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The Reality of Islamic Anthropology Through Halal Food: Evidence from Tokyo Prefecture, Japan

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Abstract

This study investigates Islamic practices in Tokyo, Japan, examining their role as a unifying force that transcends ethnic, national, and cultural boundaries. Based on field research conducted in 2024, the study analyzes the dynamics of Tokyo's diverse Muslim community, which encompasses practitioners from varied global backgrounds. Through systematic interviews and participant observation, the research reveals how the halal industry functions as a primary mechanism for promoting inclusive and tolerant Islamic teachings. The gradual expansion of Islam in Tokyo since the 2000s has been characterized by practices that foster cultural inclusion and social cohesion. The concept of halal food emerges as an exemplar of Islamic pluralistic principles, serving as a bridge between different faith communities and cultural traditions. This phenomenon aligns with the Qur'anic principle of unity in diversity (QS 49:13), demonstrating the practical manifestation of Islamic teachings on pluralism within a contemporary urban context. The findings indicate that the halal trade serves as both a medium for religious expression and a catalyst for cultural harmony in Tokyo. This research contributes to the cultural anthropology literature by illuminating

previously underexplored dynamics of cultural adaptation and religious pluralism within Japan's urban landscape.

Keywords: *pluralism, anthropology, halal industry, Islam, Tokyo*

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INTRODUCTION

Vermeulen (1995) traces the emergence of anthropology as a scientific discipline to the 16th century, noting its initial focus on anatomical and physiological studies before evolving into "physical anthropology" or "biological anthropology." During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, European theologians appropriated the term to examine the relationship between human characteristics and divine creation. The late eighteenth century witnessed an expansion of the concept, as German and Russian scholars deployed "anthropology" as a framework for systematically studying and categorizing cultural attributes across ethnic groups (Bierschenk et al., 2016). This historical trajectory reflects anthropology's development into an interdisciplinary field encompassing biological, theological, and cultural dimensions in its investigation of human nature and society (Doda, 2005).

Barnard (2004) delineates four principal domains within North American anthropology: (1) biological anthropology, (2) archaeology, (3) linguistic anthropology, and (4) cultural anthropology. This study situates itself within cultural anthropology, the most comprehensive subdiscipline, which encompasses the examination of cultural diversity, the identification of universal cultural patterns, the analysis of social structures, and the interpretation of symbolic systems. Cultural anthropology provides the theoretical and methodological framework for investigating human cultures and their inherent complexities.

Tokyo, Japan, was selected as the research site due to its distinctive position as a metropolis navigating the transition between traditional and modern societal structures. This duality presents unique characteristics that offer valuable insights for cultural anthropological inquiry. The city's ongoing transformation, characterized by the simultaneous preservation of deeply rooted cultural traditions and adaptation to global influences, provides an ideal context for examining cultural dynamics and diversity (Observations, July 2024). Tokyo exemplifies the intersection of heritage and innovation, offering a fertile ground for investigating the halal industry's role within its evolving cultural landscape.

The Tokyo community exhibits a pronounced commitment to maintaining local culture and the Japanese language as foundational elements of both internal and external social interactions (Li, 2014). This deliberate preservation, despite intensifying globalization pressures, illustrates the mechanisms through which cultural identity persists amid cross-cultural exchange. Huffman (2006) notes that Japanese modernity has fostered an increasingly autonomous and individualistic society, generating complex social dynamics. These transformations provide crucial context for understanding how Islamic values, manifested through the halal industry, integrate into Japan's orthodox societal framework.

Bestor's 1985 ethnographic research in Miyamoto, Tokyo, demonstrates that while the city's society exhibits spatial fragmentation, it maintains cohesion through intricate informal social, economic, and political networks. His critique of traditional analytical perspectives emphasizes the necessity of thoroughly examining contemporary Tokyo's social dynamics. This study addresses this research gap by analyzing the halal industry phenomenon as an expression of modern cultural pluralism.

