

MUSLIM COMMUNITY IN BUSAN, SOUTH KOREA:  
ITS DEVELOPMENT, CHALLENGES AND FUTURE  
PROSPECTS

BY

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## ABSTRACT

Islam began to spread in South Korea, particularly after the Korean War (1950-53), especially at Seoul, the main metropolitan city in the country. Since most literature on Islam and Muslims centred on Seoul, there is limited work, especially in English, on Islam and Muslim community in Busan. Even the actual number of Muslims residing there remains inconclusive despite their existence since 1976. Similarly, not much information is available on the condition of the Muslims, including the negative perception held or treatment shown towards the group by the non-Muslim population in the city. Thus, this research aims to introduce the Muslim community in the south tip of South Korea called Busan, which is not known to many, by focusing on the role and contributions of local and foreign Muslim individuals and organisations in developing the Muslim community in the city. With the establishment of Al-Fatah Busan Mosque in 1980, the Muslim community in Busan started to flourish slowly, which saw an increasing number of Muslims, local and foreign, as well as of mosques and Islamic centres. Known as the south gate to South Korea that is famous for its booming seaport activities and various modern industries, Busan has attracted many foreign workers from all around the world, including Muslims from Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Uzbekistan, and others, which consequently contributed to the development of Muslim community there. Hence, the research would like to examine the relationship development between Korean and foreign Muslims in Busan and discover the problems and challenges faced by the community as well as future prospects. Using qualitative approach i.e., interviews, observation, and secondary sources, the study provides information on the under-studied topic gathered from different figures and individuals directly involved with establishing and developing the Muslim community in Busan. Information was also derived from non-Muslim South Koreans' views of Islam and Muslims in South Korea. The findings demonstrated close cooperation between local and foreign Muslims in Busan, best exemplified in various Islamic organisations that exist and are run by both groups in the city. That said, Muslims in Busan are not exempted from problems that make their lives difficult and serve as obstacles for da'wah activities towards non-Muslims. Finally, the study highlights the prospect of the Muslim community in Busan, hoping that with certain incentives and greater efforts, the community will thrive in the future.

## خلاصة البحث

بدأ الإسلام ينتشر في كوريا الجنوبية خاصة بعد الحرب الكورية (1950-1953) وخاصة في سيول، المدينة الحضرية الرئيسية في البلاد. وبما أن معظم المؤلفات المتعلقة بالإسلام والمسلمين تركزت في سيول، فإن هناك عمل محدود خاصة باللغة الإنجليزية حول الإسلام والمجتمع المسلم في مدينة بوسان، حتى أن العدد الفعلي للمسلمين المقيمين هناك لا يزال غير حاسم على الرغم من وجودهم منذ عام 1976. وبالمثل، لا تتوفر الكثير من المعلومات. على حالة المسلمين بما في ذلك التصور السلبي أو المعاملة التي يظهرها تجاه المجموعة من قبل السكان غير المسلمين في المدينة. ومن ثم، يهدف هذا البحث إلى التعريف بالمجتمع المسلم في الطرف الجنوبي من كوريا الجنوبية والذي يسمى بوسان والذي لا يعرفه الكثيرون، مع التركيز على دور ومساهمات الأفراد والمنظمات الإسلامية المحلية والأجنبية في تنمية المجتمع المسلم في المدينة. مع إنشاء مسجد الفتح في بوسان عام 1980، بدأ المجتمع المسلم في بوسان في الازدهار ببطء مما أدى إلى زيادة عدد المسلمين المحليين والأجانب، وكذلك المساجد والمراكز الإسلامية. تُعرف مدينة بوسان بالبوابة الجنوبية لكوريا الجنوبية وتشتهر بازدهار أنشطة الموانئ البحرية والصناعات الحديثة المختلفة، وقد استقطبت مدينة بوسان العديد من العمال الأجانب من جميع أنحاء العالم بما في ذلك المسلمين من إندونيسيا وباكستان وبنغلاديش وأوزبكستان وغيرها مما ساهم بالتالي في ازدهارها وتنمية المجتمع المسلم هناك. ومن هنا يرغب البحث في دراسة تطور العلاقة بين المسلمين الكوريين والأجانب في مدينة بوسان واكتشاف المشكلات والتحديات التي يواجهها المجتمع، وكذلك الآفاق المستقبلية. باستخدام المنهج النوعي، أي المقابلات والملاحظة والمصادر الثانوية، توفر الدراسة معلومات حول الموضوع قيد الدراسة التي تم جمعها من مختلف

