

HABIBIA ISLAMICUS

(The International Journal of Arabic & Islamic Research) (Quarterly) Trilingual (Arabic, English, Urdu) ISSN:2664-4916 (P) 2664-4924 (E)
Home Page: <http://habibiaislamicus.com>

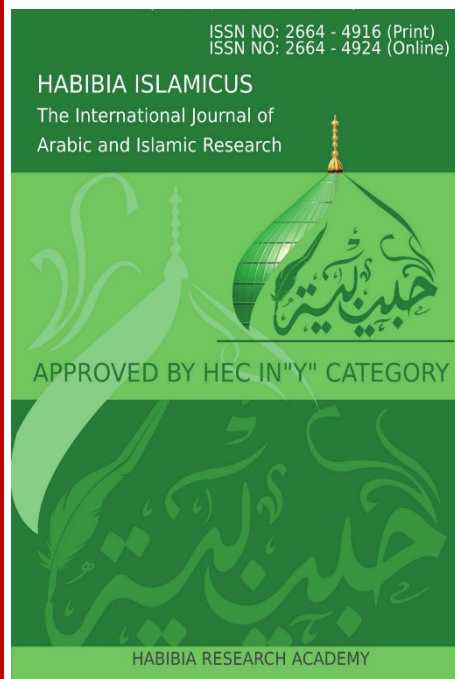
Approved by HEC in Y Category

Indexed with: IRI (AIU), Australian Islamic Library, ARI, ISI, SIS, Euro pub.

PUBLISHER HABIBIA RESEARCH ACADEMY
Project of JAMIA HABIBIA INTERNATIONAL,
Reg. No: KAR No. 2287 Societies Registration
Act XXI of 1860 Govt. of Sindh, Pakistan.

Website: www.habibia.edu.pk,

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TOPIC:

MASJID AS A SOCIO-ECONOMIC MODIFIER- THE CASE OF SEOUL CENTRAL MASJID ITAEWON, SOUTH KOREA.

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How to Cite: Ubaid Ullah, Muhammad Iqbal, and Syed Mansoor Ali Shah. 2022. "MASJID AS A SOCIO-ECONOMIC MODIFIER- THE CASE OF SEOUL CENTRAL MASJID ITAEWON, SOUTH KOREA.". *Habibia Islamicus (The International Journal of Arabic and Islamic Research)* 6 (2):61-68.
<https://doi.org/10.47720/hi.2022.0602e04>.

URL: <https://habibiaislamicus.com/index.php/hirj/article/view/252>

Vol. 6, No.2 || April –June 2022 || P. 61-68

Published online: 2022-06-18

QR. Code



**MASJID AS A SOCIO-ECONOMIC MODIFIER- THE CASE OF SEOUL
CENTRAL MASJID ITAEWON, SOUTH KOREA.**

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ABSTRACT:

Masjid is an important place maker, shaping and reshaping its neighborhood. The role of masjid ranges to an all-encompassing place having impact on all activities of life in a society. Seoul central Masjid of South Korea was built in 1976 as the first Masjid in modern history of South Korea. Since 1990s the immediate surroundings of the Masjid revitalized by itself in the without any governmental interventions. This study explored the existing neighborhood of the masjid and examined the urban maps form 1970 and 2020 to find out the impact of masjid on the revitalization of its neighborhood. The results shows that the urban form remained unchanged to a major extent, but the activities of the neighborhood changed to those related with the Muslim community. The study also presented the conditions, and events which paved the way for the re-generation process. The Masjid in this case acted as socio-economic modifier for its,.

KEYWORDS: Muslim Street, Seoul central Masjid, Islam in south Korea, Halal food in Korea, Itaewon

INTRODUCTION: The construction of Seoul central masjid Started in 1974 and was completed in 1976. By 1997, five more Masjid had been built in South Korea and the Muslim population had reached 40,000 (Lee, 1997). Today there are more than 8 Masjids and 61 prayer centers throughout the country. In 2010, it has been recorded that there are roughly 45,000 resident Muslims and an additional 100,000 temporary Muslim residents in Korea, such as students, businessmen, and migrant workers (Nam, 2012). Since, late 1990s the number of Muslim immigrants has been steadily on the rise since and shows a steep rise since 2000s (Hee-Soo & Young-Joo, 2012). At the time of construction of the Masjid the number of Muslims was much lesser than today's Forty-five thousand native Korean Muslims. Many historians believe that the oil crisis of 70s developed Korea's interest in the middle east and therefore the Korean government donated land for the construction of mosque. Construction Aid was provided by Muslim Country like Saudi Arabia and Malaysia etc. Later, Sheikh Sultan Islamic School was added by Saudi Arabia grant. The Street leading to the Masjid is known as Muslim Street or Islamic Street – which contains a small strip of halal food restaurants, grocery shops, Islamic bookshops, and Hajj travel agents (Song 2016).