Japan's distinctive cultural matrix is shaped by three primary religious systems: Shinto, Buddhism, and Confucianism, which collectively form the societal and spiritual foundation (Sosnowski, 2014). Shintoism, as Japan's indigenous religious tradition, functions as a fundamental cultural element, emphasizing harmonious relationships with

nature (Shaw, 2005). From an Islamic anthropological perspective, while fundamental theological differences exist with Shinto beliefs, the proliferation of halal establishments in Tokyo demonstrates the city's capacity to accommodate diverse cultural practices while maintaining its traditional identity.

Takamizawa (2001) documents significant Japanese cultural resistance to Western influences in the post-World War II period. However, the growth of the halal industry in Tokyo indicates a notable shift, reflecting an increasing openness toward religious and cultural diversity. This phenomenon highlights the flexibility of Tokyo's socio-economic landscape in accommodating emerging cultural expressions.

Japan's halal industry began its expansion during the economic bubble era of the 1980s, coinciding with an increase in tourism from Muslim-majority nations. By 2012, the industry had grown to encompass 55 food establishments (Yusofa & Shutto, 2012). This study employs a qualitative anthropological approach to analyze the growth of Tokyo's halal industry. Focusing on halal restaurants and retail establishments, the research examines how this phenomenon promotes Islamic pluralism and social diversity within Japan's orthodox social context. Data collection methods included interviews, participant observation, and documentary analysis, with key informants including Haroon Quraishi (Japan Islamic Trust), Saeed Akhtar (Nippon Asia Halal Association), and Kyoichiro Sugimoto (Chiba Islamic Cultural Center). The study utilizes Miles & Huberman's (1994) analytical framework, enabling an interactive analysis to understand the halal industry's role in Tokyo's social and cultural dynamics.

DISCUSSION

1. Muslim Social and Religious Affairs in Tokyo

Hisonari Kato, as discussed in Arsan (2007), explains that the Japanese belief in *Amakudari*, divine grace descending from heaven, forms a fundamental part of the nation's strength and identity. Shintoism, which underlies the spiritual life of most Japanese, is

rooted in nature worship and ancestor veneration. This flexibility has shaped the character of Japanese society, especially in its openness to foreign influences, despite a historical tendency to view outside forces with suspicion. Historically, the Japanese have been quite conservative, fiercely protective of traditional values and practices, yet they have shown remarkable adaptability by adopting and adapting beneficial foreign elements without sacrificing their cultural identity (Wuisang, 2020).

The reciprocal relationship between language and culture in Japan further exemplifies this adaptability. As Yaman Baca (2014) notes, Japan has preserved its linguistic heritage while also engaging with global culture, ensuring that foreign communities entering Japan are subject to the influence of the Japanese language. This process reflects the broader cultural integration that continues to shape Japanese society. Japan's sense of seasonality, as Shirane (2012) explains, is another cornerstone of its cultural identity. Here each season is celebrated for its unique contribution to Japanese life, the plum blossoms of spring, the cuckoos of summer, the bright leaves of autumn, and the snow of winter.

From a cultural perspective, Markus & Kitayama (1991) argue that the Japanese emphasize a holistic view of social relationships, in which individuals see themselves as interconnected with the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others. This interconnectedness, combined with self-dependence in human interactions, provides space for openness within the social framework (Matsumoto & Hwang, 2012). Japanese society also manifests distinct social stratification in everyday life, exemplified by the use of different pronouns in formal and informal settings. Tanaka (2015) highlights this linguistic variation as a key feature of Japanese social interactions, reflecting hierarchical relationships in the culture.

An interesting development is Japan's relatively recent engagement with Islam, which has been culturally distant but has been gaining acceptance since the 1970s. Syahraeni (2007) observes that although Islam has not yet achieved widespread acceptance in Japan, it is slowly gaining traction through intellectual and social channels. In 1974, the conversion of Prof. Dr. Syauki Futaki to Islam led to the founding of the Japan Islamic

Congress in Shinjuku, Tokyo, playing a key role in converting many Japanese to Islam and translating the Qur'an into Japanese. This movement contributed to the growth of the Muslim population in Japan, estimated at 30,000 in 1982, with figures reaching around 70,000–100,000 by the early 21st century (Ernazarov, 2022). Despite Japan's historically isolated tendencies, figures such as Kyoichiro Sugimoto, a Japanese convert and founder of the Chiba Islamic Cultural Center, have advanced Islamic integration. This illustrates Japan's openness to blending Islamic values with its cultural traditions while maintaining its commitment to discipline, responsibility, and social harmony.