الشخصيات والأفراد الذين يشاركون بشكل مباشر في إنشاء وتطوير المجتمع المسلم في مدينة بوسان. كما تم الحصول على معلومات من الكوريين الجنوبيين غير المسلمين حول وجهات نظرهم حول الإسلام والمسلمين في كوريا الجنوبية. لقد أظهرت النتائج أن هناك تعاونًا وثيقًا بين المسلمين المحليين والأجانب في مدينة بوسان، وهو ما يتجسد بشكل أفضل في المنظمات الإسلامية المختلفة التي كانت موجودة وتديرها كلا المجموعتين في المدينة. ومع ذلك، فإن المسلمين في مدينة بوسان ليسوا معفيين من المشاكل التي تجعل حياتهم صعبة في بعض الأحيان وتكون بمثابة عقبات أمام أنشطة الدعوة تجاه غير المسلمين. أخيرًا، تسلط الدراسة الضوء على آفاق المجتمع المسلم في مدينة بوسان، على أمل أن يتمكن المجتمع من الازدهار في المستقبل من خلال حوافز معينة وجهود أكبر.

## **APPROVAL PAGE**

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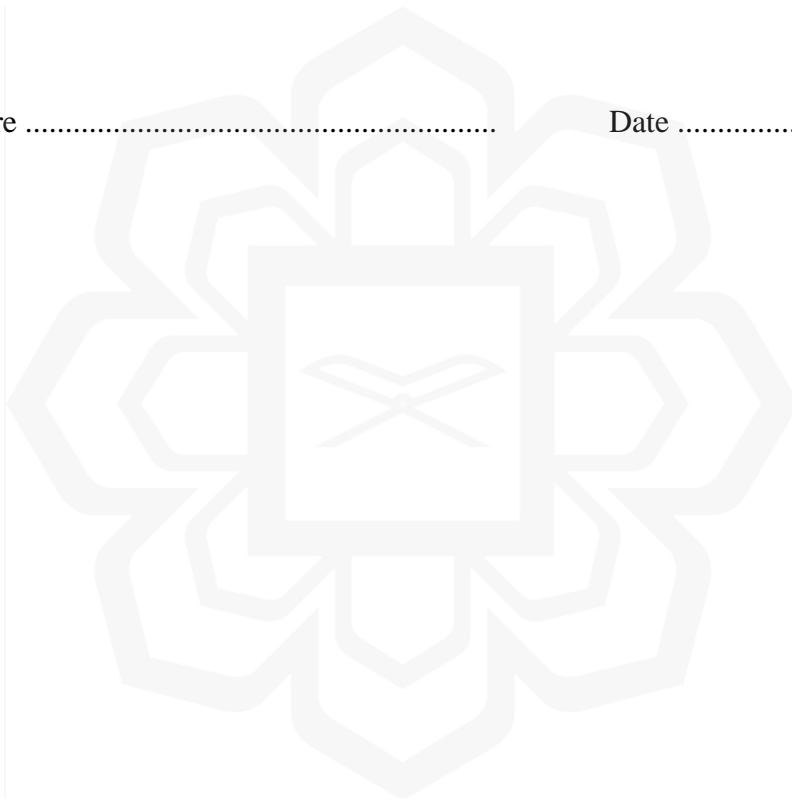
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## DECLARATION