Objectives of the study:

1. To explore the reasons of socio-economic revitalization of Muslim Street in Itaewon.
2. To examine the urban form of the Muslim Street from 1970 and 2020.
3. To find out the role of Masjid in the socio-economic re-development of its immediate surroundings.

Background History and Literature Review:

The contacts of Muslims with Korea date back to the late fifth and early sixth century. (Hee-Soo, 1991). In the time of the Koryo dynasty, merchants used to visit Korea from Arab countries, and some Muslims were settled in Korea from central Asia. Even at that time, there was a Masjid in Gaesung, in Korea (Nam, 2012). As time progressed through the Koryo dynasty, Muslim communities settled, and some villages were founded by Muslim merchants (Seo, 2010). A major change occurred in 1427 when a royal order banned Islamic rites and dress to be performed and worn (Lee, 1997). After 1900s with the expansion of Russia into Central Asia and the Japanese occupation, migration of Muslims started again (Fathil, Fauziah, & Fathiah, 2011). In the Korean War in 1950, the United Nations sent forces including troops from Turkey to help the South Korean troops in the war against the North Korea. In 1955, the first two Koreans embraced Islam through, in the camp of Turkish army (Seo, 2010).



(a)



(b)

Fig 1:

Seoul Central Masjid (a) Under construction (b) at present

In the same year, the first Muslim society of Korea was formed and after twelve years the Korea Islamic Foundation was established. Before 1960s, relationship of Korea with Muslim countries was mainly focused on countries of South Asia and those in Southeast Asia.

In the 1970s oil boom, South Korea focused its attention on Muslim countries, especially oil producing countries in the Gulf (Song, 2016). In 1976, Seoul Central Mosque was built with an Islamic center in Itaewon through the financial aid of Arab countries, and the Korea Islamic Foundation was transformed into the Korea Muslim Federation (Lee, 1997). From the era of Joseon Dynasty (1392) Itaewon remained as an area for foreigner because of its location to Seoul. Also, due to the proximity

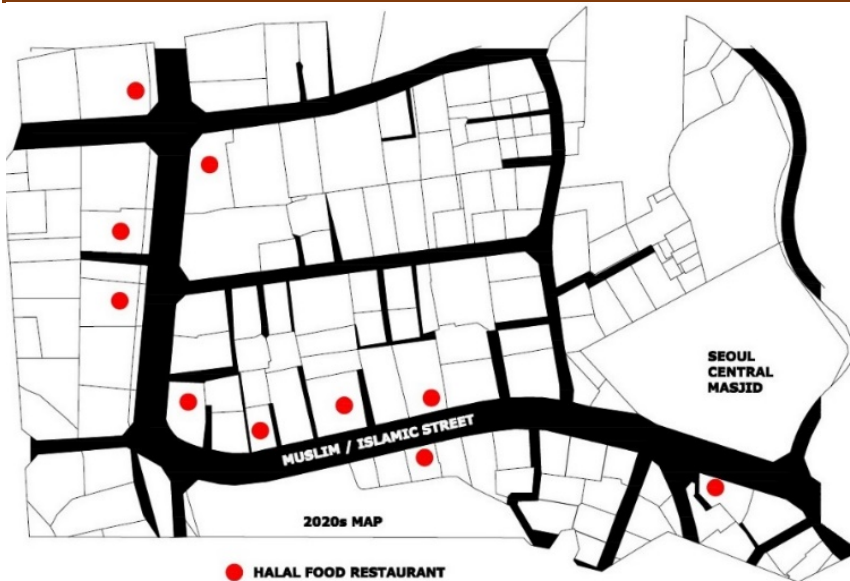
to Han River, the main water route from the Southern part of the peninsula to Seoul. The origin shows that Itaewon, originated from Chinese words meaning ‘the other’, and this place has always been associated with foreigners. The geographical location Itaewon was one of the crucial factors for foreign troops to be stationed from the early 19th century. The area was occupied by Chinese then Japanese and now American since Korean war. Commercial as well as residential units around the army base were developed.

Research Methodology

This research used case studies and combined strategies method with explorative and explanatory approach. In the first step data the about the case was collected, and the area was visited. The halal food restaurants were marked on the map. In the second step the maps of the neighborhood were obtained from the Seoul metropolitan office for the comparative analysis of urban form (1970 and 2020). In the third step a synthesis was developed for the possible explanation of urban regeneration of the neighborhood taking Masjid as a catalyst.

