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INDONESIAN MUSLIM WOMEN WORKERS IN CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE WORKPLACES

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Abstract: This article examines the experiences of Indonesian Muslim Women working in contemporary Japanese workplaces, focused on how their religious identity is constrained within gendered and migration-based employment structures. Using an intersectionality framework, the study analyzed the intersection of religion, gender, and migration status in the workplace. At the subjective level, the analysis combined a self-concept perspective to explain how the participants interpreted and negotiated their professional and religious identities. Based on in-depth interviews with five Indonesian Muslim Women employed in the academic, hospitality, and sending-organization (組合 *Kumiai)* sectors in Sendai, Gunma, Chiba, and Shiga cities, the findings demonstrated that spirituality practices are economized through continuous negotiation. Decisions regarding hijab use reflected individual agency and self-reflexivity, while the Engineer, Specialist in Humanities, and International Services (技人国ビザ *Gijinkoku Biza)* visa operated as a strategic resource for workplace adaptation. The article emphasizes the importance of considering religion as a critical analytical dimension in labor and migration studies in East Asia.

Keywords: Indonesian Muslim women; Contemporary Japanese Workplaces; intersectionality; self-concept; Japan; migrant workers

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, Japan has undergone a modification in its workplaces, leading to a substantial increase in the number of foreign workers, including those from Muslim-majority countries such as Indonesia. Against this backdrop, the presence of Indonesian Muslim Women in Japanese workforce not only reflects the dynamics of the international labor market but also highlights the intricate interplay of religion, gender, and labor structures within a historically and relatively homogeneous East Asian society. This article examines the experiences of Indonesian Muslim women workers in contemporary Japanese workplaces, focusing on how they maintain and negotiate Islamic identities and practices in environments shaped by secular, masculine, and productivity-oriented norms. Recent demographic trends further indicate that the Muslim presence in Japan is becoming increasingly visible. This condition is reflected by Pratama (2025), who reports that while Muslim migrant workers, especially those from Indonesia, are becoming more visible in Japan's labor market, their religious practices are largely managed through individual adaptation rather than institutional accommodation. This reflecting the persistence of workplace norms that privilege productivity, conformity, and secular professionalism.

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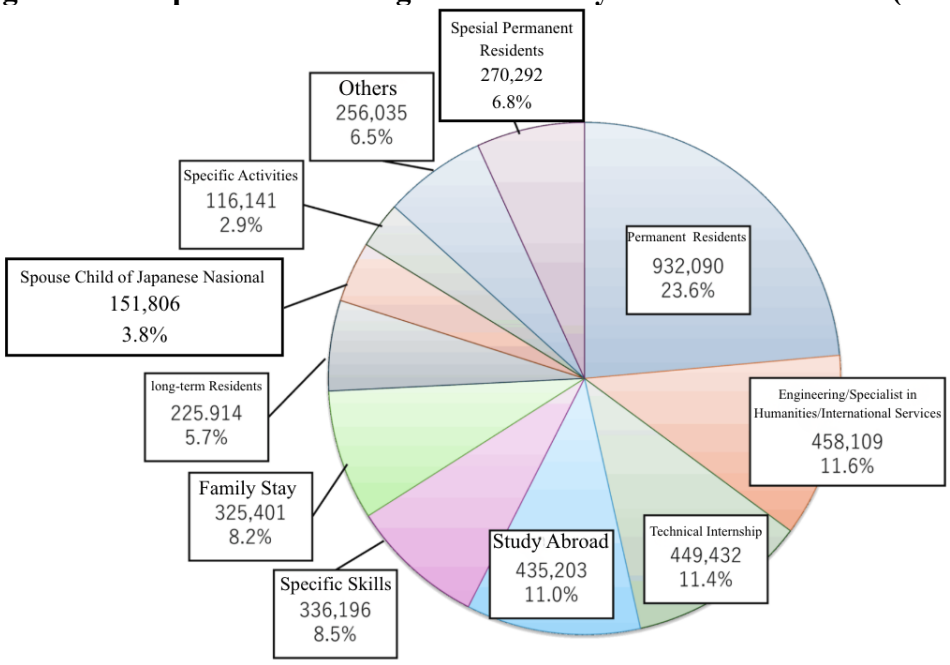
Based on the report *Estimate of Muslim Population in Japan* (2025) compiled by Hirofumi Tanada using official data from the Statistics on Foreign Residents published by the Japan Immigration Services Agency, the Muslim population in Japan in late 2024 and early 2025 is estimated to be around 420.000. This figure includes around 363,000 foreign Muslims and 55,000 Muslims with Japanese nationality, accounting for approximately 0,3% of the total national population (Tanada, 2025). This increase reflects gradual yet consistent demographic changes within contemporary Japanese society. Tanada (2025) explains that the growth of the Muslim population since the 1990s has been driven primarily by an influx of Muslims coming to Japan for employment, study, or research. It has also been driven by a rising number of individuals obtaining medium- and long-term residence statuses, including permanent residency, long-term residence permits, and spousal visas for Japanese nationals. Cross-national marriages, family formation, and the continuity of employment contracts have facilitated the long-term settlement of Muslims in Japan.

