

## Adapting *Fiqh al-Aqalliyāt* in Japan: Islamic Legal Responses to Muslim Social Life in a Minority Context

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Ade Dedi Rohayana\*<sup>1</sup>, Maghfur Ahmad<sup>2</sup>, Taufiqur Rohman<sup>3</sup>, and Achmad Gazali<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup> Universitas Islam Negeri K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan, <sup>4</sup> Gifu University, Japan

✉ [adededirohayana@uingusdur.ac.id](mailto:adededirohayana@uingusdur.ac.id)\*

### Abstract

The adaptation of *fiqh al-aqalliyāt* (Islamic jurisprudence for Muslim minorities) poses legal and social challenges for Muslims in non-Muslim majority countries. Japan, with its secular legal system and predominantly non-Muslim society, offers a distinct context to examine how Muslim communities maintain religious practices in a non-supportive environment. This study explores how Muslims in Japan adjust their religious obligations despite limited access to religious facilities, how they reconcile Islamic law with Japanese state law, and how these adjustments influence social integration. Data were gathered through qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews with Muslim community members and leaders in urban areas such as Tokyo, Mito, Koga and Ibaraki. Using the frameworks of legal pluralism and *maṣlahah*-based reasoning, the study reveals that Muslims apply flexible interpretations of *fiqh al-aqalliyāt*, including time adjustments for prayer, the use of shared spaces for worship, and legal innovations in marriage. These adaptive strategies help sustain religious identity while fostering coexistence. The study concludes that *fiqh al-aqalliyāt* can serve as a dynamic legal tool to harmonize religious commitments with minority realities, contributing to the broader discourse on Islamic law in global minority contexts.

### Abstrak

Adaptasi *fiqh al-aqalliyāt* menghadirkan tantangan signifikan bagi Muslim yang hidup sebagai minoritas di negara non-Muslim. Studi kualitatif ini mengkaji bagaimana komunitas Muslim di Jepang—sebuah negara sekuler dengan sistem hukum dan masyarakat yang khas—mengatasi keterbatasan akses terhadap fasilitas ibadah dan mendamaikan hukum agama dengan hukum negara. Melalui wawancara mendalam dengan anggota komunitas di wilayah perkotaan (termasuk Tokyo dan Ibaraki), penelitian ini menemukan bahwa dengan menggunakan kerangka pluralisme hukum dan pendekatan berbasis *maṣlahah*, Muslim Jepang menerapkan interpretasi *fiqh al-aqalliyāt* yang fleksibel, seperti penyesuaian waktu salat, penggunaan ruang bersama untuk ibadah, dan inovasi dalam masalah pernikahan. Strategi adaptif ini memungkinkan mereka mempertahankan identitas keagamaan, mendorong integrasi sosial, dan hidup berdampingan secara harmonis, sekaligus menegaskan bahwa *fiqh al-aqalliyāt* dapat menjadi instrumen hukum yang dinamis untuk menyelaraskan komitmen keagamaan dengan realitas minoritas global.

### Keywords:

*Fiqh al-aqalliyāt*; Muslim minority; Islamic law; Legal pluralism; Japan

### How to Cite:

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## Introduction

In an era marked by globalization and rising migration, the presence of Muslim communities in non-Muslim countries has become an increasingly significant area of study (Yusuf et al., 2023). Japan, as a country with a majority non-Muslim population and a secular legal system, faces unique challenges in accommodating the social and religious needs of its Muslim minority (Csajka-Vándor, 2020). This phenomenon raises questions about how Muslim communities can optimally practice their religion while adapting to different legal and social environments. *Fiqh al-aqalliyāt*, as a branch of Islamic jurisprudence that focuses on the needs of Muslim minorities, is highly relevant in this context (Friberg & Sterri, 2021).

Studies on *fiqh al-aqalliyāt* have developed as a response to the challenges faced by Muslim minorities in various parts of the world (Srimulyani, 2021). Several studies highlight how the principles of Islamic law can be adapted to address different social realities without compromising the core values of the sharia (Zakiyah et al., 2023). In Japan, the social and cultural conditions, which differ greatly from those of the Islamic world, create unique dynamics of adjustment, particularly in the practice of religious rituals (Ratih et al., 2022).

A review of the literature shows that although studies related to *fiqh al-aqalliyāt* exist, the focus on its implementation in Japan remains very limited. Previous research tends to examine legal or social aspects separately, without comprehensively integrating the two—such as studies on *fiqh al-aqalliyāt* as a relevant solution for Muslim minorities in Japan concerning *halal* standardization (Salam et al., 2023); *fiqh al-aqalliyāt* as a conceptual foundation for Muslim minorities to integrate into Western societies (Kröger et al., 2022); *fiqh al-aqalliyāt* as a progressive solution in formulating new jurisprudence specifically for Muslim minorities in Western countries (Mawardi, 2020); and *fiqh al-aqalliyāt* as a source of moral obligations toward non-Muslims (Yusuf et al., 2023). This study seeks to fill that gap through a holistic approach that combines analysis of Islamic law with the social conditions of Japanese society.

The significance of this research lies in its ability to provide a deep understanding of how Muslim minorities in Japan navigate challenges in maintaining their religious identity. This study also contributes to the development of *fiqh al-aqalliyāt* as a dynamic and responsive legal approach to the needs of Muslim minorities in non-Muslim countries (Mawardi, 2020). Therefore, the results of this research are expected to serve as an essential reference for academics, Islamic legal practitioners, and policymakers.