2. Halal Restaurants and Shops in Tokyo as an Anthropological Reality of Islam

a. Growth of *Halal* Industry Distribution in Tokyo

Data of Halal-Gourmet Japan (2020) shows that Tokyo has emerged as a leading halal industry hub in Japan, with around 330 Japanese restaurants offering halal food and 86 officially *halal*-certified restaurants (Table 1). This growth reflects the growing demand for halal options in Tokyo, positioning the city at the forefront of the *halal* food sector in Japan.

Table 1

Japanese Restaurants Serving Halal Food and Halal-Certified Restaurants

Area	Restaurant Provides Halal Food (unit)	Halal Certified Restaurant (unit)	Total (unit)
Tokyo	244	86	330
Osaka	53	17	70
Kanagawa	34	3	37
Aichi	34	6	40
Kyoto	38	21	59
Fukuoka	11	2	13
Lokasi Lain	272	47	319
Total	**686**	**182**	**868**

Source : Halal-Gourmet Japan , 2020

Table 1 illustrates that, although Japan is non-Muslim country, it has made significant step in accommodating Muslim needs by offering halal food and restaurant. This service can be accessed by resident and visitors international in various prefecture, highlight commitment Japan to culture inclusivity and diversity in its culinary offer (Konety dkk., 2021).

Distribution of halal food restaurant and shop all over Tokyo provides interesting outlook about the intersection of orthodoxy culture and external religious influences. In the east city section, *halal* places are concentrated in the Sumida area, bordering on the Arakawa River, and elongating to north to Adachi. In the west part, their presence reaches Kawaguchi, near Saitama, and stretches to the South to Ota. Meanwhile, in central Tokyo, especially in Chiyoda and Minato, halal restaurants are characterized by more luxury food offer catering to wealthy customers.

Regardless this progress, area like Shinjuku, which is famous with life the lively night, experiences less significant growth in *halal* places compared to with densely populated area traveler such as Sumida (Sugimoto, *interview*, June 2024). Famous places including "Tokyo Chinese Muslim Restaurant," near Skytree City, offers Chinese halal cuisine in the middle landscape culinary Japan dominated by food main such as sushi, ramen, and sake. This development reflects wider anthropological phenomenon, as described by Vermeulen (1995), where the integration of various ethnic groups' attribute culture challenges the local norm.

The distribution of halal food in the congested economic areas like central Tokyo, which is traditionally pushed by materialistic objective, is a significant achievement in building cross-cultural and social connection (Wuisang, 2020; *interview* with Akhtar and Quraishi, June 2024). The halal food Company's ability of developing in strong-rooted society in local tradition highlights the Islamic pluralism's adapting ability. This development shows the combination of inclusiveness and competition strategies successfully harmonizing external religious values and Tokyo modern and fast lifestyle

while respecting its cultural orthodoxy. This anthropological perspective underlines potential integration cross sustainable culture at the heart of one of the most complex urban landscape in the world.

b. Transformation of "Halal" from religious to social values

The term halal, rooted in Islamic teachings, signifies what is permissible under Sharia law, encompassing all aspects of life, from worship to social interactions (*muamalat* and *Mu'asharah*) (Miskam, 2015). On the contrary, *haram*, refers to what is prohibited. Decisions regarding what is *halal* or *haram* are based on the Qur'an and Sunnah, reflecting their central role in guiding ethical and religious practices. Traditionally considered an exclusive concern for the Muslim community, the concept of *halal* has expanded beyond its religious origins into a broader industrial and consumer context. Cheng & Low (2008) explain that *halal* products ranging from food to cosmetics and pharmaceuticals are not only marked with *halal* certification but also meet universal safety and quality standards.

