

## Research article

# The Future of the Halal Tourism Market in Japan After COVID-19: An Economic Pragmatism Perspective

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**Abstract.** This qualitative study aimed to describe how Halal tourism in Japan developed five years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and how it should be supported to recover post-pandemic, using a perspective of economic pragmatism, which is the alignment of policies with economic development interests. Allegedly one of the largest potential markets in the goods and services sector, Halal tourism is often described as capitalizing on the increasing number of Muslim tourists from both Muslim and Muslim-majority countries. Under this assumption, the increasing number of restaurants and hotels in Japan providing services for Muslim tourists has a correlation with the increasing fame of Japan among Muslim tourists. The Japanese Government has also supported the establishment of the Halal and Muslim-friendly market in Japanese tourism through the provision of visa-free visits for some countries, international promotion through fairs and web promotion, and cooperation with Islam-related non-governmental organizations. The society-level contributions have mainly been focused on the opening of Halal and Muslim-friendly businesses, with the assistance of Muslim residents in Japan. Such multi-level contributions from the Japanese Government, non-governmental organizations, Japanese society and Muslim residents could provide hope for the recovery of the struggling Halal tourism market in the country, as well as for contributing to a more inclusive Japan with Muslims and non-Muslim Japanese living harmoniously.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, Halal tourism, inclusive Japan, Islam, Japan

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## 1. Introduction

Mentioning the country Japan, the terms “technologically advanced” and “modern” often become synchronous for many people across the globe. However, the country has lately added “cultural uniqueness” and “openness” to its name, mainly due to its massive expansion on tourism industry and its aggressive tourism promotion in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. With tourism being the country’s main income aside of agriculture and fishery and manufacturing among the top three, it is understandable that Japan intends to invest more in strengthening its tourism foundation [1]. Such contribution results in the

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country being nominated one the world's most favorite tourism destinations in which international tourists frequently visit Japan to immerse themselves in the hospitality and beauty found barely anywhere else on Earth. In 2018 alone, Japan managed to attract 31,191,856 international tourists, approximately 3 million higher than the previous year with tourists mostly coming from China, Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, and other parts of Asia, with other parts of the world such as Australia, Europe, Africa, and America following [2].

The country has also experimented in one of the newest segments of tourism: "Halal Tourism", being the segment of tourism focused on serving the needs of Muslim tourists, mainly dietary and spiritual needs, in accordance with the Islamic law of *Sharia* [3] known for strictly forbidding the consumption of pork, alcohol, and meat of animals not slaughtered in the name of God (in Arabic, *Allah*) in addition to the compulsory five times daily prayers a Muslim must offer [4]. Despite facing challenges due to the two main issues of pork is the mainly consumed meat in Japan, no religiously related regulations applied to food production [5], and difficulties on providing official prayer spaces for Muslims [6], Japan's tourism industry somehow managed to adapt on such needs. Capitalizing the fact that Islam is the second most-adopted religion in the world with followers numbering at 1.8 billion people in 2018 [7], the continuous adaptation of Japan's domestic tourism market to Muslim needs has placed Japan into one of the most nominated non-Muslim countries in terms of hospitality towards Muslim tourists.

However, since the outbreak of COVID-19, the Halal tourism industry in Japan had faced a major blow unlike any other industries the country relies on. Due to its near-complete dependence to foreign Muslim tourists, the complete stop of Muslim tourists' arrival in Japan has caused many Halal and Muslim-friendly establishments to close their doors until an unknown extent. While some establishments, particularly restaurants, managed to continue operating by either limiting menu availability or shortening opening hours, it also creates problems for domestic Muslim tourists as they have less food options during tourist visits thus creating a problem loop which if not solved soon and correctly, may lead to further decline of the Halal tourism in Japan in general. This research aims to discuss how Japan's Halal tourism has developed through the last five years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (particularly year 2015-2020) and how it can possibly recover from the decline the pandemic has caused. While answering the question, the author also intends to discuss Halal tourism as a step towards creating a more inclusive Japanese society in which Japanese people can live side-by-side in a more diverse society.

## 2. Methodology

This research is intended to be qualitative research aimed to describe the changes Japan has made, both in national and societal scale, in responding to the rising trend of Halal tourism for the last five years, preferably year 2015-2020 prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The reasoning behind the selected timeframe is the period of increasing Muslim tourists being at its peak at this point. Furthermore, it is presumable that the peak of the growing interest in the Japanese tourism industry towards the Halal tourism industry is at this timeframe, but not to disregard the changes in the year 2010-2014 as research on Halal tourism in Japan at said timeframe managed to deliver an insight on the start of the trend.