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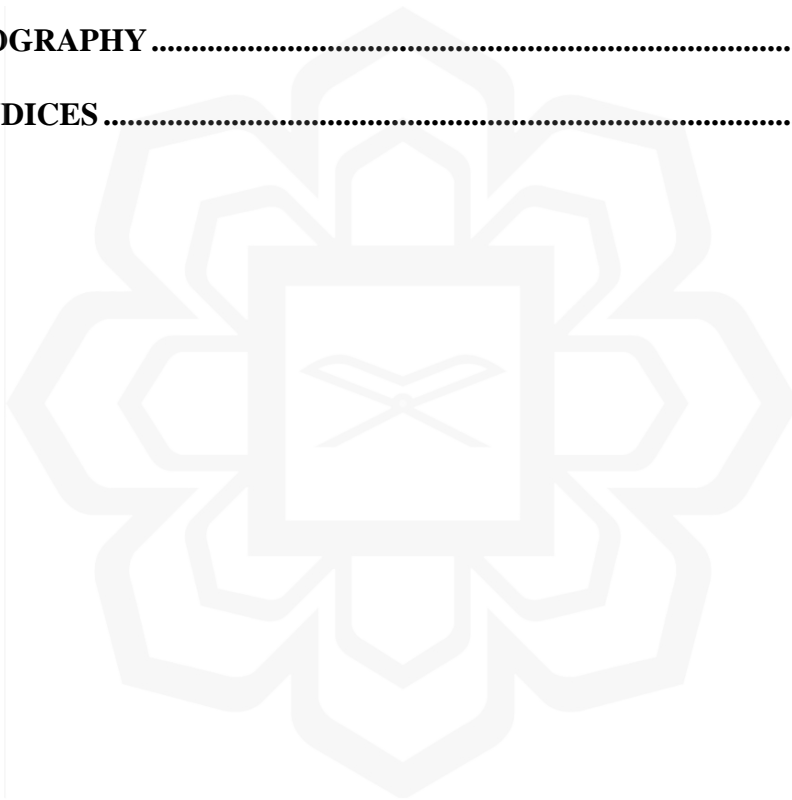
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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A.D.	Annon Domini
B.C.	Before Christ
B.C.E.	Before Common Era
C.E.	Common Era
BFIA	Busan Foundation for International Activities
BMSA	Busan Muslim Student Association
BPJPH	Badan Penyelenggara Jaminan Produk Halal
CTS TV	Christian Television System
GSFC	<i>Geumsaem</i> Foreign Centre
HDC	Halal Development Corporation
iERA	Islamic Education and research Academy
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
JAKIM	Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia
K-Pop	Korean Popular Culture
KCC	Korean Christian Council
KIHI	Korean Institute of Halal Industry
KMF	Korean Muslim Federation
Koslims	Korean Muslims
KOSIS	Korean Statistical Information Service
KTO	Korea Tourism Organisation
MBC	Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGOs	Non-governmental Organisations

P.B.U.H.	Peace Be Upon Him
PUMITA	Persaudaraan Umat Muslim Indonesia Al-Fatah
RTM	Radio Televisyen Malaysia
S.A.W.	Salla Allahu Aleyhi Wassalam (Peace Be Upon Him)
SBS	Seoul Broadway Station
SOP	Standard Operation Procedure
SR	Saudi Riyal
S.W.T.	Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala (Glory to Him, the Exalted)
THIDA	Taiwan Halal Integrity Development Association
UN	United Nation
USD	U.S. Dollar
WAMY	World Assembly of Muslim Youth

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

South Korea is a homogenous country with a population consisting mostly of Korean descendants, imbuing the South Koreans with a strong sense of pride and loyalty towards their country.<sup>1</sup> This strong belief in ethnic homogeneity resulted in the South Koreans' strong opposition to multiculturalism ideology.<sup>2</sup> However, in reality the country is already a multicultural society which consists of small groups of races living and building their own community since decades ago. Since the majority are made up of the Korean community, the non-Korean communities, such as ethnic Chinese, Japanese, and North Koreans, as well as religious minorities like Muslims, are small; hence, their existence in the country is not much noticed by the people of South Korea.<sup>3</sup> As the existence of these communities is overlooked, it is proper to propose a study that can shed light on the existence of these non-Korean communities, which the researcher is called to do. Hence, the researcher studied the establishment of the Muslim community in Busan, which began when Turkey, a Muslim country, joined the Korean War (1950-1953).

When the Korean War started in 1950, the stability in the region was completely disrupted by the conflict between the North and South. This war had also involved many other countries; for example, China, the United States, and several other countries under

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<sup>1</sup> Han Kyung Koo, "The Archaeology of the Ethnically Homogeneous Nation-State and Multiculturalism in Korea", *Korea Journal*, vol. 47, no. 4 (Winter, 2007): 8-31.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.



the command of the United Nations, including Turkey.<sup>4</sup> The war, which ended in 1953 with the declaration of the Armistice Treaty, had brought devastating results as millions of people were estimated to have died during the war; two million civilians and two million members of the armies from both sides.<sup>5</sup> The war has been etched as one of the most gruesome wars in history because of its high fatality rate of Korean civilian compared to World War Two and the Vietnam War.<sup>6</sup> As the war ended, both South and North Korea declared independence from each other and this separation continues until today.