This study employs a qualitative method with data collection techniques consisting of in-depth interviews and participatory observation (McMullin, 2023). The respondents include members of the Muslim community, religious leaders, and academics in Japan who possess an understanding of *fiqh al-aqalliyāt* practices and the social life of Muslims in the country (Aspers & Corte, 2019). Data analysis is conducted within the framework of legal pluralism and the principle of *maslahah* to understand the adaptation of Islamic law in the context of minority communities (Benda-Beckmann & Turner, 2018).

This research found that Muslims in Japan employ adaptation strategies such as adjusting prayer times, using multifunctional spaces for worship, and innovating family law related to marriage and inheritance (Zakari et al., 2022). These strategies not only enable them to maintain religious commitment but also help build harmonious relationships with the predominantly secular Japanese society (Rohmad et al., 2022). These findings affirm that *fiqh*

*al-aqalliyāt* can function as a flexible and progressive legal instrument to accommodate the needs of Muslim minorities in various contexts (Razi, 2021).

## Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach, specifically a case study on how Muslim communities in Japan adapt the principles of *fiqh al-aqalliyāt* in the fields of worship, social life, and politics, focusing on issues such as *fiqh* of ritual worship (*'ibādah māḥḍah*), the concept of purity, the implementation of Friday prayers, and the provision of halal culinary services. Field research was conducted in three main locations, i.e. Tokyo, Mito, and Koga in Ibaraki Prefecture, which have relatively active Muslim communities with diverse ethnic and professional backgrounds.

First, in-depth interviews were conducted with various groups of informants, including mosque imams, administrators of local Islamic organizations such as the Special Branch of Nahdlatul Ulama (PCINU) Japan and the Special Branch of Muhammadiyah (PCIM) Japan, international Muslim students, migrant workers, and Muslim families residing in Japan. The selection of informants was based on their involvement in religious practices and community social activities. The interviews focused on how they understand and apply *fiqh al-aqalliyāt* in matters of worship, such as maintaining *tahārah* in public spaces, determining the *qiblah* direction, performing Friday prayers at workplaces or campuses, and consuming halal food amid limited facilities and regulations. In addition, the interviews explored their views on social relations and the political position of the Muslim minority within Japan's secular and homogeneous society.

Second, participatory observation was conducted in mosques, campus prayer rooms, halal restaurants, and religious social activities such as study circles (Indonesian: *pengajian*), Friday prayer services, and Islamic cultural festivals. Through these observations, the researcher was able to directly understand the dynamics of applying *fiqh al-aqalliyāt* principles in daily practices, especially how Muslims negotiate limited public spaces for worship and halal consumption. During the observation process, the researcher maintained natural involvement and built empathetic relationships with the informants to create an open and trusting atmosphere.

Third, a documentation study was conducted by examining various written sources, including reports from Japanese Muslim communities, fatwas from the Japan Halal Council, academic publications on minority Islam, Japanese government regulations on freedom of religion and halal labelling, and online news coverage of the dynamics of Muslims in Japan. This approach enriched the theoretical context and broadened the understanding of the interaction between Islamic law, the Japanese legal system, and local culture.

Data analysis was conducted using the legal pluralism approach and the *maṣlahah* perspective to examine how the principles of *fiqh al-aqalliyāt* are applied in responding to religious and socio-political challenges in a predominantly non-Muslim society. Through this approach, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Muslim communities in Japan interpret the flexibility of Islamic law to preserve the purity of worship, ensure the availability of Friday prayer and halal culinary services, and build harmonious social relations within the context of minority life.

### ***Fiqh al-Aqalliyāt*: Ethics for Minority Muslims in Secular Politics**

*Fiqh al-aqalliyāt*, or minority jurisprudence, is a contemporary branch of Islamic law developed to address the issues faced by Muslims living as minorities in non-Muslim or secular countries (El Guyanie & Baskoro, 2021). Its primary focus is on how the principles of sharia can be applied contextually within social, cultural, and political environments that differ from majority-Muslim societies (Wahib, 2021). This jurisprudence serves as a guide for Muslims to practice their religion consistently without conflicting with the legal systems and values of the countries in which they reside (Mustafa & Agbaria, 2016).

In the political context, *fiqh al-aqalliyāt* serves as an ethical foundation for minority Muslims participating in public and political life in secular states (Subchi et al., 2022). Its principles affirm that political involvement is not a compromise of Islamic teachings but a form of social responsibility and citizenship (Shavit & Spengler, 2018). Muslims are encouraged to actively uphold justice, promote common welfare, and be constructive citizens (Akram, 2019). Thus, the political ethics derived from *fiqh al-aqalliyāt* are not solely for the interests of Muslims but also reflect Islam's moral contribution to society at large.

Theoretically, *fiqh al-aqalliyāt* is grounded in the concept of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* (the objectives of Islamic law), which emphasizes the protection of religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property (Mohiuddin & Bin Borham, 2022). In minority contexts, these objectives are interpreted flexibly to avoid social and political conflict. Jurisprudential principles such as *al-darūrāt tubīh al-mahzūrāt* (necessities permit the prohibited), *yurā'ā al-'urf wa al-siyāq* (custom and social context are considered), and *taghayyur al-aḥkām bi taghayyur al-azmān wa al-amkinah* (laws can change according to time and place) guide decision-making (Reskiani et al., 2022). This means Muslims are allowed to adjust their political and social actions according to their environment as long as they do not conflict with core beliefs (March, 2009).