This research intends to combine secondary data collection method utilizing book and journal and news articles as the main source of information and primary method by conducting interviews with individuals involved in the Halal tourism industry, mainly business establishment owners, managers, and workers, while simultaneously observing the establishments physically through visits, utilizing the relaxation of travel restrictions within Japan. Some sources would be in Japanese as most of studies conducted by Japanese researchers are conducted and written in Japanese instead of English thus creating a unique challenge for the author. However, Japanese-based articles undoubtedly deliver an insight into the development of Halal tourism and industry in general, mainly in prefectural scale, which the author finds to be rarely found in English-based articles. Interviews on individuals are intended to be short, mainly non-structured interviews to create a quick insight into the current situation the establishments face, particularly facing the COVID-19 pandemic. However, guidelines are to be established as follows: (1) how the business is running before and after the outbreak, (2) general customers of the establishments (who they are, where they reside, and how frequent they visit), and (3) strategies to overcome the shortage of customers in short and long period of time.

## 3. Recent Studies on Halal Regulation and Halal Tourism in Japan

Studies on Islam and Muslim society has been one of the most recent socio-economic issues in the world. Following the rise of Muslim immigrants from areas such as the Middle East and Central Asia in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century, discussions on Muslim migrant issues, their clash and integration with the locals, and other issues have

become more frequent. One rising issue is the adoption of Halal regulations in many countries and its impact on Halal tourism foundation. In the case of Japan, research on Halal regulations and Halal tourism within Japan are mostly presented in Japanese. However, it is still possible a great number of English-based articles outside Japan discussing Halal regulations and Halal tourism in Japan conducted by both Japanese and non-Japanese researchers.

Halal tourism, based on various research, is essentially a new concept in the tourism industry [8] thus creating a degree of understanding on what the rule of Halal is and what are included in it among the society, particularly those intending to establish a tourism-related establishment, is essential [7]. Additionally, it is commonly referred to with many names, but not limited to Muslim-friendly tourism and Sharia tourism [8]. Due to its sensitive nature as Halal is closely related to religion, the formation of Halal tourism in national scale may instigate various responses, both positively and negatively. One example is that due to the difference between Muslims' lifestyle with the commonly adopted religions in the country (i.e., Japan with Shintoism, Buddhism, and Christianity), many would perceive the adoption of Halal values being a part of Islamic requirements exclusively and such issue has been suspected by many to be the main cause of the shyness of tourism enterprises from venturing into Halal tourism sector [9].

Another issue is that the relatively new penetration of Halal values in the Japanese tourism market, specifically the gastronomic (food and drinks) aspect of tourism. For many, achieving a complete Halal certification is an additional time and monetary burden as not only that the food serving methods is included in the criteria, but also the cooking process and the manufacturing and transportation of the ingredients. Sugiyama [10] explained the flow of food system in Japanese market within four main components compiled into a form of "river flow" or 川の流れ (*kawa no nagare*) consisting of the "river upstream" or 川上 (*kawakami*) being the producers of food (agriculture, forestry, fishery, etc.), "river stream" or 川中 (*kawanaka*) being the food grocery business providing ingredients for the "river downstream" or 川下 (*kawashimo*) such as restaurants and other eatery business, and the "lake" or 湖 (*mizu-umi*) or each person's dietary style. Analyzing from the "river flow" provided, it is assumed that integrating Sharia law into Japanese market in supporting the market of Japan's Halal tourism would be time/effort-consuming but is possible due to market demands from the "lake".

Another aspect of Halal tourism is the three main components of the needs of Muslim tourists: Need to have (primary) which includes Halal food services and prayer facilities, Good to have (secondary) which includes water usage-friendly washrooms and Ramadhan services and facilities, and Nice to have (tertiary) which includes no

non-Halal activities and the availability of recreation services and facilities. An article by Khoiriati, Sharko, Krisnajaya, and Dinarto [11] later described elements crucial for Halal tourism in accordance with the Global Muslim Travel Index standards, namely the family friendly holiday and safe travel destination (family friendly holiday destination, safe travel environment, Muslim visitor arrivals), Muslim friendly services and facilities available at the destination (dining options and assurance, ease of access to prayer spaces, airport services and facilities, accommodation options), and Halal awareness and destination marketing (ease of communication/language proficiency, Muslim travel needs awareness and outreach).

While presumably easier to implement in countries with Muslims as majority, the level of difficulties may differ distinctively in Muslim-minority countries such as Japan [8]. For instance, it is common for Muslims living or traveling in Japan to resort to South Asian cuisine due to the lack of Japanese cuisine fitting the Halal criteria of the Muslim travelers [12] and other lack of facilities such as dedicated faucet for washing before praying. However, the system is not completely to blame as Halal criteria and restrictions of each Muslim may differ; this distinction is often referred as the “grey area” [7]. For instance, some Muslims may find eating various types of meat fine as long as it is not pork or cross-contaminated with alcohol while other Muslims may discourage it and resort to Halal-certified restaurants or home cooking. Furthermore, providing minimal facilities for Muslim tourists such as prayer spaces, Halal foods, and Kiblah direction (direction to the Ka'ba in Mecca) in places such as hotel rooms is considered enough by many to elevate the country's reputation for Muslim tourist hospitality [11].