In the aftermath of the war, some members of the Turkish army who had fought in the war decided to stay in South Korea and through them, Islam began to be spread in the country.<sup>7</sup> In the early period of this propagation of Islam, the Imam of the Turkish army brigade, Adul Gafur Karaismailoglu, acted as the religious leader to the Turkish army, giving lectures and leading prayers as he felt obligated to spread the teaching of Islam in the country. His lectures attracted several Koreans, which resulted in the conversion of Kim Jin Gyu and Yoon Du Young to Islam. Kim and Yoon adopted Umar and Muhammad, respectively, as their Muslim names and later became the backbone of da'wah<sup>8</sup> work in South Korea.<sup>9</sup> The Korean Islamic Society was then established in 1955 with the aim to spread the teaching of Islam in the country; it successfully converted 39 more Koreans.<sup>10</sup> A year later, an Imam from Turkey, named Zubeyr Koch,

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<sup>4</sup> Bruce Cumings, *The Korean War: A History*. (New York: Modern Library, 2010), pp. 32-36

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 36.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Abdul Haq, *Gerakan Islam di Korea dan Indonesia*. (Yogyakarta: Bagian Penerbitan Dua Dimensi, 1985), 109-110.

<sup>8</sup> According to Izzati: "Da'wah meaning preaching, spreading, inviting, asking, leading, encouraging and enjoining good and forbidden evil" Izzati Abu Al-Fazl. *The spread of Islam: the contributing factors*. London: Islamic College for Advanced Studies Press, 2002. P. 76.

<sup>9</sup> Sohn Joo Young, *Organisations and Activities of the Muslim Minority in Korea*. (n.d.). Retrieved August 3, 2016. 1-2. [www.world-dialogue.org/MWL/minority/C1430-M08-1.pdf](http://www.world-dialogue.org/MWL/minority/C1430-M08-1.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> Hee Soo Lee, "Historical Survey on Islam in East Asia - II", *The Muslim World League Journal*, vol. 32, no. 6 (August, 2004): 32.

arrived in Seoul and further hastened the da'wah work there, which led to the successful conversion of more than 200 Koreans to Islam.<sup>11</sup>

This development of the Muslim community initially happened in Dong Daemun, Seoul, as it is the place where the remnants of the Turkish army resided after the end of the Korean War. Islamic teachings later reached other parts of South Korea. Currently, there are several existing Muslim communities in South Korea; for instance, in Busan, Anyang, Ansan, Gwangju, Daejeon, and others. Since the Muslim community of Busan has been selected as the topic of study, lengthy discussions on the establishment of the Muslim community in the metropolitan city of Busan will therefore be further discussed in the following chapters.

Before looking further into the Muslim community in Busan, it is important to know the number of Muslims in South Korea. Houssain Kettani did a survey that calculated the number of local and foreign Muslims residing in the country from 1950 to 2009. He stated that “estimates for the Muslim population increased from few hundred or less than 0.01 percent in 1950, to few thousands or around 0.02 percent in 1971, to 235,000 or 0.50 percent in 2009”.<sup>12</sup> From this number, 45,000 Korean Muslims have been accounted for, while foreign Muslims are three times that number, with an estimation of as many as 190,000 people. As stated in an article posted by *The Korean Herald* about the population of foreign Muslims who had migrated to South Korea, this migrant population mainly originated from countries such as Indonesia, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, who came to South Korea for work, while some came from Uzbekistan, Malaysia, and the Middle East.<sup>13</sup> Since this research revolves around the community's

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<sup>11</sup> Sohn Joo Young, “Organisations and...”, 1.

<sup>12</sup> Houssain Kettani, “Muslim Population in Asia: 1950-2020”, *International Journal of Environmental Sciences and Development*, vol. 1, no. 2 (2010): 151.

<sup>13</sup> Ben Jhoty, “Muslim community finds refuge in religion,” *The Korean Herald*, 21 September, 2001, Muslim Population,

development in Busan, it is important to understand the definition of ‘community development’, which is:

“A process where community members come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems. Community wellbeing (economic, social, environmental, and cultural) often evolves from this type of collective action being taken at a grassroots level.”<sup>14</sup>

The above process is applied to the study in understanding the dynamic relationship between local and foreign Muslims in the city and how this contributes to the development of Muslim community in Busan.