In recent years, the number of Indonesian Muslims in Japan has increased notably, in parallel with the expansion of skilled labor migration, technical internship programmes, and professional employment, as well as shifts in Japan's labor policies. While the Muslim population in Japan remains relatively small compared to that of Western countries, the social implications of this growth should not be underestimated, particularly concerning employment. The introduction of the *Specified Skilled Worker* visa in 2019 and the planned revision of the 育成就労 *Ikusei Shuurou* (Technical Intern Training Program) in 2027 signal a significant shift in Japan's approach to the accepting of medium- and long-term foreign workers. However, these policies are formulated based on the assumption of a "culturally and religiously neutral" workforce, resulting in limited explicit accommodation of religious practices, particularly those that are visibly expressed, such as the wearing of the hijab or the need for prayer spaces in the workplace.

Figure 1: Composition of Foreign Residents by Status of Residence (as of June 2025)



Source: Compiled by the author based on the "Publicly Released Data (as of the end of June 2025)" issued by the Immigration Services Agency of Japan (2025a).

Based on residence status, as shown in Figure 1, permanent residents constitute the largest proportion, totaling 932,090 individuals (23.6% of the total). The Engineer, Specialist

in Humanities, and International Services category also represents a significant proportion, with 458,109 individuals (11.6%), reflecting the presence of a professional foreign workforce in the technical, humanities, and international service sectors. There has been a notable increase is observed in the Specified Skilled Worker category, which has grown to 336,196 individuals (8.5%), marking an increase of 51,730 people (18.2%) compared to the previous year. This growth indicates an accelerated transition from the Technical Intern Training Programme to the Specified Skilled Worker scheme, alongside an increase in the recruitment of new workers with this status. Furthermore, foreign workers classified under the 'Engineer, Specialist in Humanities, and international Services' category may obtain permanent residency after five years of employment, provided they have the recommendation of their employer and can demonstrate good conduct, as certified by the local immigration office.

Academic scholarship on Muslims in Japan has largely focused on demographic patterns, social integration, the establishment of mosques, and Japan-Islam relations more broadly. While research on foreign migrant workers has also expanded, yet it predominantly focuses on men in the manufacturing sector or low-wage labor. In contrast, Muslim working women are not able to get particularly skilled or professional migrants from Indonesia and then stay under-examined. These women occupy a complex intersection of gender, religion and nationality. No single social category can adequately explain their work experiences given the intersection of gender, religion, nationality, and employment status. Addressing this gap, this article presents an empirical analysis of how Indonesian Muslim women workers in Japan maintain, negotiate, and adapt their Islamic practices, such as worship, hijab use, and halal consumption, within Japan's gendered contemporary Japanese workplaces. Rather than emphasizing overt discrimination or explicit resistance, the study foregrounds the subtle, pragmatic, and situational strategies of everyday negotiation that enable these women to remain visibly present as both professional workers and religious subjects.

To analyze these dynamics, this study consistently adopts the intersectionality perspective introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) as its primary theoretical framework. This perspective provides a clearer understanding of how religion, gender, and migration status do not operate in isolation, but rather interact to shape the structural positions and working lives of Indonesian Muslim Women workers in Japan. By employing a single, focused theoretical framework, the study avoids analytical fragmentation and provides a coherent interpretation of the relationship.

To capture how these intersectional positions are subjectively experienced and interpreted, the study draws on the concept of the self from the tradition of social psychology. Drawing on George Herbert Mead's (1934) notion of the self as a socially constructed entity formed through social interaction and experience, this concept supports self-awareness. It helps individuals negotiate their professional and religious identities within unequal workplace contexts. Thus, while intersectionality remains the central analytical framework, the concept of the self-bridges the gap between structural inequalities and subjective experience when examining everyday practices of negotiation, as discussed in detail in the following sections.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The concept of intersectionality was first introduced by Crenshaw (1989) to explain how social categories such as gender, race, and class do not operate independently but intersect to produce specific experiences of inequality and exclusion. Within this framework, individuals occupying multiple subordinate positions cannot be adequately understood through a single identity category, as their lived experiences emerge from the interaction of overlapping power structures. In this study, intersectionality serves as the sole theoretical lens for examining the experiences of Indonesian Muslim women workers in Japan, conceptualizing religion (Islam), gender (women), and migration status (foreign workers) as interrelated dimensions. This

approach enables a more nuanced analysis of how these dimensions simultaneously shape participants' social positions in the Japanese workplace, rather than treating them as isolated variables.

Departing from approaches that frame religious merely as a personal identity or private belief, this study conceptualizes Islam as a social category with structural implications in the workplace. Religious practices such as wearing the hijab, performing daily prayers, and consuming halal food extend beyond individual belief systems and intersect with professional norms, institutional policies, and cultural expectations prevalent in Japanese work environments. In societies historically constructed as homogeneous and secular, such practices often become sites of negotiation and are not consistently accommodated within formal workplace structures. From an intersectional perspective, this study rejects singular analytical categories such as "women workers," "Muslim workers," or "migrant workers." Instead, the experiences of Indonesian Muslim women workers are understood as emerging from a distinct intersectional position that differs from those of Japanese women, male Muslim workers, and non-Muslim migrant workers. This position generates specific forms of vulnerability while also shaping strategies of adaptation in response to workplace demands. Moreover, in this study, intersectionality is employed not only to identify structural inequalities but also to capture the forms of agency that emerge within constrained contexts. The work experiences of Indonesian Muslim Women are thus conceptualized as an ongoing process of negotiation, in which individuals navigate structural constraints while sustaining both religious and professional identities. Accordingly, intersectionality functions as the primary analytical framework for linking structural conditions with lived experiences in the empirical analysis presented in the following section.