Japan has recently experimented with Halal tourism for some time for the last five years. Several initiatives include the promotion of restaurants and hotels' registration to a Halal certification body managed by various Muslim non-governmental organizations. Organizations such as the Japan Halal Association (JHA), Nippon Asia Halal Association (NAHA), Halal Development Foundation Japan (HDFJ), and Muslim Professional Japan Association (MPJA) are among known Halal-certifying organizations to be affiliated with the Indonesian *Ulema* Council (in Bahasa Indonesia, *Majelis Ulama Indonesia* or MUI) and the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (in Malay, *Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia*) along with several Islamic organizations across the world. The simultaneous affiliation with various Islamic organizations in Muslim countries is caused by the difference of three aspects: Halal certification's standards, regulations, and systems on each Muslim country even among OIC members, the “Halal-certified” logo on each country, and the schools of thought (i.e., *Hanbali*, *Hanafi*, *Maliki*, and *Shafi*) [13] underlying the certification requirements [14].

## 4. Discussing Economic Pragmatism on Tourism Sector

It is to assume that the root of pragmatism in economy and economic decisions in general roots back to the rational characteristics of humans to assume poses or issue decisions for the benefits of themselves. Responding to the new challenges in the progressing era and the need for new solutions in solving issues the “old” theories unable to answer to, the “new” pragmatism as dubbed by Kolodko [15] is considering the shifting of various focuses researchers need to consider. While the “old” economic theories are considered disputable at some points, calling it void altogether is also incorrect as some ideas are still viable in answering the justification of the actions of economic entities as great as a country or as small as an individual.

One consideration the author intends to underline is the necessity to include various non-economic factors such as political, cultural, social, historical, and geographical conditions in the liberal view of economy, something often considered Kolodko considered missing or facing little attention from the “old” theories [15,16]. Furthermore, while “old” theories focus more on rationality of economic entities, profit maximization as a driving factor, and intrinsic effectiveness of unregulated market, globalization and its various consequences (i.e., the blurring of national border) to the global connectivity starts to influence how economy operates in the modern world. This connectivity, while being beneficial in a way, may develop its unique challenge as a crisis in one part of the world may affect the economies of countries across the world as portrayed by the end-20<sup>th</sup>-century and 2008 economic crisis [15]. Additionally, economic pragmatism and pragmatism in general emphasizes the need for attention on humans’ habits and skills to form and manage institutions or organizations, the nature of choice, innovation and rationality, and the complexity of self-interest [17]. Such idea emphasizes the capabilities of humans to determine further actions based on rational judgements on present factors and matching one’s interest with such factors in addition to those of other individuals present in the similar economic environment.

In relation to tourism and the economic pragmatism behind various decisions on the sector, tourism is being the most interconnected and integrated of all [18], binding transportation, food and agriculture, accommodation and leisure, information system, and other sectors into a single circle. Recently, with the blurring of national border due to globalization and the increasing ease of international travel, there is a chance that such phenomenon may force individuals, institutions, and presumably states, to continuously innovate in responding to the continuously expanding tourism market. Surprisingly, many countries around the world copes up well with the development by

pragmatically approach the market through various actions, such as strategic alliances consisting of tourism establishments [18], visa exemption policies issued by tourism destination countries, culture-based tourism [19], and other decisions rooting from the mentioned condition.

Another presumably more recent condition is the coping of national tourism of various countries across the globe in response to the sudden global halt of tourism-purposed international travel due to the COVID-19 pandemic, reducing the income for the tourism sector by digits within a single year. While some countries struggle to maintain control over the increasing cases of infection daily, some new trends may also arise with some already happening at some degrees, including the rise of domestic travel [20]. While being a “refreshing wind” for the crippled tourism sector and those involved in it, it also comes with its own risks of causing another spike of infection rate, particularly in countries with low-rate of either first or second-dose vaccination [21].

## 5. Halal Tourism in Japan: Pragmatic Background and The Present Challenges

An article by Khoiriati, Krisnajaya, and Dinarto [11] discussed the two primary components of Halal tourism both researchers and practitioners shall pay attention into: value-based and branding-based Halal tourism. While the former mainly focuses on the belief system every Muslim should ideally adopt, being the command for Muslims to uphold the Sharia principles and the five pillars of Islam (declaration of faith in Allah and the Prophet Muhammad, five times prayers, fasting during the month of Ramadhan, observing Zakat/charity, pilgrimage to Mecca) and how countries and establishments should adopt to such system, the latter focuses on the creation and maintaining of positive nation image or branding, meaning the necessity of countries and establishments to create and maintain a positive image or branding among Muslim travelers. Responding to this idea, settling on which one to build first could be a challenge as establishments would take minimum chances venturing on establishing Halal-friendly systems under uncertain market conditions. Additionally, while establishing a Halal-friendly image costs a considerable amount of money spent primarily on hiring consultants and promoters of tourism, opening establishments for Muslim customers may also cost roughly the same amount with a considerably high risk of failing.