Busan is located at the tip of south-east Korean Peninsula and known as the second largest metropolitan city in South Korea after Seoul. It has been separated from the South Gyeongsang Province, having its self-governing authority led by an elected mayor.<sup>15</sup> As of 2011, the population reached up to 3.6 million people and the metropolitan city is the largest industrial city in the country resulting from seaport trading activities, which makes it the fifth busiest seaport in the world.<sup>16</sup> A deeper elaboration on Busan’s history and the Muslim community will be done in Chapter 3.

The choice of Busan’s Muslim community as a subject of study comes with several reasons. Firstly, since most scholarly writings focused on the Muslim community in Seoul, information on other areas such as Busan, Ansan, and Jeju is lacking and scarce. Therefore, this research aims to provide more comprehensive details on the Muslim community of Busan. Secondly, as Busan is the second largest metropolitan city in South Korea and the main industrial area of the country, it attracts many foreign workers

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<<http://www.muslimpopulation.com/asia/Korea%20South/Muslim%20community%20finds%20refuge%20in%20religion.php>> (accessed 20 August, 2016).

<sup>14</sup> Flo Frank and Anne Smith, *The Community Development Handbook: A Tool to Build Community Capacity*. (Quebec, Human Resources Development Canada, 1999), 6.

<sup>15</sup> Kim Jong Hae, *Life in Busan: A Guide for Foreign Residents*, (Busan, Busan Foundation for International Activities, 2013), 21.

<sup>16</sup> Martin Robinson, Ray Bartlett and Rob Whyte, *Korea*, (London, Lonely Planet, 2007), 227.

to work there, including Muslims from countries such as Indonesia, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Thus, a foreign Muslim community has emerged in Busan and their relationship with the local Muslim community in the city is worth studying. Another reason is that with Busan being known as the southern gate to South Korea, this attracts many Muslim tourists to the city. Several famous attractions are the Gamcheon Culture Village, Haeundae Beach, Dongbaeksom Island, and many historical and beautiful places that set Busan as one of the great tourism destinations. It is hoped that this study will provide more information pertaining to the Muslim community, halal premises, and the Islamic organisations and institutions available in the city to ease their stay in Busan. Lastly, the Muslim community in Busan is very active in da'wah activities, community services, and community developments, hence, it is also hoped that this study will shed light on these activities and garner attention from Muslims all over the world to come to Busan to help their mission in spreading the teaching of Islam, either financially, physically, or through other possible contributions.

In conclusion, this research focuses on the establishment of Muslim community in Busan, which began in the 1970s and has continued until the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The timeline proposed by the researcher starts in the 1970s because the Muslim community in Busan began to root there during the period mentioned. This research investigates the community until the 21<sup>st</sup> century to further understand its development, either its progress or regress. General information on other Muslim communities that have existed in South Korea is also included in this study. Furthermore, this research highlights the cooperation (economic, social, education, da'wah works and others) between local and foreign Muslims in Busan and proceeds to highlight the challenges faced by the community that have made them a strong community in a non-Muslim country. It is also important to recognise the roles played by local and foreign prominent

figures and organisations in developing the Muslim community in Busan. Several organisations are actively involved in the establishment and development of the community: for example, local Muslim organisations such as the Korean Muslim Federation (KMF) and *Geumsaem*, as well as foreign Muslim organisations such as Persaudaraan Umat Muslim Indonesia Al-Fatah (PUMITA). Lastly, the study discusses the future prospects of Busan's Muslim community.

## **1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The purpose of this study is essentially to examine and bring forth information about the Muslim community in the metropolitan city of Busan, South Korea, which is currently scanty due to the lack of interest in investigating this community and compiling information for future reference. While South Korea is currently acknowledged by the world community thanks to the spread of its popular culture via dramas, Korean pop (K-Pop), and cuisine, knowledge about the Muslim community in the country is still hard to find. In fact, most Muslims in other countries are still unaware of their existence. It is quite motivating for the researcher to introduce the Korean Muslim community, which has existed from as early as the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century to the world.

Although there have been articles or studies published by scholars on the community, these have only provided a general background and history of the communities or have only focused on one Muslim community; for example, Sohn Joo Young, a former KMF president, gave an account of the Muslim community in South Korea with much discussion on the building of mosques and Islamic centres,<sup>17</sup> while

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<sup>17</sup> Sohn Joo Young, "Organisations and...", 5-9.

Jiyun Camilla Nam described only the life of Muslims who live in the Itaewon district, Seoul, in her article.<sup>18</sup> Hence, further study is important and necessary, and the researcher feels responsible to uncover the history of the Muslim community in South Korea, particularly pertaining to its development and cooperation between local and foreign Muslims, especially in Busan.