The political ethics emerging from *fiqh al-aqalliyāt* guide Muslims to be law-abiding citizens who respect government systems and actively engage in democratic life. They are expected to demonstrate tolerance, openness to diversity, and participation in elections or other political activities aimed at promoting justice and collective welfare. Engagement with government institutions, involvement in social organizations, and interfaith collaboration are considered part of efforts to realise *maṣlahah mushtarakah* (common good) within the state (Yusron, 2021).

In secular countries, where religion is separated from politics, Muslims face the challenge of balancing religious commitment with civic loyalty. *Fiqh al-aqalliyāt* views this situation not as a threat but as an opportunity to demonstrate the universality of Islamic values such as honesty, justice, and social responsibility. Thus, a Muslim can adhere to Islamic teachings while contributing positively to national development. The principle of *al-walā' wa al-barā'* (loyalty and disavowal) is interpreted moderately, meaning loyalty to the state is maintained as long as it does not conflict with faith and injustice in any form is rejected (Damir-Geilsdorf et al., 2019).

The application of *fiqh al-aqalliyāt* in political contexts can be observed in Muslim participation in Western or East Asian countries, such as Japan and the United Kingdom, where they actively engage in social activities, interfaith dialogue, and elections (Wahib, 2021). This participation is not only a form of integration but also a way to advocate for religious freedom and maintain Islam's image as a peaceful and rational religion. Through this approach, Muslims

avoid exclusivism and fanaticism, presenting themselves as an inclusive, progressive community oriented toward universal welfare.

Therefore, *fiqh al-aqalliyāt* is not only a legal instrument but also a foundation for political ethics relevant to minority Muslims in secular countries. It demonstrates that Islam can coexist with modern democratic systems without losing its spiritual identity. Through this jurisprudence, Muslims are encouraged to view politics as a form of social worship—striving for justice, peace, and human welfare in accordance with the higher objectives of sharia (El Guyanie & Baskoro, 2021).

### **Integration of *Madhhab* Perspectives in Contemporary *Fiqh al-Aqalliyāt* in Japan**

*Fiqh al-aqalliyāt*, as a legal approach that focuses on the needs of Muslim minorities (Yakar & Yakar, 2021), requires methodological flexibility by integrating the various opinions of the classical Islamic legal schools (Shemer, 2017). The integration of *madhhab* opinions becomes essential when Muslims live in socio-legal environments that differ significantly from majority-Muslim societies (Subhi et al., 2023), as experienced by Muslim communities in Japan. Japan's homogeneous social structure, limited religious facilities, and secular legal system require adaptive, context-sensitive legal reasoning. Therefore, *fiqh al-aqalliyāt* operates by combining cross-*madhhab* *ijtihad* and contemporary fatwas to formulate moderate, realistic, and principled solutions that remain rooted in the foundational objectives of Islamic law (Ikhsana & Khasanah, 2020).

Integration of *madhhab* opinions within the framework of *fiqh al-aqalliyāt* demonstrates that Islamic legal reasoning can be elastic in addressing the lived realities of Muslim minorities in Japan without compromising the core principles of the sharia (Ibrahim Alturki & Wasito, 2023). This approach positions *fiqh al-aqalliyāt* not merely as a pragmatic response but as a modern legal paradigm that is responsive, contextual, and oriented toward the public good. Consequently, this *fiqh* serves as a legal framework capable of embracing global complexities while ensuring the continuity of Islamic religious practices in non-Muslim environments.

### **Friday Prayer in Japan: Challenges of Space, Time, and Religious Legitimacy**

The practice of Friday prayer in Japan faces complex challenges related to worship spaces, time adjustments, and religious legitimacy within the Muslim minority community (Sheibani, 2024). As a country with a relatively small Muslim population and limited religious infrastructure, Friday prayer is often conducted in non-mosque spaces such as university halls, public rental rooms, or apartments converted into prayer rooms or *musallā* (Wiedner et al., 2022). This condition reflects the limited availability of formally recognized worship spaces and the adaptive efforts of Muslim communities to maintain their religious practices in a secular environment (Woods, 2024).

Time constraints are also a significant factor. Work schedules and academic activities in Japan generally do not allow specific time for Friday worship (Rijal, 2009). Many Muslim workers cannot leave their workplaces during the *zuhr* period, leading some to perform a shortened Friday Prayer or substitute it with congregational *zuhr* prayer (Yen et al., 2022). This

phenomenon has sparked debates in fiqh regarding the validity of Friday prayer among Muslim minorities (Yani & Barthos, 2020). Some scholars apply the *fiqh al-aqalliyāt* approach to provide legal flexibility, enabling Muslims to continue to worship according to their capacities and social conditions (Evans, 2019).

In terms of religious legitimacy, not all Friday prayer practices in Japan meet the formal requirements outlined in classical fiqh texts, such as the minimum number of worshippers, the Arabic-language sermon (*khuṭbah*), and a fixed location (Karimullah, 2023). However, local Muslim scholars and imams prioritize the principle of *maṣlahah mursalah*, which emphasizes communal benefit in preserving religious identity and the continuity of worship (Abdullah, 2022). Thus, the implementation of Friday prayer in Japan represents the contextualization of Islamic law within the reality of a minority society, where the essence of brotherhood (*ukhuwwah*) and religious expression takes precedence over mere formalities (Silawati et al., 2024).

Moreover, support from local governments and Japanese public institutions for religious freedom has contributed to the continuity of Friday prayer, for example, by granting permission to use public facilities or allocating space or prayer rooms (Rijal, 2009). Although this support has not yet extended to formal religious institutionalization, it indicates recognition of the Muslim community's right to worship in Japan (Ikari et al., 2023).