Japan, as described by many previous research, is considerably pragmatic in its approach towards Halal tourism and how to welcome Muslim tourists. As opposed to creating an image as the foundation of Halal tourism, physical establishments (Halal and



Muslim-friendly restaurants, prayer rooms, etc.) and systems (Muslim tourist information center, Halal restaurant information network, etc.) become priority. While uncertainty may jeopardize the success of the plan, rigorous promotion conducted by countries' officials and societies had bolstered the reputation of the country into one of the most recognized Muslim-friendly tourist destinations in the world with roughly 500 businesses in Japan certified by multiple Halal certification bodies recognized by a multitude of Halal certification organizations in Muslim countries and 110 mosques recorded in 2021 [22]. More so, the increasing presence of Muslim migrants in Japan contributed to the developing understanding of Japanese domestic Halal market in some degree in addition to the international cooperation initiated by the government.

### 5.1. Halal Tourism-Supporting Facilities around Tourism Spots

It is a common understanding for individuals involved in the establishment and research of tourism industry that one of the most vital elements of tourism industry is tourist' convenience which is achievable through tourist-preferred food and accommodation. In fulfilling this goal, chances are the tourism market of host countries should adjust and adapt their services to the needs of tourists [23], being both physically and spiritually. In spite so, these adjustments shall not scrutinize the local aspect of tourism, particularly in countries or areas with the unique culture as a selling point. Under this principle, Japan had been adapting to the need of tourists for the last twenty years, rigorously promoting the country as "the one and only" for its culture in forming a "country built on tourism" [24].

Along with an increase of tourist visits from Muslim countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore in the Southeast Asia since 2010 and an increase on demand for Muslim-friendly hospitality, the market began to consider adding Muslim-friendly facilities, such as restaurants, Muslim-friendly hotels, and public prayer rooms around several tourism hotspots and information centers. The most recent the author has personally visited is a prayer room located near Marunouchi Gate of Tokyo Station, conveniently placed at a corner of the tourist information center and the JR East office. Mentioning that the place is quite small accommodating only two or three people at most, such a small presence of a prayer room can be a relief for Muslims in a tourist visit and have little access to larger prayer spaces such as mosques. Another source stated that there are approximately 191 prayer rooms around Japan placed around several hotspots at this time being, such as airports, information centers, shopping malls, restaurants, and tourist attractions [25] and 105 masjids in almost every prefecture in



the country [26]. The numbers apparently exclude the mobile prayer spaces originally intended for Muslim visitors in preparation for the delayed 2020 Tokyo Olympics [27].

Food as aforementioned is one of the major foundations of tourism and the image of Japanese food is often oversimplified as a part of its unique identity repeatedly promoted in its cultural tourism program. While finding authentic Japanese cuisine can be a simple task for the non-Muslims, it is a considerably overwhelming task for Muslims generally bound to the rule of Halal, in particular the prohibition of the consumption of pork, alcohol, animals not slaughtered in the name of Allah (God), and cross-contamination of Halal and non-Halal ingredients and food. Encouraging a Muslim-friendly tourism ecosystem, such additional restrictions should not be considered a hindrance, but rather a marketing opportunity with Muslim tourists as the main customers. Referring to Halal Gourmet Japan website, a website dedicated for sharing information related to Halal restaurants in Japan, 796 restaurants across Japan has been recorded by the website administrator [28] and presumably dozens more of Halal and Muslim-friendly restaurants yet to be registered to the website. In a perspective, such presence of increasing numbers of Halal and Muslim-friendly restaurants can encourage and ensure Muslim tourists that the country's hospitality towards Muslims is continuously growing.

Although the trend of Muslim-friendly hotels in Japan is continuously growing, the rate is relatively slower compared to the restaurant counterpart. As for 2021, there are 42 Muslim-friendly hotels registered in Japan Muslim Guide, another website dedicated for providing information related to Halal tourism in Japan. It is worth noting that the provision of hotel accommodation for tourists might be more flexible than providing Halal menus in restaurants due to several basic components of Halal facilities relatively easy to achieve: the provision of dedicated prayer rooms (which is also achievable with Muslim customers praying in hotel rooms) and faucet for washing before prayers in toilets. However, challenges to its development still exist, particularly the provision of dedicated faucet and other matters explained in the later chapter of the paper.

## **5.2. Government's Approach: Easier Tourism for Everyone, Including Muslims**

The aforementioned trend on Japan's increasing attention on Halal tourism is mostly influenced by external factors instead of the internal factors of Muslim residents in Japan being both Japanese national and foreign residents, namely the growing international Halal marketplace and the need to focus on accommodating Muslim tourists as the

continuation of building Japan as a country “built on tourism” [24]. Based on this principle, it is rational that the Japanese government would intend to capitalize the global Halal market trend to bolster national economy by attracting potential tourists, in particular Muslim tourists. Furthermore, one important aspect of the action issued by the government is the globalization of people’s communication and movement [29], in which the modern world has become interconnected with easier flow of information and faster and more convenient travelling options, blurring national borders almost globally.

Within the last five years alone, the Japanese government has been committed to ease the travel of tourists from many countries, particularly Muslim-majority ASEAN countries through the visa-free policy and the relaxing of visa regulations. Such policy is considerably a success due to the increase of Muslim tourist visits to Japan with 60 percent of them coming from Southeast Asian countries, 27 percent of them from Indonesia alone [30]. Additionally, Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) has released a section of its website dedicated to the provision of information related to facilities for Muslim tourists provided mainly in English, Bahasa Indonesia, and Malay. Other forms of initiative by Japanese government specifically purposed for Muslim tourists are Hakuba Muslim Friendly Project, East & Stay: Kansai Muslim Friendly Guide, Sendai Information for Muslim and Vegetarian Visitors, and more [31]. In 2019, Warees Halal Limited (WHL), a subsidiary of MUIS (Islamic Religious Council of Singapore), and Japan Tourist Bureau Group (JTB Group), a formerly Japanese government-owned company, signed an agreement to promote and assist the tapping of Japanese and Singaporean companies on the developing Halal food and travel market in Japan while providing options for Muslim travelers [32].

As much as the national-scale promotion has been committed, the field implementation and development of Muslim-friendly market in Japan, particularly Halal tourism, is almost autonomically managed by prefectural governments with prefectures promoting and managing the Halal tourism establishments in each region. Moreover, the implementation of the policy may be unique to each region, prompting each regional government to adapt to the challenge. However, one problem is identical for all: many consider Halal certification is an additional time-money burden to business establishments. As a part of creative solution, the government, Halal certification organizations, and business establishments reached a compromise to allow non-Halal-certified establishments, such as restaurants, to provide Muslim-friendly services (food and accommodation) through disclosure and transparency of ingredients and service methods, ensuring the safety and Halal quality of each service. One example of the compromise is the Takayama initiative [12] which, while initially started in June 2014, continues until today.

### 5.3. Society's Assistance: Supporting One's Life in Japan

Japanese capitalistic market system allows both Japanese and foreign residents to contribute to the national economy, creating presumably equal opportunity for all to explore the need of Japanese market. Currently, the Japanese market also includes the growing Halal tourism market as one of the most promising with contribution on restaurants and hotels mostly committed by small-middle business establishments, such as family restaurants and hotels. However, it is also to note that Muslim foreign residents in Japan may have contributed more than expected. For instance, the famous Naritaya Halal Ramen conveniently situated in Asakusa, Tokyo, is managed by Mohammad Asri, a Malaysian Muslim currently residing in Japan with staffs coming from fellow Muslim-majority Southeast Asian countries such as Indonesia based on the author's last visit in mid-2021. While the Naritaya Asakusa ramen was originally founded by Shimada Yoichiro in 2014, the ownership was later granted to Mohammad Asri in 2017 to ensure the management being held by a Muslim [33], presumably to ensure the Halal quality of the served ramen dish. Other small restaurant business dedicated to serve Halal dish, particularly ramen as one Japanese staple dish, are Ayam-ya, Ramen Honolu Ebisu, Halal Sakura, Halal Ramen Inaho, Ramen Halal 117, and others found across Japan.

Within 2020, approximately 220,000 Muslim residents in Japan has been recorded, less than one percent of Japanese population [34]. Most of these numbers are foreign residents either continuing their study or working at Japanese companies, some being accompanied by their families registered as dependent residents with a relatively small percentage considering entrepreneurship, establishing and managing their own business. Among the Muslim residents in Japan, the trend and opportunity for part-time work in the country allows a certain percentage of them committing part-time work while either studying or being dependents in Japan, many working with intention of personal income. However, their presence in the Japanese workplace can be perceived as an overwatch for guaranteeing the Halal quality of products and facilities, including industries related to Halal tourism and Halal product sold on the market in general. Yamaguchi [24] mentioned one already-closed Bakery L in downtown Tokyo employing a Muslim Syrian woman in the bakery's kitchen. While studying in a university in Tokyo, she also worked part-time as a bread-maker while also guaranteeing the Halal quality of the bread by providing clarification for the Muslim customers.

Presumably one of the most intriguing part of the development of Halal tourism is the contribution and enthusiasm of non-Muslim Japanese in the uncertain Halal market. Since the beginning of the development of Halal industry and Halal tourism in Japan, the

primary target for tourism promotion is the foreign Muslim tourists staying in a relatively short time, all while leaving a relatively low attention towards Muslims living in Japan for a longer period, such as foreign Muslim residents. The aforementioned Takayama initiative [12], currently Hida Takayama Food Barrier-free Association, is one example of a massive tourism movement aimed to attract foreign Muslim tourists. Most of the establishments included in the initiative belong to non-Muslim Japanese venturing in the food industry accommodating not only Muslims, but also other religious groups and people with specific dietary needs and allergies [35]. Such presence of entrepreneurship also assists in the tackling of various misconceptions and misunderstanding, such as “Halal tourism is exclusively for Muslims” and “Halal food and services can only be enjoyed by Muslims”, which is a terrible interpretation of the industry. The *tendon* (rice bowl topped with assorted fried food) restaurant “Tendon Itsuki” is one example in which even Japanese can provide and enjoy Halal food and accommodation. Focusing on seafood and vegetables *tempura* (fried food) instead of meat, every seat is always occupied mostly by Japanese during lunchtime every time the author visits Tokyo. Also, the restaurant is in possession of a Halal certificate issued by the Central Islamic Council of Thailand based on an article on the website of Food Diversity [36], a Japanese company focused on the promotion of mainly Halal tourism, while also employing Japanese as kitchen staffs.

Information system on Halal facilities continues to increase with websites dedicated to the providing and discussions of news related to Halal food and accommodations in Japan gradually increases. While some are managed by individuals, startup companies such as Food Diversity which sources websites such as Halal Media Japan, Halal Gourmet Japan, and Japan Masjid Finder plays a significant role in promoting the growing industry [37]. Having a Japanese representative within the company, it also employs Muslim foreigners as a part of the management and web contributors. Another increasing trend in the information system is the sporadic increase of Muslim tourism guide mobile applications such as Halal Navi, Muslim Pro, and other unmentioned applications fills the mobile application stores such as Google Play Store and Apple App Store, serving roughly the same purpose. Moreover, previously non-profit blogs such as Halal Japan (mostly in Facebook) is famous among Muslim tourists and residents for actively monitoring the changes in ingredients of store-bought products in Japan which frequently causes worries among the Muslims.

#### 5.4. International Collaboration for Halal Certification and the Long-Present Dilemma

The discussion on the necessity of Halal certification as a primary condition for establishments to declare themselves as Muslim-friendly has been an ongoing debate for years, some viewing them as essential while the others as non-essential while seeking ingredients transparency as an alternative. However, it is hard to ignore that the presence of Halal certification bodies has been assisting in setting standards for restaurants and other establishments aiming to venture on Halal tourism and industry in general, providing their existence an importance. Learning from various Muslim-majority countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia, establishing a Muslim-friendly market environment is a time-consuming process often coerced by an urgent need to ensure Muslim customers' safety. While Malaysia began its large-scale Halal certification project due to the government's "Islamization" policy in the 1970s leading to the establishment of the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) in 2004, Indonesia's nationwide awareness on the need for Halal certification and the forming of specific body for the task emerged during the finding of massive amount of lard in a rice field in the province of East Java in 1988, prompting Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) to establish a non-profit organization dedicated to monitor the Halal quality of products for Muslims' consumption, namely the Institute of Food, Drugs and Cosmetics of Indonesian Ulama Council (LPPOM-MUI) [24].

In the case of Japan, it is assumable that the process may take a considerable amount of time and effort in the future as Japan is not considered as a Muslim-majority country if compared to Indonesia and Malaysia and Japan's Muslim customers are mostly foreign tourists instead of residents. However, the progress has been improving within the last few years as Halal certification bodies are emerging as a form of market consciousness on the need for accommodating Muslims' needs in Japan, being both tourists and residents. Quoting Nakagawa [38], as per 2016, 22 Halal certification bodies have been recognized in Japan, including Japan Halal Association (JHA), Nippon Asia Halal Association (NAHA), Halal Development Foundation Japan (HDFJ), and Muslim Professional Japan Association (MPJA) to name a few. Setting Halal standards for components such as slaughtering, food processing, and flavoring, the organizations often refer to and establish mutual recognitions with Halal certification bodies outside Japan, such as Indonesia's MUI, Malaysia's JAKIM, Thailand Islamic Central Committee (CICOT), and other unmentioned organizations across the world.

Despite the relatively high number of Halal certification bodies within a single country like Japan, it is aweing that problems on Halal certification continue to emerge, particularly the difficulty of the certification bodies to agree on one universal Halal standard favorably applied nationwide. This problem, argued by many, is due to the absence of an internationally accepted Halal standard, causing the same problem in countries with multiple Halal certification bodies. While seemingly a simple problem to solve at a first glance, the cause of this dilemma roots deep in the difference of stances of four dominant Islamic schools of thought: *Hanbali*, *Hanafi*, *Maliki*, and *Shafi* [13], each country adopting generally one or two as dominant. Such condition, in turn, renders the said establishment of a universal Halal standard barely possible despite repetitious attempts to unify said standards [24].

Another issue on the certification topic is the competition among Halal certification bodies based on the refinement of the applied standards. Yamaguchi [24] explained that the Japanese market tends to prefer a more developed and clarified standard, causing each certification body to compete in setting a Halal standard easily followed by establishments. Additionally, with the continuous development in Japanese food industry, the food producing process will become more complex and the ingredients are famous to constantly change, forcing such bodies to adapt to such rapid changes. Consequently, the price for Halal certification may differ to each body and such has become quality-price competition among bodies. For instance, a two-years Halal certificate issued by Nippon Asia Halal Association (NAHA) costs 100.000 yen (roughly 885 USD) while a one-year, five-products, certificate issued by Japan Islamic Trust (JIT) costs 300.000 yen (roughly 2.655 USD) with 20.000 yen (around 117 USD) per additional product, both bodies applying their own standards with recognition from different Halal certifications abroad [39].

The last issue leading to the certification dilemma is that each Muslim has his/her own set of standards on determining the Halal quality of consumed products. Maknu, Manan, and Ariffin [40] focused on the psychological background of the capability of Muslims in determining options for Muslim-friendly Japanese street foods under the *istihalah* principle, meaning the principle “necessity turns something unlawful/haram lawful/halal”. Under this assumption, each Muslim has an autonomy in determining whether the consumed food and other goods are Halal or Haram based on knowledge and trust referring to either one of school of thoughts. Additionally, racial, national, and school of thought background may also affect the Halal/Haram judgement of each Muslim in which the interpretation of Halal/Haram and how strict/loose it shall be implemented in

one country may differ greatly in many cases. Nevertheless, personal judgement is the final decision on how Halal standard should be implemented individually or collectively.

## 6. Discussion: COVID-19, Crippling Halal Tourism in Japan, and A Bitter Truth

Since the early stage of COVID-19 global outbreak in early 2020, the world's mobility appears to halt almost completely with countries closing their doors amidst the uncertainty of actions that should be taken to ensure national security. Not to mention the death tolls caused by the rapid mutation of the novel coronavirus, the world economy is also affected with business being forced to closed either temporarily or permanently under the lack of customers causing the inability of the establishments to continuously pay the workers. Among all business, tourism arguably receives a devastating blow as the industry completely relies on human mobility [41]. As time progresses, the year 2021 perceives the relaxing of mobility restrictions with people gradually being allowed to leave homes with masks covering their noses and mouths, maintaining hygiene by repetitiously disinfecting their hands with either washing with water or disinfectants, and observing social distancing in every activity, allowing 1-2 meters of distance between people. Such universally agreed trend means an opportunity for all industries to gradually return to regular operations with adaptations based on the three rules and people across the world have begun to adapt to lives during the pandemic.

Mentioning the worldwide pandemic, Japan is also included as the first to be hit by the first wave of COVID-19, prompting the country to take a drastic measure to completely stop all inbound and outbound travels from and to foreign countries [42], despite later beginning to relax the restrictions to only essential travels (study, work, and emergency travels such as funerals). Noting that tourism is not considered as essential travels, there has been no signs of Japan opening its borders for tourists any time soon. Such decision promptly halts the inbound tourists to Japan, leaving the graph almost zero [43] and affecting Japan's tourism industry which often completely relies on foreign tourists. Based on the number of hard blows Japanese tourism industry receives from the pandemic, Halal tourism in Japan is basically in threat due to its almost-complete reliance on foreign Muslim tourists instead of the Muslim residents, ranging roughly 90% of daily customers based on an interview with Mohammad Asri, the current manager of Naritaya Halal Ramen [44] which is temporary closed for the time being due to lack of Muslim visitors to both the store and Asakusa temple complex in general. Same problems are faced by several Halal-dedicated restaurant chains within the proximity



of common tourism sites across cities such as Tokyo, Osaka, and Kyoto based on the author's visit in late-January 2021. Meanwhile, some establishments, such as the ones in Shirakawa-go, assume less-drastic measures by either reducing menu availability, limiting opening days, or both simultaneously performed.

Mentioning that the Muslim population currently residing in Japan reached approximately 220,000 people [34] as per 2020, such numbers are often overestimated as it merely contributes to less than one percent of Japanese total population per religious affiliation, most of them residing in Japan for primarily professional reasons instead of tourism. Additionally, due to often limited presence of Halal restaurant in cities less oriented on tourism, Muslim residents often resort to home cooking, rendering eating-out or 外食 (*gaishoku*) industry mostly focused on tourist hotspots. Despite the fact that non-Halal-certified establishments and those providing both Halal and non-Halal services within the same store somehow manage to survive by relying on non-Muslim customers, it is hard to ignore the overdependence of Halal industry in Japan towards foreign Muslim tourists as the demand for Halal products mainly comes from those outside of Japan [45] instead of the inside.

## 7. The Future of Inclusive Japan through Halal Tourism and Market

Many would question when Japanese Halal market will begin observing the inward development in contradiction to the current outward trend, presumably in an effort to revitalize the pandemic-crippled Halal industry in the country while waiting for the opening of Japanese borders for foreign tourists. Unfortunately, the answer to this question is most likely being either "uncertain" or "not within a few years", but optimism towards the potential of inward-looking Halal market is also to be maintained with the increasing discussion on Halal status and Muslims' presence in the country. The reason for this positivity is that the increasing presence of foreign tourists and residents regardless the national, racial, and religious background has become more noticeable with millions of people crossing Japanese border yearly, some considerably staying for a considerably long time than others, including Muslim residents. In many aspects, it may prompt Japanese both as a country and a racial society to adapt to the presence of foreign residence for the realization for a more inclusive Japan and small progresses have been made. One personal example is the author's personal experience in a trip to Ashikaga Flower Park, Tochigi, during the month of Ramadhan 2021. Whilst having a

trouble selecting a menu for evening fast-breaking at the cafeteria, a Japanese middle-aged man from the customer queue suddenly mentioned to the staff that the author and another Muslim friend (note, she wears a hijab) cannot eat pork, a common characteristic of Muslims. Based on the experience, the author perceives a positive future for the development of Halal market in Japan which can also contribute to the future of Halal tourism.

Positivity aside, several issues on the implementation of development of Halal tourism and Halal market in general in Japan need to be addressed. The first issue is that there has been yet any unified Halal certification body in Japan providing that such body is also absent internationally despite the attempts of unification. However, the author assesses that Halal certification bodies are not merely bodies dedicated to certifying Halal qualities, but also the representative of voices of Muslims in the world, particularly in Muslim-minority countries like Japan, something beyond economic pragmatism values. After all, one of the main purposes of Halal certification bodies is to ensure the Halal quality of products for Muslims' consumption which for Muslims contains spiritual priority values similar to medical purposes such as allergies.

Secondly, it is also true that global Halal market is one of most rapidly growing market in the world in response to the continuous growth of global Muslim population. Such phenomenon apparently forms a perspective that Muslims are potential customers needs-capitalizing and since most of the Muslims visits Japan for short-term visits or tourism, there is a bigger demand to focus on tourism hotspots. However, this perspective may pose a problem of overreliance on foreign customers while considering little attention to those living in Japan as what is happening during the pandemic. It is indeed a relief to find Japanese business owners gradually consider foreign Muslim residents as their customers such as mentioned in the article by Yamaguchi [24], but prefectural/regional presence of Muslims in Japan is also to be considered into the equation with an increase of Muslims within a certain area may increase the demand for Halal products thus encouraging more establishments to consider venturing on Halal market.

Lastly, while being rarely discussed in news outlets, topics on increasing cases of Japanese ethnic converting to Islam and marginal aspects caused by being Muslims are to be discussed. An article by Obuse [46] described how a Japanese Muslim woman is often marginalized on both ends, foreign-born Muslims in Japan and Japanese ethnic societies, based on the fact that the interviewee for Obuse's research, named Kawada Naoko, happens to be a Muslim (religiously marginalized), a Japanese (ethnically marginalized), and a woman (gender marginalized). It is intriguing that even among

Muslim societies which are relatively famous for transcending beyond national/racial borders, there is always an unfortunate chance for certain individuals to be either marginalized or scrutinized by fellow Muslims while being prejudiced as “terrorists” alone is overwhelmingly inconvenient from the start. In increasing the favor of Japanese to learn more about Muslims and Islam in general which may also favor Halal market development in the future, the author observes the need for Muslim residents to present “the best representation of Islam” for the Japanese society by encouraging inter-cultural, inter-religious discussion in preventing unproductive debates which often leads to clashes between Muslims and Japanese.

## 8. Conclusion

Summarizing the development of Halal tourism and Halal market in general, most development of Halal tourism and Halal market in Japan is extremely reliant to external market, namely the continuously growing Muslim population and an increase of foreign Muslim tourists. Responding to the market opportunity, the Japanese government with the “assistance” of Japanese society and foreign Muslim residents in the country initiated a series of pro-tourism policies, Muslim tourist information system, and tourism facilities able to accommodate the dietary and spiritual needs of Muslims during a travel in Japan with Halal certification bodies serving as monitoring agencies. However, such overreliance shows its weakness during the COVID-19 pandemic with business facing difficulties due to the stoppage of foreign tourists visits and the pandemic also led to author’s realization on the need for a more nationwide consciousness on an inclusive Japan, being able to accommodate the coexistence of Muslims and Japanese in the country in the near future.

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