To examine how intersectional positions are subjectively experienced, this study adopts self-concepts as an analytical lens. Drawing on social psychology within the Traditional of symbolic interactionism, the self is understood as a socially constructed entity that is continuously formed and negotiated through everyday interactions, including those in the workplace. Mead (1934) conceptualizes the self not as an innate attribute but as the outcome of social processes through which individuals come to understand and reflect on themselves from others' perspective. In this regard, the experiences of Indonesian Muslim Women workers illustrate an ongoing process of self-concept formation, in which self-perceptions are shaped by social evolutions, institutional norms and professional expectations embedded in the Japanese work environment.

Although employment structures impose rigid boundaries, this study does not position Muslim Working Women as merely passive subjects. Following Kabeer (1999), agency is defined as the capacity to make choices and to act within existing structural constraints. In this context, Indonesian Muslim Women's agency is manifested through subtle, pragmatic, and situational negotiation practices. Rather than engaging in overt resistance, participants frequently employed adaptive strategies such as adjusting prayer schedules, selecting hijab styles perceived as more professional, or cultivating informal communication with supervisors and colleagues. These practices enable them to maintain Islamic identities without directly confronting dominant workplace norm. consequently, negotiation emerges as a central practice that mediates between structure and agency. Moreover, this framework situates the experiences of Muslim women in Japan within broader regional dynamics in East Asia. By integrating intersectionality as an analytical framework, this study provides a conceptual foundation for the empirical analysis presented in the following section.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative approach, using an in-depth interview-based field study to examine the work experiences of Indonesian Muslim women workers within Japan's

contemporary Japanese workplaces. A qualitative design is selected to enable a nuanced exploration of participants' subjective experiences, everyday practices, and negotiation strategies in response to workplace institutional demands. Rather than measuring variables, this research emphasizes meaning-making, reflection, and strategic action as derived from participants' lived experiences.

The methodological framework is grounded in the perspective of intersectionality as introduced by Crenshaw (1989). This approach is applied to capture how religion (Islam), gender (female), and migration status (foreign worker) intersect and operate simultaneously in shaping participants' work experiences. Accordingly, the interview design seeks to explore this experience holistically within concrete workplace contexts, instead of treating these identities as separate analytical categories. In addition, the study draws on the concept of self from the tradition of social psychology as an analytical tool during the data interpretation stage. Following, Mead (1934), the self is understood as a socially constructed entity formed through interaction and experience. This perspective is used to analyze how participants interpret themselves as both professionals and Muslims, and how social evaluations and institutional norms influence religious practices and identity expression in the workplace. Self-concept is not employed as a primary theoretical framework, but rather as a complementary analytical lens within a broader intersectional approach. By integrating qualitative methods, intersectionality, and self-concept analysis, this research design seeks to bridge the gap between employment structures and the subjective experiences of Indonesian Muslim women workers. This approach enables a sensitive examination of power relations, institutional contexts, and participants' agency in negotiating religious and professional identities in Japanese workplaces.

This research examined several locations in Japan that represent diverse employment sectors and institutional settings, namely Sendai, Gunma, Chiba and Shiga. Sendai city represents academic and campus-based environments, with participants working as postdoctoral researchers. Gunma city is a hub for hospitality and service, particularly hotels serving domestic and international guests. The cities of Chiba and Shiga represent job-based sending organizations (組合 *kumiai)*. In the cases examined in this study, organizations identified locally as *kumiai* primarily function as recruitment facilitators and coordination bodies rather than training supervisors (Conrad & Meyer-Ohle, 2018). Participants working in these institutions typically perform professional roles such as translation and interpretation, coordinating administrative tasks between Japanese firms and overseas partners, recruitment matching, processing documentation, and workplace mediation. These positions generally require advanced Japanese proficiency (JLPT N2–N1 level or higher) and operate under standard employment contracts.

This study involved Indonesian Muslim women who were actively employed in Japan at the time of the research. The researchers used purposive sampling to ensure that participants met the criteria in Japan. Most participants held a 技人国 *gijinkoku* (Engineering/Specialist in Humanities/International Services) visa, which formally classifies them as skilled or professional workers. From an intersectional perspective, the analysis treats visa status not merely as an administrative category but as a structural condition that intersects with gender and religion in shaping employment. The 技人国 *gijinkoku* (Engineering/Specialist in Humanities/International Services) visa plays a central role in participants' working lives. In many cases, this dependency constrains participants' bargaining power to formally request religious accommodations, as the researchers seek to avoid negative evaluations, contract non-renewal, or instability in residency status. The study therefore, conceptualizes work visas as part of an intersectional configuration of workplace power relations, alongside gender norms and expectations religious practice.