Interviews with several respondents reinforce these findings. An Imam of the Tokyo Camii Mosque, Adem Levent, explained:

*We often have to adjust the Friday prayer schedule according to the congregation's situation. In some places, the sermon lasts only ten minutes so sworkers can return to the office quickly. But we always try to maintain the essential requirements and pillars of the sermon (Levent, 2024).*

A representative from the Special Branch of Nahdlatul Ulama (PCINU) Japan, Achmad Gazali, stated:

*PCINU Japan helps facilitate mobile Friday prayer, especially for Indonesian Muslim communities in cities without mosques. We rent university rooms or community centers. The main challenge is not only finding a place but also coordinating congregations from different backgrounds (Gazali, 2024).*

Meanwhile, a representative from the Special Branch of Muhammadiyah (PCIM) Japan, Miftah Faried, added:

*We strive to organize regular Friday prayer in accessible locations for students and workers. In our sermons, we also include contextual messages such as work ethics in Japan and maintaining good relations with the surrounding community (Faried, 2024).*

An international Muslim student named Alnus Meinata, studying in Osaka, said:

*Our campus allows us to use a seminar room every Friday afternoon for Friday prayer. But the time is very limited, only about an hour. We take turns delivering the sermon because there is no permanent imam (Meinata, 2024).*

From the migrant worker community, a factory employee named Alvin in Nagoya shared:

*I rarely join Friday Prayer because I can't leave work. Sometimes we replace it with Dhuhr prayer in a small prayer room near our dormitory. We know it's not ideal, but our situation is difficult (Alvin, 2024).*

A Muslim family residing in Japan, Yuanasa (known as Cak Anas), who is married to Chikako, shared a different experience:

*We usually leave early for the mosque every Friday, even though it's quite far. Our children come along so they can experience the Friday atmosphere. But not all mosques have special spaces for women and children (Yuanasa, 2024).*

From these interviews, it is evident that the practice of Friday prayer in Japan involves various adaptations that take into account social, professional, and fiqh considerations. Despite facing limitations in space, time, and legitimacy, Muslim communities demonstrate flexibility and strong commitment to maintaining Islamic practices peacefully and contextually (Safei et al., 2022). Therefore, the practice of Friday prayer in Japan is not only a routine act of worship but also a symbol of the existence and social integration of Muslims in a minority setting.

### **Halal Certification in Japan: Collaboration between Muslims and Local Government**

Halal certification in Japan is an essential issue in the dynamics of the growing Muslim minority community in the country (Jamaludin & Sugawara, 2022). With the ever-increasing number of Muslim residents and tourists, demand for halal products and services has also increased significantly (Hasnan & Kohda, 2023). However, Japan is not a country with an Islamic legal tradition; therefore, the halal certification system is not centralized as in Muslim-majority countries (Kawata et al., 2018). Instead, its regulation and implementation have developed through collaboration among Muslim communities, private certification bodies, and local governments (Yamaguchi, 2019).

Initially, halal certification initiatives emerged from Muslim organizations seeking to ensure the halal integrity of available food and consumer products. Institutions such as the Japan Halal Association (JHA) and the Nippon Asia Halal Association (NAHA) have actively issued halal certificates in accordance with international standards, such as those of MUI (Indonesia) and JAKIM (Malaysia). Local governments later recognized the economic potential of the halal sector, especially in tourism and the culinary industry (Jamaludin & Sugawara, 2022). This collaboration led to new policies encouraging restaurants, hotels, and food producers to obtain halal certification to support Muslim-friendly tourism (Kubota et al., 2017).

The *fiqh al-aqalliyāt* approach provides an essential framework for Muslims in Japan in facing such limitations (El Guyanie & Baskoro, 2021). In this context, halal certification is not only understood as a matter of sharia compliance but also as a form of social and cultural negotiation between Muslim and non-Muslim communities (Lallmahomed-Aumeerally, 2017). The principle of *maṣlahah mursalah* is used to weigh broader benefits, such as strengthening

public trust in halal products and reinforcing Muslim identity within a plural society (Timol, 2020).

Interviews with various respondents revealed the dynamics and realities of this collaboration. An imam of a mosque in Ibaraki, Japan, KH Mahmud Sulaeman, explained:

*We help socialize the importance of halal certification to both Muslim and non-Muslim business owners. The local government is quite open and asks for our input to ensure halal standards can be implemented correctly without causing misunderstandings (Sulaeman, 2024).*

A representative from Otsuka Mosque stated:

*PCINU Japan acts as a bridge between the Indonesian Muslim community and halal institutions in Japan. We also often discuss with local governments to ensure that halal labels are not merely economic symbols but truly reflect proper religious value (Gazali, 2024).*

Meanwhile, a representative from PCIM Japan, Miftah Faried, added a similar perspective:

*We strive to ensure that halal certification not only focuses on food but also on the Muslim lifestyle, such as tourism services, accommodations, and daily necessities. Some city governments, such as those associated with Otsuka Mosque and Tokyo Camii, are quite proactive in collaborating with Muslim communities to design halal guidelines (Faried, 2024).*

An international Muslim student named Arini, studying at Kyoto University, shared her daily experience:

*We often struggle to confirm the halal status of food in campus cafeterias. But since the university began collaborating with local halal institutions, special menus with halal labels have become available. We are also involved in surveys to provide feedback (Arini, 2024).*

An Indonesian migrant worker named Hendr R. Kenz in Nagoya said:

*In the past, it was challenging to find halal food around the factory. But now there's a small convenience store selling halal-certified products. The owner cooperated with the local government and received special permission. This really helps us (Kenz, 2024).*

From a Muslim family's perspective in Mito, Ibaraki, Japan, a housewife in Yokohama shared:

*We choose products with halal labels, but sometimes we are uncertain because not all certifications in Japan are the same as in Indonesia. We've learned to distinguish between official halal labels and purely commercial ones. Fortunately, local governments now often hold seminars about halal products (Chikako, 2024).*

Based on these interviews, it is evident that the collaboration between Muslim communities and local governments in Japan is not only economically oriented toward the halal industry but also reflects a spirit of mutual understanding between religion and public policy. The Muslim community plays an active role as a consultative partner, not merely as a policy recipient. Local governments have also begun to view halal initiatives as part of social inclusion and cultural diplomacy strategies.

Thus, halal certification in Japan is not merely an economic instrument but also a reflection of intercultural dialogue and a contextual application of *fiqh al-aqalliyāt* (El Guyanie & Baskoro, 2021). Through this cross-sector collaboration, Muslim communities in Japan have successfully strengthened their presence as adaptive, moderate, and constructive religious groups that contribute to harmony within a plural society (Amin, 2019).

### **Adaptation of *Tahārah* in Japan's Public Spaces: A Study in *Fiqh al-Aqalliyāt***

The concept of *tahārah* or purity is a fundamental aspect of Islamic teachings and a prerequisite for the validity of worship, especially prayer. However, for Muslim communities living in Japan—a country with a public environment that is very different from the Islamic cultural context—the practice of *tahārah* presents its own challenges (Srimulyani, 2021). The lack of water in most public toilets, differences in hygiene standards, and the lack of space for ablution require adjustments that do not neglect the principles of sharia (Kocalan, 2022). In this context, the phenomenon of *tahārah* adaptation has emerged among Muslims in Japan (Ratih et al., 2022), based on the principles of *fiqh al-aqalliyāt*, a jurisprudential approach that provides legal flexibility for Muslim minorities so they can continue to practice their religion within the limits of their capabilities and environmental conditions (El Guyanie & Baskoro, 2021).

This study aims to identify the forms of *tahārah* adaptation practiced by Muslims in Japan and to examine their *fiqh* foundations. Several practices have been identified, including the use of wet tissues or portable ablution kits as substitutes for water, the utilization of automatic toilet systems (washlet) as purification tools, and the rearrangement of ablution schedules at workplaces or campuses to adjust to the limitations of public facilities (Kusnan & Basit, 2024). This phenomenon demonstrates a contextual *ijtihad* that integrates the principle of purity with Japan's modern values of efficiency and cleanliness, without eliminating the essence of Islamic teachings (Halim & Hosen, 2021).

Methodologically, this study uses a qualitative approach with in-depth interviews conducted with several groups of informants, namely mosque imams, administrators of local Islamic organizations such as the Special Branch of Nahdlatul Ulama (PCINU) Japan and the Special Branch of Muhammadiyah (PCIM) Japan, international Muslim students, migrant workers, and Muslim families residing in Japan.

The interview results show that mosque imams play an active role in providing adaptive *fiqh* guidance to congregants, such as permitting *tayammum* in emergency situations or offering instructions on using modern tools to maintain purity. Islamic organizations such as PCINU and PCIM Japan also play an essential role in educating the community through Islamic studies and online discussions about *tahārah* practices in non-Muslim environments. Meanwhile, students and migrant workers face practical challenges in workplaces or on campuses that lack

worship areas or ablution facilities, leading them to develop personal innovations, such as carrying small bottles of water for purification (Ramlan, 2020).

Muslim families who have long settled in Japan also develop adaptive strategies by adjusting their children's habits to Japan's high-tech sanitation facilities, which are not always based on the Islamic concept of *tahārah*. These findings affirm that the adaptation of *tahārah* in Japan represents a form of social and cultural *ijtihād* that combines normative *fiqh* understanding with the lived reality of Muslim minority life. From the perspective of *fiqh al-aqalliyāt*, this effort is not merely a compromise but a reflection of the principles of *taysīr* (ease) and *maṣlahah* (benefit), underscoring Islam's flexibility in facing the realities of the modern global context (Mahrus et al., 2020).

### Religious Freedom in Japan: A *Fiqh al-Aqalliyāt* Perspective

Religious freedom in Japan has become an important topic in the study of *fiqh al-aqalliyāt* because it illustrates how Muslims as a minority navigate religious life within a secular society that places religion in the private sphere (Mehfooz, 2021). Constitutionally, Japan guarantees freedom of religion and provides space for religious communities to practice their respective teachings (Kocalan, 2022). However, in practice, Muslims face various cultural and social challenges, such as limited worship facilities, the availability of halal food (Kubota et al., 2017), and public acceptance of Islamic expressions in public spaces. In this context, the principles of *fiqh al-aqalliyāt*, such as *taysīr* (ease), *maṣlahah mursalah* (public benefit), and *urf* (social context), serve as the foundation for Muslims in Japan to adapt without losing their Islamic identity (Idris et al., 2021).

Adem Levent, an imam in Tokyo, explained that legally, religious freedom in Japan is excellent, but social acceptance remains a challenge. He stated that the government never prohibits worship activities, but local communities sometimes have misconceptions about Islam. According to him, it is necessary to adopt a wise approach to *da'wah* that emphasizes *ta'āyush silmī* (peaceful coexistence), so that Islam is understood as a religion of mercy that promotes universal values of goodness.

A similar view was expressed by representatives of PCINU Japan, who emphasized the importance of building social dialogue and Muslim participation in community activities. Through active involvement in social initiatives such as neighborhood cleanups, cultural bazaars, and humanitarian programs, they strive to strengthen the image of Islam as an inclusive and moderate religion. Meanwhile, representatives of PCIM Japan highlighted the importance of understanding Japanese social values, such as discipline, cleanliness, and respect, which align with Islamic teachings. They stressed that these values can serve as a common ground in building harmonious interfaith relations in Japan. This approach forms part of the *da'wah bi-al-ḥāl* strategy, which promotes Islam through concrete actions that benefit the wider community.

International Muslim students studying in Osaka and Kyoto reported experiencing genuine religious freedom on campus. They are free to perform prayers, although facilities are limited and they often need to improvise, such as using laboratories or campus gardens. One student mentioned that Japanese professors and classmates are very respectful of prayer times, and some even show interest in learning more about Islam. This indicates that tolerance in

Japan is social and cultural rather than theological. Japanese society respects religious practices as long as they do not disrupt social order.

Unlike students, Muslim migrant workers face more tangible challenges in practicing religion at work. An Indonesian migrant worker employed in a factory in the Nagoya area stated that he often performs prayers in changing rooms or parking lots because there is no designated prayer space. Nevertheless, management has never prohibited such activities. He emphasized that maintaining ethics and professionalism is essential for ensuring that religious freedom is reasonably accepted in the workplace. Meanwhile, Muslim families who have long lived in Japan said they strive to instill values of tolerance and adaptation in their children. For them, living as a minority requires balancing the preservation of Islamic identity with social engagement in the surrounding community.

Overall, this study's findings show that religious freedom in Japan is understood not only within a legal framework but also as a social process that requires cultural adaptation. From the perspective of *fiqh al-aqalliyāt*, this condition reflects the application of the principle of *maqāsid al-sharī'ah*, particularly *hifz al-dīn* (protection of religion), which is carried out in a contextual, peaceful, and locally wise manner. Muslims in Japan have succeeded in practicing their religion without political pressure or open discrimination, although they continue to face practical and symbolic challenges. Religious freedom for Muslim minorities in Japan depends not only on state regulations but also on their ability to engage in social *ijtihād*, namely, to reinterpret religious practices in accordance with modern life contexts without losing the essence of Islamic teachings (Srimulyani, 2021). Thus, *fiqh al-aqalliyāt* becomes a vital instrument in developing a dynamic and relevant understanding of religion capable of fostering interfaith harmony in a plural society such as Japan (Wahib, 2021).

### **Halal Fiqh in Japan: Minority Muslim Adaptation to Halal Products and Restaurants**

Japan, as a country without a religion-based legal tradition, presents unique challenges for Muslims in determining the halal status of products and food (Makhlouf, 2023; Jamaludin & Sugawara, 2022). The limited number of halal certification bodies, differing standards among organizations, and the general lack of public awareness in Japan regarding the concept of halal require Muslims to engage in contextual *ijtihād* based on the principles of *fiqh al-aqalliyāt*—a jurisprudence designed to address the needs of Muslim minorities living in non-Muslim societies (Kubota et al., 2017).

This study found that adaptation to the concept of halal is carried out in various ways, including building social networks within Muslim communities, creating self-check mechanisms for food ingredients, and forming collaborations between Islamic institutions and local businesses. The principles of *taysīr* (ease) and *maṣlahah mursalah* (public benefit) serve as the foundation for legal decision-making, without neglecting the sanctity of Islamic law (Mohiuddin & Bin Borham, 2022).

In-depth interviews with various informants reinforce this understanding. An imam in Tokyo emphasized that Muslims must remain cautious in their food choices and also understand environmental limitations wisely. According to him, “*Some restaurants in Japan label their food as ‘halal,’ but do not fully understand the concept according to Islamic law. Therefore, Muslims should verify directly and not easily trust unofficial halal labels.*”

Meanwhile, a representative of PCINU Japan stressed the importance of balancing sharia principles with social context. He stated, “As a minority, we must prioritize public benefit. Islam provides flexibility as long as it does not contradict the fundamental principles of halal and haram.” A representative of PCIM Japan added that their organization often collaborates with business owners and local governments to provide education on halal standards. This effort is not only for the benefit of Muslims but also to broaden Japanese society’s understanding of Islamic values that emphasize cleanliness, honesty, and responsibility.

An international Muslim student in Osaka explained that they rely on online communities to find halal restaurant recommendations. “We have a group to share information. If we are unsure, we choose vegetarian or seafood options,” he said. Meanwhile, a migrant worker in Nagoya stated that he brings food from home to avoid consuming products with unclear status. A Muslim family that has lived in Japan for a long time said they have become increasingly selective in choosing food ingredients, even opening a small business based on halal products to meet the needs of the surrounding community.

From these interviews, it can be concluded that Muslims in Japan have developed creative and independent forms of adaptation in understanding and applying halal-haram law. This adaptation is not seen as a relaxation of religious rules but as a form of social *ijtihad* grounded in the principles of *maqāṣid al-syarī‘ah*, particularly *hifẓ al-dīn* (protection of religion) and *hifẓ al-nafs* (protection of life). Through this approach, Muslims are able to maintain their religious identity while actively participating in Japan’s plural and modern society.

Thus, *fiqh al-ḥalāl* in Japan reflects the dynamics of contemporary Islamic jurisprudence that is both living and adaptive to global realities. It demonstrates that Islamic law is not rigid but can adapt to the conditions of its followers while upholding the principles of faith, purity, and collective welfare (Aminah & Bhakti, 2023).

### **Challenges & Solutions in Adapting Muslim Worship Practices in Japan**

This study reveals that Muslims in Japan face various challenges in performing daily worship, particularly because they live as a minority within a predominantly non-Muslim social environment (Gazali, 2024). One of the biggest challenges identified is the limited availability of worship facilities, as the number of mosques is very limited, forcing many Muslims to pray in public spaces or in locations not explicitly designed for worship (Sezgin, 2019). Another challenge is adjusting prayer times to accommodate work and school schedules in Japan (Srimulyani, 2021), resulting in difficulties for many respondents in performing congregational prayers, especially Friday prayer, due to tight work schedules and the considerable distance to mosques. Survey results show that 67% of respondents frequently reschedule their prayers to avoid conflicts with routine activities.

The limited understanding of Japanese society regarding Muslim worship also poses a significant obstacle. In-depth interviews revealed minor cases of discrimination, such as the refusal to allow prayer spaces in workplaces or schools. These misunderstandings are often linked to negative stereotypes, requiring Muslims to exercise extra caution when praying in

public. However, despite these challenges, Muslims in Japan demonstrate real adaptive efforts, particularly in adjusting worship practices to local conditions (Putra et al., 2018).

The adaptation of worship *fiqh*, particularly through the approach of *fiqh al-aqalliyāt*, is an essential solution for Muslim minorities in Japan (March, 2009). Practices such as using *tayammum* when clean water for ablution is difficult to obtain and leniency in performing congregational prayers for those without easy access to mosques represent forms of flexibility accepted by the Muslim community in Japan (Safei et al., 2022). Local *fatwas* that accommodate these conditions help Muslims fulfill their religious obligations correctly and practically (Rubinstein-Shemer, 2022).

In addition, local Muslim communities and organizations actively provide alternative worship facilities, such as prayer rooms in small mosques, Islamic schools, or members' homes. Field data indicate that approximately 12 alternative worship facilities in Tokyo, Mito, and Koga serve as centres for worship activities and religious education for the Muslim community. The existence of these facilities provides a concrete solution to the limitations of worship spaces (Yamaguchi, 2019).

Social integration of Muslims in Japan is also supported by interfaith dialogue and joint social activities with the local community (Yamashita, 2022). Positive interactions help reduce misunderstandings and increase tolerance among religious groups (Sezgin, 2019). Interviews with Japanese community leaders indicate growing awareness and support for Muslim communities as part of Japan's pluralistic society (Kohno et al., 2022).

However, this study also identifies structural challenges arising from Japanese government policies and regulations that do not fully accommodate the specific needs of Muslims (Arini, 2024). Examples include the lack of recognition of Islamic religious holidays and limited worship facilities in workplaces, which make it difficult for Muslims to perform their prayers consistently and optimally (Mohd Raffi et al., 2022).

Advocacy and education strategies directed at local governments have become a critical solution employed by Muslim communities. They actively inform authorities about worship needs and request the provision of prayer spaces in educational institutions and workplaces. Such collaborations have produced positive results; for example, several schools in Mito have started providing prayer rooms for Muslim students (Saville & Mahbubi, 2021).

The use of technology also forms part of practical solutions, such as prayer-time applications adjusted to Japan's time zones and digital Quran applications, which make it easier for Muslims to access religious resources anytime, anywhere. This approach helps Muslims adjust their worship practices to the dynamic living conditions in Japan (Debroux, 2022).

Muslim communities also develop strong internal support systems, including training local imams and conducting regular studies on *fiqh al-aqalliyāt* (Abdullah, 2022). These initiatives ensure that worship practices remain consistent with Islamic principles while being adaptive to local socio-cultural conditions (Batool & Saeed, 2022). Strengthening internal community structures is key to maintaining sustainable and realistic worship practices in a minority environment (Mustafa & Agbaria, 2016).

In the discussion, this study emphasizes the flexibility of *fiqh al-aqalliyāt* in addressing the needs of Muslims living in non-Muslim countries (Serrano-Ruano, 2022). Adjustments in worship are not a compromise of religious principles but a legitimate and necessary response

to ensure that religious obligations can be fulfilled without neglecting the local social and cultural context (Rizapoor & Rahimi, 2023).

Overall, the findings provide a comprehensive picture of how Muslims in Japan face various challenges in worship practices and develop practical solutions. Support from local communities, understanding from Japanese society, and inclusive government policies are key factors in the successful adaptation of *fiqh al-aqalliyāt* in the social life of Muslims in Japan.

### **Strategies for Balancing *Fiqh al-Aqalliyāt* with Japanese Law**

This study found that Muslims in Japan face a dilemma in balancing the demands of Islamic law with the secular, constitution-based national legal system. On the one hand, they strive to follow Islamic teachings through the principles of *fiqh al-aqalliyāt*. On the other hand, they are required to comply with Japanese laws that are not explicitly designed to accommodate religious practices. This challenge is particularly evident in areas such as family law, halal food, finance, and the use of public spaces for worship (Kubota et al., 2017).

Interviews with 20 respondents, including Muslim community leaders, academics, and Muslim students, indicate that Muslims in Japan employ an adaptive approach in interpreting Islamic law (Adegoke, 2021). They prioritize the principles of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* to safeguard the five fundamental objectives of Islam—religion, life, intellect, lineage, and wealth—which serve as the basis for determining what can be compromised and what cannot. This strategy becomes the main approach to bridging sharia requirements with Japanese regulations (Hashikami et al., 2023).

In terms of marriage and divorce, most Muslims in Japan still conduct religious nikah ceremonies while adding civil registration to ensure legal recognition under Japanese law (Kamano et al., 2023). However, some Muslim couples face difficulties with divorce because the Japanese legal system does not formally recognize concepts such as *ṭalāq* or *'iddah*. In such cases, the Muslim community has established informal sharia councils to provide religious legal references. These councils act as bridges between the implementation of sharia and the Japanese legal system.

Another strategy observed is the use of *ta'līlī* (rationalization of Islamic law) to address specific prohibitions (Rohmanu & Rofiah, 2023), such as halal food consumption. When permanent halal food is unavailable, Muslims in Japan adopt an emergency (*darūrah*) approach, selecting the option with the least harm (*akhaffu al-dararain*). This approach is justified by scholars who understand the context of minority Muslims (Chanifah et al., 2022).

In finance and banking, the interest-based system central to conventional Japanese banking poses a significant challenge for Muslims (personal communication, Japan, 21 October 2024, n.d.). Some Muslim communities have addressed this by developing local Sharia-based cooperatives, collectively managed to provide interest-free loans to community members. Although still small in scale, these cooperatives serve as an essential and growing solution (Yamashita, 2022).

Regarding dress and religious identity, while Japanese law does not prohibit wearing religious symbols such as the hijab, Muslims still face social challenges, including subtle discrimination in workplaces or schools. Therefore, cultural dialogue and social negotiation

have become key strategies for maintaining religious identity without conflicting with Japanese social norms (Rehman & Hanley, 2023).

Another important strategy is two-way legal education. On one hand, the Muslim community educates its members about Japanese law to avoid unintentional violations (Alvin, 2024). On the other hand, they educate local authorities and the general public about the importance of religious accommodation, such as the provision of halal food or prayer spaces. As a result, some educational institutions and companies have started implementing more Muslim-friendly policies.

Japan's public policies emphasizing religious freedom provide space for Muslims to practice their religion. However, this space does not automatically guarantee protection for Islamic legal practices (Miftah, 2024). Therefore, Muslims rely more on informal and dialogical approaches to bridge the gap, rather than demanding formal legal changes that require lengthy political processes.

The study also reveals that *fiqh al-aqalliyāt* provides theological legitimacy for Muslims to be flexible in their practice of Islam abroad (Abdullah, 2022). Principles such as *rukṣah* (dispensation) and *maslahah* (benefit) form the basis for legal decision-making (Baihaqi et al., 2024). This approach is considered more realistic than a rigid, literalist approach, allowing greater interpretive latitude in non-Muslim countries like Japan (Devi, 2024).

Further discussion shows that the integration of *fiqh al-aqalliyāt* and Japanese law does not create frontal conflict but operates through dynamic social and legal negotiation (Kamano et al., 2023). In other words, Muslims accept Japanese law but seek to adapt it as much as possible without compromising core sharia principles (Rosidah, 2020). This reflects a strong understanding of the importance of living harmoniously in a multicultural society (Salis Yuniardi et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, significant challenges remain regarding the sustainability of these strategies, particularly in institutional aspects. Many practices and solutions remain informal and depend on individuals or local communities (Shinde & Olsen, 2023). Therefore, efforts are needed to establish formal institutions capable of systematically bridging sharia and Japanese law, such as local fatwa councils or centers for minority Islamic legal studies in Japan (Mun'im, 2021).

The study also emphasizes the importance of academic and scholarly contributions in supporting the practice of *fiqh al-aqalliyāt* in Japan (Whyte, 2017). The involvement of Muslim academics in developing contextual legal guidelines, as well as collaboration with Japanese scholars in cross-cultural forums, is essential to strengthening the bridge between Islam and Japanese legal systems. An interdisciplinary approach combining Islamic law, positive law, and legal sociology is key (Ibrahim Alturki & Wasito, 2023).

Overall, the findings show that the strategy of balancing *fiqh al-aqalliyāt* with Japanese law is conducted through adaptive, flexible, and dialogical approaches (Nurhayati, 2013). Muslims in Japan have developed creative ways to uphold Islamic teachings without violating Japanese law. These findings answer the main research question: how Muslims maintain their identity and practice sharia in a secular country with a legal system that differs paradigmatically (Tahiev, 2023).

## Conclusion

The adaptation of *fiqh al-aqalliyāt* in Japan demonstrates that the Muslim community is able to establish a flexible religious lifestyle within a secular society. This study found that adaptation to local social and legal conditions is carried out through contextual *ijtihad*, such as the use of multipurpose mosques, adjustments to prayer times, and tolerance for differences of opinion among Islamic schools of thought. The strategy of balancing *fiqh al-aqalliyāt* with Japanese law operates through a dialogical, collaborative approach with local authorities, as well as through internal community education, to strengthen Islamic identity while respecting existing legal and social norms.

These adjustments have a significant impact on the social integration of Muslims, shaping an Islam that is inclusive, moderate, and open to diversity. The adaptation of *fiqh al-aqalliyāt* helps the Muslim community build harmonious relationships with Japanese society without losing their religious identity. In the future, further research is needed to explore the potential of *fiqh al-aqalliyāt* in bridging Muslim minority communities in other countries. In addition, strengthening minority *fiqh* education and training local community leaders is important to support the sustainability of peaceful and constructive social integration.

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