Despite having several active organisations in Busan, there are no accurate statistics on the number of Muslims residing in Busan. Even though a survey was done by these organisations, most of the respondents were not interested to fill it in, which resulted in the failure of calculating the number of local and foreign Muslims in Busan. Moreover, some foreign Muslims were busy with their labour and had a lack of free time since they work in construction areas which negated them from joining social activities held by Muslim organisations.<sup>19</sup> A field study was done in the hope that the researcher will acquire the number of Muslims, local and foreign, in Busan from 1970 and the latest statistics.

The researcher observed a dearth of interest when conducting a literature search on the Muslim community in Busan. It was evident that there was limited information available in both English and Korean. In contrast, sources and information related to the Muslim community in Seoul Metropolitan City are readily accessible in various forms, such as articles, newspapers, theses, and other publications. Therefore, being the second-largest city in South Korea and a significant home for the Muslim community, it is crucial to have detailed information about Islam and Muslims there. This information can facilitate global Muslims, particularly *du'at*<sup>20</sup>, in recognising their

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<sup>18</sup> Jiyun Camilla Nam, "Itaewon, Muslims and Koslms: Inter-cultural Dynamics in the Muslim Neighborhood of Seoul", *Situations*, Vol. 6 (winter, 2012): 52-54.

<sup>19</sup> PUMITA Busan interviewed by Ahmad Faris Naqiyuddin bin Mohd Ghazi via Facebook Messenger on 30 September 2016.

<sup>20</sup> *Du'at* is the plural form of *da'i*. It is used to refer to a group of Muslim preachers or missionaries.

presence and assisting them with their needs, as well as supporting the development of the community, including da'wah activities.

Furthermore, there is a need for constructive writing elaborating the establishment of the Muslim community in the country, as Islam and Muslims are being perceived as threats to the world and have been mislabelled as terrorists in many non-Muslim countries. These negative perceptions towards Islam and Muslims have been blindly accepted by many, including South Koreans, which has led to the Muslims in South Korea receiving bad treatment from the local community. Moreover, the rivalry of Christianity has also posed a threat to the South Korean Muslim community as they have spread propaganda about Islam and Muslims in South Korea through the media, either in newspapers or television; for instance, CTS TV in 2008 degraded Islam and Muslims in its programme when they claimed that if Islam were to be successfully propagated in the country, so would the terrorist ideology.<sup>21</sup> These accusations towards Islam and Muslims have swayed the views of South Koreans as discontentment and mistrust towards Muslims continue to increase over the years. This study, therefore, investigated the root of the problem and how the Muslim community in Busan has dealt with the situation. In fact, this situation calls for Muslims, both local and foreign, to stand together to refute the allegations. Hence, it is worth to look further into the relationships forged between local and foreign Muslims in understanding their significance towards each other.

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<sup>21</sup> Hee Soo Lee, "Two Contradictory Trends in Recent Korean Society: Understanding Islam and Islamophobia," Muslim World League, (2011): 3-4. <[www.world-dialogue.org/MWL/taiwan/TW-C-4-4.pdf](http://www.world-dialogue.org/MWL/taiwan/TW-C-4-4.pdf)> (accessed 24 August, 2016).

### **1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

In identifying the underlying issues pertaining to the establishment of the Muslim community in Busan and the relationship between local and foreign Muslims, the following questions are listed:

1. How have the Muslims in Busan established and developed a community in the metropolitan city since the 1970s?
2. What is the nature of the relationship that has been established between local and foreign Muslims in Busan?
3. Which prominent figures and institutions have been involved in the building of the community in Busan?
4. What are the problems and challenges faced by the Muslim community in Busan since its establishment and what are the future prospects of the community's growth and developments?

### **1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

This study was proposed to gain insight into the Muslim community in Busan, South Korea, and the community development and its situation since the 1970s. The study proceeds with an examination of the relationship between Korean and foreign Muslims, as well as their dependency towards each other, which would signify the unity and strength of the Muslim brotherhood, making it possible for Islam to thrive for more than 60 years in this metropolitan city. Moreover, the study also aims to discover the problems and challenges faced by the community, as well as the future prospects of the Muslim community in Busan, which will be critically assessed.

Therefore, four objectives of the study can be concluded from the main research questions that had been mentioned earlier: