

Muslims in Korea

Provided by Hyunsoo Lee

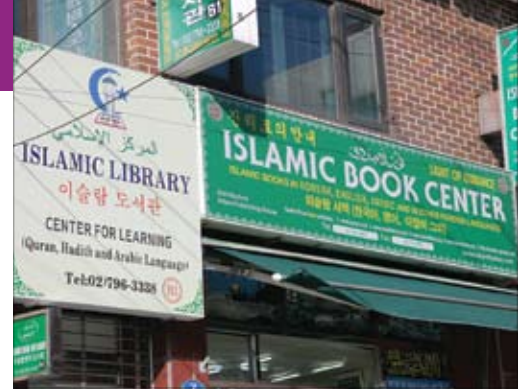
The presence of a small community of Muslims in Korea can be traced back to the 13th to 14th centuries. Contacts with Muslims in that period were probably linked to the active trading and commercial exchanges between Korea and China. This small Muslim presence can be shown in Korean history until the time of the Japanese colonization in the 1920s. At that time, thousands of Muslim Kazaks came to Korea and settled under the Japanese colonial government.

In 1950 the Korean War broke out. The UN sent troops to Korea to fight against the North Korean communists. As part of the war effort the nation of Turkey sent a battalion of soldiers to Korea. This was the beginning of modern contact between Koreans and Muslims. Two Turkish imams came with their fellow soldiers and began propagating Islam to war weary Koreans through education in the Chung Jin private learning institute. Within a couple of years two Koreans became Muslims through their efforts. It is said that there are now more than 35,000 ethnic-Korean Muslims since the first two Korean converts in 1955. Korean Muslims built their first mosque, called Central Masjid, at Iteawon in Seoul with financial help from Muslim countries. Now there are more than 10 mosques and 40 prayer centers throughout the country.



Although full statistics are lacking, Korean Muslims have started to get attention from society in recent years due to the gradual growth in their numbers. In addition, more foreign Muslims are making their appearance in Korea. By 2007 there were about 110,000 expatriate Muslims in South Korea (see chart). Note: The Bangladeshis and Pakistanis are mostly illegal laborers.

Due to the lack of Korean understanding of Islam and its culture, Muslims seem to be mistreated and discriminated against in factories and schools. Culturally eating pork seems to be almost unavoidable while living in Korea. For example, one Muslim Uzbek worker who came to Korea as a trainee worker under a South Korean government's training program for Asians was unfortunately assigned to a pig farm for training, even though Muslims are forbidden to raise pigs for slaughter according to their religion.



Prayer REQUESTS

- ▶ *Pray for a greater awareness and understanding of Islamic religion and culture in Korean society in general. This will facilitate greater social integration of Muslims in society.*
- ▶ *Like Korean society in general, Korean churches are also lacking understanding of Islam. Because of the negative impact of various incidents involving Koreans in Afghanistan and elsewhere, animosity and fear toward Muslims and Islam have crept into the hearts of some Korean believers. Believers will need to overcome fear (1 John 4:18 and 2 Tim. 1:7). Pray for Korean believers to have a renewal of vision and desire to reach out to Muslims.*