim immigrants awakened in the ‘progressive’ and ‘advanced’ European societies.