The researchers collected primary data through semi-structured, in-depth interviews, which balanced analytical focus with narrative flexibility. The researchers conducted interviews in Indonesia or in English, depending on the participant's preference, lasting 60 to 90 minutes. The interviews explored migration and employment trajectories, religious practices at work, institutional and collegial responses to Islamic attributes, experiences of accommodation and restriction, and everyday negotiation strategies. The researchers analyzed the data using thematic analysis through an iterative coding process. The researchers focused on identifying recurring patterns at the intersection of religion, gender, and migration status in participants' narratives and interpreted them through an intersectional framework. This approach highlights not only structural inequalities but also forms of agency exercised within constrained institution contexts.

This study followed established ethical principles of social research, including informed consent, anonymity, and data confidentiality. The researchers anonymized participant's and institution's identities. Although the study has limitations in terms of sample size and geographical scope, it aims to generate an in-depth, contextualized understanding of the work experiences of Indonesian Muslim Women in Japan rather than to produce statistically generalizable findings.

Table 1. Data Informant

Name	**Age**	**Location**	**Origin**	**Long in Japan**	**Occupation**	**Universities in Indonesia**	**Long working time**
VN	33	Sendai	West Java	8 years	*Research Postdoctoral*	Bandung Institute of Engineering	3 years
AS	33	Sendai	Central Java	7 years	*Research Postdoctoral*	Bandung Institute of Engineering	2 years
EK	32	Shiga	West Java	8 years	*Kumiai*	Universitas Maranata	8 years
IK	34	Gunma	East Java	7 years	Hotel Permanent Employee (*Shain*)	Universitas Maranata	2 years
ML	34	Chiba	West Java	4 years	*Kumiai*	Universitas Padjadjaran	2 years

Source: processed by researcher

Based on Table 1., the study involved five Indonesian Muslim female workers in their early to mid-30s with 4 to 8 years of residence and work experience in Japan. Two participants were employed in academic settings in Sendai as postdoctoral researchers. VN (33) had lived in Japan for 8 years and had 3 years of postdoctoral research experience, while US (33) had resided in Japan for 7 years and had 2 years of postdoctoral researcher. These participants represent knowledge-based professional occupations that offer relative flexibility while maintaining high professional demands.

The remaining three participants worked in non-academic sectors characterized by more structured and routine-based work arrangements. EK (32) was employed by a sending organization (組合 *kumiai*) in Shiga City and had lived and worked in Japan for eight years,

making her the participant with the longest residence. IK (34) worked in the hospitality sector in Gunma City, had lived in Japan for 7 years, and had 2 years of hotel work experience. ML (34) was employed by a sending organization in Chiba City, with 4 years of residence and 2 years of work experience in Japan. According to Japan's Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, sending organizations (組合 *kumiai*) are worker-established associations aimed at improving labor conditions and economic well-being.

This variation location, employment sector, and length of residence enables a comprehensive analysis of how Muslim women's religious practices and negotiation strategies are shaped by different workplace contexts within contemporary Japanese workplaces. All participants held work-based residence statuses, primarily under the Engineer, Specialist in Humanities, and International Services (技人国 *gijinkoku*) visa category, which directly ties their legal residence to employment. From an intersectional perspective, participant characteristics are treated not merely as demographic attributes but as structural factors that interact with gender and religion in shaping work experiences, bargaining power, and strategies for negotiating Islamic practices in the workplace.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that the work experiences of Indonesian Muslim women in Japan cannot be understood by separating religion, gender, and migration status. These dimensions are mutually constitutive and form an intersectional configuration that shapes participants' opportunities, constraints, and negotiation strategies. In this context, religious practice is not merely a private matter but is embedded in work structures, professional norms, and power relations associated with female migrant labor in Japan. Pratama (2025) notes that Indonesian Muslim workers in Japan have experienced a gradual increase in acceptance from Japanese management and coworkers. However, this acceptance remains highly contingent on workplace type and the degree of managerial openness or conservatism. Budianto's (2024) findings, highlights that Indonesian Muslim white-collar workers in the Tokyo Metropolitan area tend to enjoy more positive workplace relations when management provides explicit support for religious needs.

In an academic setting in Sendai city, for instance, postdoctoral researchers generally enjoy greater autonomy in managing their religious practices. Flexible working hours, project-based tasks, and an international institutional culture enable them to perform prayers individually without formal approval. However, this flexibility does not negate intersectional dynamics. As Muslim minority women, participants continue to negotiate the visibility of their Islamic identity particularly the hijab, within professional environments that emphasize academic neutrality and universality. Although the hijab is not formally prohibited, it is often interpreted as a marker of "difference." Positioning Muslim women as symbolically vulnerable to stereotypes and normative expectations.

By contrast, in the hospitality sector in Gunma City, restrictions on religious practice are more explicit and institutionalized. Service standards, mandatory uniforms, and rigid work schedules constrain opportunities to pray on time or to wear the hijab according to personal preference. In some cases, the hijab is permitted only when adjusted to match uniform colors or designs, implicitly framing religious identity as something that must conform to institutional interests. Here, the intersection of gender and religion is particularly salient, as women's bodies become the primary sites of visual regulation and labor discipline. At the same time, migrant status further weakens their bargaining power. Experiences within sending organization or 組合 *kumiai* in Chiba and Shiga cities reveal different but not necessarily more inclusive ones. Although cooperative-based systems foster a sense of collectivity and solidarity, they also

demand uniformity and strict adherence to collective work rhythms. Participants in these settings tend to adopt informal and situational negotiation strategies, such as delaying prayers, selecting tasks that allow greater mobility, or adjusting religious practices to avoid disrupting group workflows. These strategies demonstrate that Muslim women's agency is not always expressed through overt resistance but often through pragmatic adaptation within existing structural constraints.

Religious Practice as Intersectional Negotiation in the Workplace

In the field of migration studies in Japan, intermediary organizations play a significant role in structuring access to employment and mediating employer-employee relations. Rather than functioning solely as supervisory bodies, such intermediaries often facilitate recruitment, coordinate activities and act as communication channels between foreign workers and Japanese firms (Conrad and Meyer-Ohle, 2018, Piper, 2012). In practice, some of these organizations are referred to locally as *Kumiai*, particularly in the context of labor mobility between Japan and Southeast Asia. However, the term does not uniformly indicate a training-based supervisory authority. Instead, intermediary institutions may have varying degrees of organizational influence, ranging from recruitment matching and processing documentation to translation, administrative coordination and workplace mediation (Conrad and Meyer-Ohle, 2018, Piper, 2012). In this study, participants employed at institutions locally identified as Kumiai perform professional roles within standard employment relations, requiring advanced proficiency in Japanese. The broader literature on migration intermediaries clarifies that participants' employment falls within professional labor arrangements rather than trainee-based migration regimes.

Against this institutional backdrop, the study's findings demonstrate that the experience of Indonesian Muslim Women workers in expressing their religious identity in the workplace is profoundly shape by organizational policy and workplace culture, regardless of sector. Religious practices and wearing the hijab are negotiated not only within daily work routines, but also at the recruitment stage. As Garcia-Yeste et al. (2021) suggest, negotiations related to diversity frequently begin formal employment, reflecting the alignment of individual identity with institutional expectations from the outset. In the cases examined here, participants reported assessing organizational flexibility, managerial attitudes and perceiver cultural openness even before accepting job offers. Consequently, religious negotiation cannot be understood solely as individual adaptation within the workplace. Rather, it is embedded within broader institutional logics that shape access, evaluation and long-term professional stability.

> *"I choose a job according to the permission I am allowed to wear a veil. When I was still in the interview process, I once did not take a job because I was not allowed to wear a hijab, I was allowed to wear a hijab when I when home and went to work."*
> *(EK)*

EK explicitly identifies the freedom not to wear the hijab as a key criterion in job selection. She stated that restrictions on wearing the hijab were a direct reason for rejecting a job offer. For EK, the size or prestige of a company is irrelevant; What matters is the ability to wear the hijab in everyday life. This position indicates that EK prioritizes the maintenance of faith over employment considerations, interpreting work as an activity that must align with religious commitment. By consistently maintaining the hijab, EK position working conditions as subordinate to person freedom. Her statement demonstrates that job choice is not determined solely by economic factors or organizational status but is deeply rooted in the self-concept she has constructed as a Muslim woman. Within this framework, the hijab is not treated as a negotiable external attribute but as an integral component of moral identity and faith that shapes

how EK understands herself as a subject. Consequently, work becomes a domain in which personal and religious values function as the primary compass for decision-making.

From an intersectionality perspective, EK's experience illustrates how religious identity gender, and migrant worker status intersect to shape the boundaries of available choices. Restrictions on wearing the hijab during job interviews not only reflect institutional norms of professional appearance but also reveal how ostensibly "neutral" workplace standard marginalize Muslim women's religious expression. EK's decision to reject a job offer regardless of company size demonstrates that labor market power relations do not fully determine individual choices but are negotiated through a value framework grounded in intersectional identity. Moreover, EK's stance indicates that Muslim women's agency is not always expressed through full compliance with institutional demands, but also through the setting of boundaries rooted in religious self-concept. By prioritizing the freedom to wear the hijab in daily life, EK understands work not merely as an economic activity, but as a practice that must remain in harmony with faith. In this context, working conditions are subordinated to the principle of religious freedom, and the decision to maintain the hijab represents a reflective and meaningful form of agency, even within a restrictive work environment with limited structural support.

> *"I was welcome on campus and granted access to a classroom for congregational prayers. Faculty members showed on concern about my veil or fully covering attire. Throughout my stay in Sendai city, I did not experience any discrimination against Muslims.'*
> *(VN)*

In contrast VN's experience in the academic environment of Sendai city demonstrates a more inclusive form of institutional accommodation for religious practice. Support from campus structures and academic authorities enables VN to practice her faith openly without concealing her religious identity. This supportive setting allows VN to actualize her self-concept as a Muslim woman with minimal compromise. Rather than being treated as an identity that must be negotiated or obscured, her religious affiliation is recognized as a legitimate component of campus diversity. Institutional accommodations, such as the provision of classrooms for congregational prayers, enable VN to sustain her religious practices without creating tension between her personal identity and her professional role as an academic.

From an intersectionality perspective, VN's experience illustrates how the intersection of religion, gender, migrant status, and institutional positioning within academia produces configurations of experience that differ from those in other employment sectors. Academic norm that value plurality and freedom of expression create conditions in which Muslim women's identities do not automatically translate into vulnerability. Support from professors and academic authorities function as a structural buffer that reduces the risk of religion- and gender-based discrimination while enhancing VN's agency. This case further demonstrates that experiences of justice or injustice are shaped less by individual identity alone than by the institutional contexts in which that identity is enacted. Where formal recognition and accommodation mechanisms exist, Muslim women are not compelled to rely on individual negotiation or adaptive strategies to sustain their religious practices. Thus, VN's case confirms that intersectionality does not inevitably produce compounded vulnerability; under diversity-sensitive institutional arrangements, it can also generate relatively secure and inclusive professional experiences.

"I feel safe and happy because the hotel and guest don't mind my hijab. And I, as the schedule management of my internships, am very trusted here. But with the note of adjusting the uniform and not excessively"
(IK)

In the hospitality sector, IK reports a relatively safe and supportive environment, albeit one bounded by institutional professional standards. The trust placed in her evidenced by the responsibility to manage fellow interns' schedules coexists with expectations to adjust her appearance in line with the institution's corporate image. IK's experience illustrates how a Muslim women's self-concept can be sustained through conditional adaptation. The hijab remains an acknowledged and uncontested marker of religious identity among both the institution and hotel guests, allowing IK to perform her professional role without concealing her faith. Nevertheless, this acceptance is accompanied by requirements to conform to uniform regulations and aesthetic norms that delineate institutional boundaries for workplace identity expression.

From an intersectional perspective, IK's experience reflects the convergence of religion gender, migrant worker status, and occupational position within the image- and service-oriented structure of the hospitality industry. The institutional trust granted to IK, including managerial responsibilities over intern scheduling, signifies recognition of her professional competence. However, this recognition remains conditional, as religious expression is permitted only insofar as it is not deemed "excessive" or disruptive to institutional representation. This condition underscores that Muslim women's agency in the hospitality sector operates within a negotiated space constrained by professional norms and institutional power relations. This pattern is consistent with Pratama's (2025) findings, which show that acceptance of Muslim workers in Japanese workplaces particularly in service-oriented sectors remains situational and highly dependent on organizational culture and managerial discretion. Pratama emphasizes that even when professional competence is acknowledged, religious expression is often tolerated only within boundaries that align with institutional image and workplace norms.

Overall, these findings demonstrate that the experience of Indonesian Muslim Women workers are not homogeneous but are shaped by the degree of negotiation space afforded by their institutions. Accommodation of religious practices may take the form of full acceptance, conditional acceptance, or restriction from the recruitment stage onward. This variation confirms that Islamic practices in the workplace emerge through contextual negotiation, in which formal regulation, professional norms, and institutional power relations define the limits of religious expression. For Indonesia Muslim women in Japan, religious practice is not merely a private choice, but a negotiated practice embedded in workplace structured by the intersection of religion, gender, and migration status.

Drawing on the framework of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989), practices as prayer, halal food consumption, and wearing the hijab were maintained by all participants VN, AS, EK, and ML though in forms adapted to work rhythms, institutional hierarchies, and professional expectations. In academic setting in Sendai city, VN and AS utilized flexible working hours to perform worship individually. In contrast, in sending organizations (*組合 kumiai*) and the hospitality sector, EK and ML relied more heavily on situational adaptation strategies, such as rescheduling prayer times or identifying permissible space within the workplace. These findings confirm that the sustainability of Islamic practices at work depends on the interaction between masculinized and homogeneous labor structures and the positionality of Muslim women as migrant workers.

At the subjective level, negotiation is closely linked to self-concept formation, as articulated in Mead's (1934) theory, in which the self emerges through social interaction.

Institutional evaluations and peer responses to religious practices constitute the "Me," representing the internalization of social norms and expectations that shape how Muslim women interpret and regulate their religious expression in the workplace. Through the "I," however, participants exercise reflective agency by negotiating forms of religious practice that remain feasible without compromising religious meaning. Religious practices therefore not only signify adherence to Islamic teachings but also function as mechanisms for self-awareness and survival within a work regime marked by structural inequality. These findings indicate that informal negotiation spaces in the workplace play a crucial role in enabling Muslim working women to sustain both their religious identity and professional standing.

Wearing Hijab as a Personal Decision, Not Institutional Coercion

Clothing practices, including the wearing of hijab, shape the self-concept of Indonesian Muslim working women within contexts structured by social stratification and institutional power relations. The hijab functions not merely as a personal religious symbol but as an identity marker negotiated at the intersection of religious, gender migration status and occupational position. From an intersectional perspective, decisions to wear or not wear the hijab do not occur in fully autonomous space, even in the absence of explicit institutional coercion. Professional norms, organizational hierarchies, and contractual dependencies constrain women's formal agency, rendering dress practices an expression of reflective agency through which Muslim women navigate workplace demands while sustaining a coherent sense of self.

> *"When I go to campus to work in the geology lab, I try to wear clothes that are not complicated to use prayers. By using a long veil that exceeds the chest and dressing loosely, it makes it easier for me to work in the lab and during research in mountains hills and others. Especially when praying, I don't need to wear mukena (Muslim prayer garment) anymore because it is in accordance with Islamic Law."*
> *(US)*

Based on statements from US participants, clothing functions as a medium of self-comfort and self-expression. When workplaces permit freedom of dress, individuals are more likely to experience psychological wellbeing and work effectively. Drawing on mead's (1934) theory, the self is constituted through experience and social interaction, as individuals come to understand themselves through experience and evaluation. In the context oof migration and employment in Japan, dress practices are not neutral; they are produced and interpreted through intersecting forms of stratification, including social and educational background, gender, regional differences between origin and destination, religious affiliation, and educational and career trajectories. Social evaluation of the hijab often linked to assumptions about professionalism, compliance, or social distance shape the "me" dimension of Muslim women's self-concept by internalizing dominant workplace norms and expectations. However, Indonesian Muslim women workers are not wholly constrained by these structures. Mead's (1934) "I" represents their reflective and agentic capacity to negotiate meaning within structural limits. This agency manifests in adaptive and situational strategies, such as managing professional appearance, seeking safe social space through community and religious networks, and exercising, heightened caution in contexts where state protection is inconsistently present, positioning the Indonesian Embassy as a symbolic source of security. Consequently, dress practices not only express religious commitment but also articulate self-awareness, the right to self-expression, and a strategy for survival within a normative and multi-layered labor regime.

> *"When I first came to work in Japan, I wore the attributes of hijab at work, but I often did not get together with my office colleagues, because they felt I was unfriendly or afraid*

of disturbing me. When I take my viel off, I feel comfortable working and communication with colleagues in the office. And this is without the compulsion and demands of feeling" (ML)

A key finding of this study concerns ML, the only participant among five who chose to remove her hijab while working in Japan. ML described this decision as the outcome of personal reflection and agency rather than explicit prohibitions, direct pressure, or formal workplace policies. No written regulations or institutional statement in her workplace explicitly banned the wearing of the hijab. Nevertheless, this choice cannot be fully separated from the structural conditions in which it was made. From an intersectional perspective, the decision to remove the hijab emerged within a professional environment shaped by implicit norm of homogeneity, visual conformity, and expectations of professionalism that subtly delineate the boundaries of comfort and acceptance. Thus, even in the absence of direct coercion, individual choices are negotiated within social contexts that privilege sameness. These findings challenge a simplistic binary between "coercion" and "free will" and highlight the need to understand Muslim women's agency as relational and structurally embedded.

The experience of wearing the hijab among Muslim women cannot be generalized as a uniform collective practice but must be understood as an individual decision shaped by self-concept. Drawing on George Herbert Mead's (1934) theory of the self, such decisions reflect a dialectical process between the "Me" the socially constructed self-shaped by external expectations and the "I," which represents reflective and autonomous agency. In some cases, the "Me" becomes more silent, manifesting in hesitation to maintain the hijab due to factors such as the comfort of living in a non-Muslim majority society, the desire for social acceptance, interpersonal considerations, or private aesthetic preferences. Conversely, the dominance of the "I" is evident among women who consciously choose to continue wearing the hijab based on a strong internalization of its religious and identity related significance, even in less supportive environments from an intersectional standpoint, these negotiations occur within a non-neutral space structured by the intersections of religion, gender, migration status, and occupational position in Japan's relatively homogeneous society. As Japan increasingly relies on foreign workers with specialized skills and language competencies, workplace have begun to demonstrate greater flexibility toward non-local employees, emphasizing professional competence over cultural appearance. Although cultural friction in both professional and everyday setting persists, local and international workers alike are increasingly compelled to renegotiate lifestyles, social relations, and professional norms within a progressively multicultural work environment.

Migration Status Work Visas as Limiting Factors for Formal Agency

These findings indicate that migration status and work visas particularly the Engineering, Specialist in Humanities, and International Services (技人国 *gijinkoku)* visa significantly constrain the formal agency of Indonesian Muslim women workers in Japan participants consistently recognized that their ability to remain in Japan depends heavily on employment stability and institutional evaluation. This dependency fosters counting in submitting formal requests for religious accommodation, such as access to prayer space or modifications to work uniforms. This tendency is consistent with insights from *Muslims living in Japan* by Nagasawa Eiji and Minesaki Hiroko (2024), which illustrates how Muslim migrants in Japan often internalize the expectation that religious practice should remain private and non-disruptive in public and professional setting. The volume emphasizes that workplace negotiations over religious practice is rarely institutionalized and are instead managed through personal discretion and self- regulation, particularly among women. Instead, participants predominantly employed informant and individualized strategies that enabled them to sustain religious

practices while avoiding institutional scrutiny. From an intersectional perspective, work visas function as structural mechanisms that intensify gendered and religious vulnerabilities. While simultaneously shaping a pragmatic and adaptive form of agency. Inequality within contemporary Japanese workplaces thus manifests less though explicit prohibition than through dependency structures that restrict the voices of female migrant workers.