1. Data about the Case (Location of Halal Food Restaurant and Grocery Shops Around the Masjid)

the Muslim population in Korea was about 1000 at the time of construction of this Masjid. After the completion of the, the population of Muslim grow to three thousand just in three years. After 1990s with the introduction of industrial training program by the Korean government a significant of number of works from Muslim countries came to Korea on work visa. At present most of the business on the way leading to the central mosque are related to the Muslim community, like Halal food restaurant, groceries cloth airline ticketing and a bookstore. Apart from the Halal tag these restaurants also present a different food experience of the different Muslim countries with additional tag name of the country like, India, Pakistan, Turkey, Dubai, Lebanon, Marrakesh, Indonesia, Bangladesh etc. These are also visited by native Koreans and foreigner from other countries to have an exotic food.

**Fig 2:**

Neighborhood map of Seoul Central Masjid showing Halal food restaurants

**Fig 3:**

Neighborhood Images of Seoul Central Masjid

2. Analysis of urban form 1970s and 2020

By comparing these two layouts of 50-year difference the change in the urban form is not obvious. Only two minor changes as shown in the encircled occurred during this time span. Because of the relocation of US army Base has always been delayed due to several factors and thus the area is not redeveloped /redesigned. In fact, this area has always been revitalized with similar urban form, with the change of function users and interior. The first example of this the US army base itself which was replaced by DIFFERENT USERS.

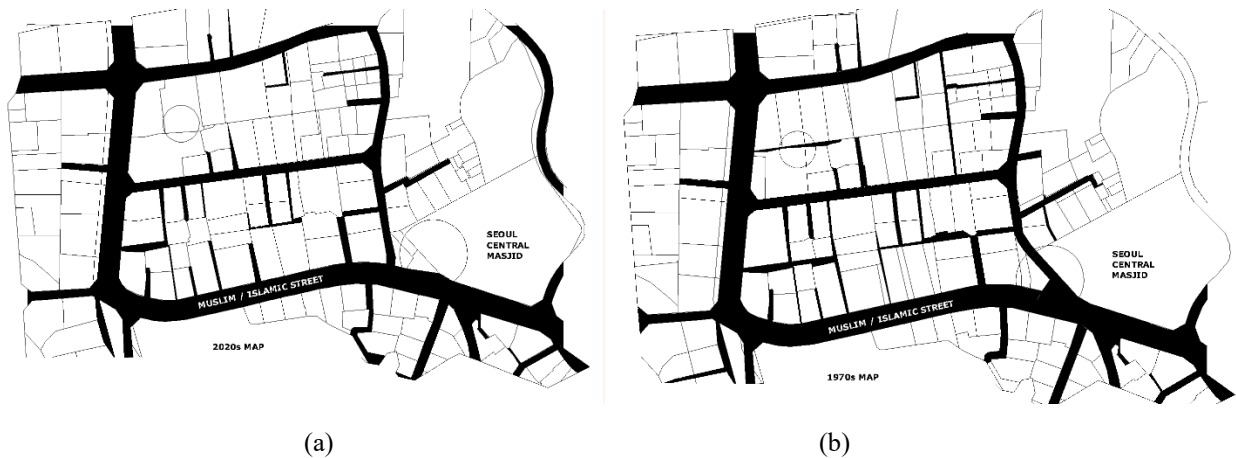


Fig 4:

Neighborhood map Seoul Central Masjid (a) 2020 (b) 1970

Until the 1990s the area was dominated by the business related to the American army. The major business included garments, shoes, bags, leather products, and counterfeit goods. There were also most entertainment clubs and bars which also include sex business. Today Itaewon's business has changed to restaurant and cafes since 1990s.

3. Synthesis

Data from the above two steps of the analysis showed that the urban form of the immediate neighborhood of Seoul central masjid remained unchanged, but the nature of shops/items changed in the past few decades, many researchers see this change or revitalization of neighborhood as a result of multiple factors, from economic growth of Korea to the decrease in number of American army, but the central point which these researcher missed or not emphasized in their research is the Masjid itself. Masjid has always been a central

pillar in the socio-economic development of Muslim society. It was after the construction of this Masjid that the number of Muslim spread in different part of South Korea came for Friday prayers and eventually the street leading to the masjid revitalized into businesses related to the Muslim community. This street eventually got the name of Muslim Street or Islamic Street due many halal restaurants, grocery shops and other shops related to Muslims and Islam.

Conclusion:

This study demonstrated the role of Seoul central Masjid as one of the major catalysts for the formation Muslim community and their business; however, this was not until the 1990s when the immigration rule's flexibility, and the Korean economic growth attracted many low developed foreign workers to the area due to cheap rents because of its abundance by the previous users. The neighboring streets revitalized into new type of business for the increasing number of new users in the area.

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