In the last decade, *halal* has emerged as a global symbol of quality assurance and ethical consumption, appealing to a diverse audience worldwide, regardless of religious affiliation (Miskam, 2015). This transformation has extended to Tokyo's highly orthodox social landscape, where *halal* restaurants, shops, and products have flourished. Despite initial cultural and social conservatism, these institutions have been embraced by local communities without triggering fear or resistance associated with Islamophobia. This success underscores the adaptability of halal as a lifestyle and global standard, seamlessly integrated into Tokyo's cultural and social fabric.

c. Cross-Culture and Pluralism in the *Halal* Industry

Shinto, sushi, ramen, sumo, and sake are widely recognized as symbols of Japanese tradition and culture, but lesser-known practices, such as whale meat consumption, are also

an important part of Japanese cultural history. Whaling has been an integral part of Japanese society for more than two millennia, with the Meiji Restoration in 1868 marking the beginning of large-scale offshore whaling. In traditional areas, whaling continued to serve as a basis for community solidarity, with whale meat featured in local ceremonies and celebrations. However, since the 1960s, the supply and consumption of whale meat has declined steadily, reflecting broader changes in Japanese dietary habits (Media Brief Redaction, 2007) and international pressures surrounding whale meat consumption. This example underlines the enduring diversity and local cultural dynamics of Japanese traditions.

Similarly, the emergence of *halal* food culture in Tokyo reveals a growing perception of global culinary practices in Japan. Many Japanese initially believed *halal* food was only for Muslims. However, research shows that *halal* food also appeals to non-Muslim consumers seeking safe and reliable food options (Yamaguchi, 2019). Internally, *halal* restaurants in Tokyo reflect diverse cultural identities, often displaying regional or "tribal" branding. This heterogeneity is evident in the diverse offerings of halal restaurants, which cater to an increasingly global and multicultural audience (Table 2).

Table 2

Characteristics of Halal Food and Shops in Tokyo

No	Nation	Restaurants	Food Characteristics
1	Turkish	Tayeba Halal Food	Turkish Spicy food
		Yıldız Turkish Restaurant	Turkish Fine Dining
		Bosphorus Hasan Ichigaya Halal	Turkish Kebabs, typical Bosphorus salads, sold at lunch and dinner packages
		Turkish Restaurant Cankaya	Turkish Cankaya, Ankara
2	Pakistan/India/ Kashmir	Habibi Halal Restaurant	Indian/Pakistani
		Zaika	Traditional Pakistani
		Haji Restaurant	East Asian, Kashmir Cuisine
		Kantipur Halal Food	Pakistani
3	Bangladesh	Sarsina Halal Food	Bangladeshi Street Stall
4	Japanese/ Chinese	Halal Sakura	Vegetarian Mix Local & Uighur
		Tokyo Chinese Muslim Restaurant	Mix Local & Chinese
		Wagyu Yakiniku	Local food
		Ayam-Ya Shin-Okachimachi Tokyo	Local food (Ramen)
		Tokyo Halal Deli & Cafe	Sophia University Yotsuya Campus
4	Arabian	Arabic Café & Deli Abu Essam	Arabian

Table 2 highlights how halal restaurants in Tokyo have managed to create inclusive public spaces, bridging cultural and religious divides to offer a dynamic and diverse culinary offering. The menu offerings remain largely influenced by Indian, Pakistani, Turkish, and Bangladeshi cuisines. An interesting example is Ayam-Ya Shin-Okachimachi, a *halal* restaurant that uses "*ayam*," the Indonesian and Malay term for chicken, as part of its brand. While the owner's origins are not specified, his name, M. Saifullah, is commonly used in Indonesia. His multilingualism in Tamil, Japanese, and Arabic reflects Tokyo's multicultural landscape (Japanese Muslim Guide, n.d.).