The 技人国 *gijinkoku* (Engineering, Specialist in Humanities, and International Services) visa status plays a central role in shaping these negotiation pattern. Because residence status is directly tied to the continuity of employment contract, job security becomes a primary concern for participants. Across multiple narratives, apprehensions regarding supervisors' evaluations, contract renewal, and future job recommendation discouraged formal requests for religious accommodation work. As discussed in *Muslims living in Japan* (Nagasawa & Minesaki, 2024), this form of legal and occupational dependency produces a condition in which Muslim workers, especially women, prioritize employment continuity over the visibility of religious claims, leading to what can be described as "silent" or non-confrontational agency. Work visa therefore operate not merely as legal classifications, but as institutional arrangements that reinforce intersecting forms of gender and religious vulnerability within labor migration. Nevertheless, Indonesian Muslim women are not passive recipient of these constraints. They actively devise strategies to preserve Islamic practices through interpersonal negotiation with colleagues, the use of alternative worship spaces, and symbolic adjustment in dress and food consumption. The book conceptualizes these practices as everyday negotiations shape by gendered expectations and minority positioning, demonstrating that Islamic observance in Japan is maintained through flexibility rather than formal accommodation *Japan* (Nagasawa & Minesaki, 2024). These practices demonstrate that religious observance is not abandoned but continuously renegotiated within the micro politics of everyday working life.

More broadly, these findings support the argument that Japan's employment regime, while not overtly discriminator toward Muslim, operates within a normative framework that privatizes religion and prioritizes workplace homogeneity. As highlight in *Muslims living in Japan* (Nagasawa & Minesaki, 2024), religion in Japan is institutionally framed as an individual matter, a condition that disproportionately affects migrant Muslim whose religious practices require spatial, temporal, and bodily expression. This structural privatization disproportionately effects Muslim migrants whose religious observance requires visible accommodation. Within this context, migrant Muslim occupy a distinct intersectional position where professional expectations, gender norms and migration related vulnerabilities converge and mutually reinforce one another. By applying intersectionality as a unified analytical framework, this study demonstrates that the work experiences of Indonesia Muslim women in Japan cannot be reduced to a single axis of identity. Instead, these experiences emerge from the simultaneous and often invisible interaction of multiple social structures. These findings challenge policy and academic approaches that compartmentalize religion, gender and migration, underscoring the need for more integrated analyses of Muslim labor in contemporary East Asia.

CONCLUSION

This study examines the experiences of Indonesian Muslim Women workers who wear the hijab within contemporary Japanese workplaces through an intersectional perspective and self-concepts that brings together religion, gender, and migration status. Drawing on the in-depth qualitative interviews of five Muslim women employed in academia, hospitality, and labor sending organization (*組合 kumiai*), this article demonstrates that religious practices in the workplace cannot be understood as purely individual choices. Instead, they emerge from the simultaneous interaction of religion, gender, migration status, and occupational position within

hierarchical institutional structures. In this contact, Islamic expressions are not practiced in a neutral space. Still, they are continuously negotiated within workplaces that prioritize behavioral uniformity, efficiency, and a strict separation between professional and private life.

The finding shows that Islamic practices among Indonesian Muslim women in Japan are shaped through ongoing, situational, and pragmatic negotiations. Most participants maintained religious observance and the use of Islamic attributes, albeit informs adapted to work rhythms, institutional norms, and professional expectations. These adaptations reflect not personal preference alone but survival strategies within work environments that lack explicit institutional support for minority religious practices. The absence of protection mechanisms or support actors such as internal policies, collective representation, or secure grievance channels places the burden of negotiating religious accommodation entirely on individual workers.

The study also finding that one participant's decision to remove the hijab made reflectively and without direct institutional coercion. However, such decisions cannot be separated from broader structural conditions in which personal choices are shaped by contractual dependency, asymmetric power relations, and limited alternative protections. These findings suggest that Muslim women's agency does not always manifest as over resistance, but also as adaptive strategies to sustain employment and legal residence. Moreover, the study highlights the central role of migration status and work visas in shaping labor experiences. Dependence on employment contracts for residence security significantly constrains formal agency and discourages demands for institutional accommodation within an intersectional framework. Work visas function not merely as administrative instruments but as structural mechanisms that intensify vulnerability based on gender and religion while individualizing risks that institutions and host states should bear.

The primary theoretical contribution of this research lies in applying intersectionality as a unified analytical framework to examine Muslim women's labor experiences in Japan an area often fragmented across separate analyses of religion, gender, and migration. By illustrating how these dimensions intersect in everyday workplace practices and are intensified by the absence of structural support, this study advances scholarship on Muslim labor in East Asia. It challenges policy approaches that frame religious practice solely as a private matter. Empirically, it addresses gaps in existing literature by presenting a contextual and multilayered account of Indonesian Muslim women's work experiences in Japan. The findings underscore the need for greater institutional recognition of religious diversity within the Japanese labor market, particularly amid growing reliance on foreign workers. Intersectionality-sensitive policies and workplace practices such as clear accommodation guidelines, protection mechanisms, and collective forms of support can foster more inclusive work environments without compromising professionalism. Despite limitations related to sample size and geographic scope, this study provides a strong conceptual and empirical foundation for future research across sectors, Muslim worker groups, and the broader East Asian context.

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