MNN Asian Halal Food & Restaurant stands out as one of the most comprehensive *halal* marts in Tokyo, although it features "*Thai Jasmine Rice*" from Thailand instead of rice from Indonesia. This underlines the dominance of regional cuisines other than Malay food, despite Indonesia's cultural and geographical proximity to Japan. The

appeal of *halal* food spans social classes, from middle-class diners to small community businesses. For example, Kantipur Halal Food and Sarsina Halal Food serve as examples of grassroots halal food businesses that cater to Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Interestingly, halal food also appeals to local Japanese; two tour guides, Sayama Chauma and Toji Kawamura, expressed a particular enjoyment of halal curry dishes (interview, June 2024). Demand from these diverse groups demonstrates the growing role of *halal* restaurants in fostering cross-cultural culinary engagement in Tokyo.

d. Islamic Anthropology through Halal Food

Kuwayama (2014) highlights a critical problem in global anthropology, describing its hierarchical knowledge structure as a "world system" dominated by the United States, Britain, and France, with other countries relegated to the periphery. This imbalance of power often results in the academic contributions of countries such as Japan being undervalued—not because of a lack of intellectual merit, but because of a gap in global influence. In this system, academic value is determined by standards set at the center, which are often disconnected from local cultural knowledge. Kuwayama (2014) dan Bestor (1985) argue that studies of Japanese urban life often reduce social and environmental dynamics to administrative and political constructs dominated by local governments, ignoring the contextual realities of social adaptation and change.

Recent developments in Tokyo challenge this perspective, especially the cultural adaptation of *halal*. The emergence of *halal* restaurants and shops, some serving local menus such as ramen with halal ingredients, illustrates the integration of Islamic practices into Tokyo's social fabric. Leaders such as Saeed Akhtar (Nippon Asia Halal Association) and Haji Kyoichiro Sugimoto (Chiba Islamic Cultural Center) have played a significant role in promoting the halal industry by facilitating halal certification and ensuring compliance with Islamic dietary laws (interview, June 2024). Their collaboration with international

organizations, such as JAKIM (Malaysia), MUIS (Singapore), and MUI (Indonesia) have enhanced the credibility and growth of Tokyo's *halal* market. These cross-cultural efforts underscore Tokyo's capacity for socio-cultural adaptation and growing inclusivity in the global *halal* industry.

CONCLUSION

The proliferation of halal food establishments in Tokyo represents a significant anthropological phenomenon. Despite the city's deeply rooted adherence to local traditions and Shinto principles—which often present ideological tensions with Islamic values—the growing presence of halal establishments demonstrates the successful integration of Islamic cultural elements into Tokyo's cultural fabric. This development exemplifies the adaptability and inclusivity of Tokyo's contemporary society in accommodating diverse cultural and religious practices.

The extensive distribution of halal food establishments across Tokyo, encompassing various operational models and ownership structures, illustrates the effective integration of the Muslim community within the city's diverse cultural, ethnic, and national matrix. However, a significant finding reveals that Tokyo's halal food landscape has been predominantly shaped by South Asian and Turkish influences, particularly from India and Pakistan, while Malay Muslim culinary traditions—despite their geographical and cultural proximity to Japan—remain notably underrepresented in this cultural evolution.

The research demonstrates that halal food functions as a powerful catalyst for social interaction and cultural exchange, providing a strategic platform for introducing and promoting Islamic culture within Tokyo's traditionally orthodox society. This facilitates enhanced cultural understanding and peaceful coexistence. The study makes a substantial contribution to cultural anthropology literature by illuminating previously underexplored dynamics of cultural adaptation and religious pluralism within Japan's urban environment.

The strength of this research lies in its rigorous qualitative methodology, enabling nuanced examination of social interactions and cultural dynamics. The employment of in-depth interviews and systematic observations yields rich insights into the halal industry's influence on Tokyo's social landscape, offering valuable perspectives on cultural pluralism in a global metropolis. However, the study acknowledges certain limitations, particularly regarding the representation of Muslim cultural influences, which remain predominantly concentrated within specific communities, notably those from South Asia and Turkey. Future research directions should explore the potential role of Malay culture in Tokyo's halal food landscape. Additionally, comparative analyses with other Japanese cities or international urban centers with significant Muslim populations could provide broader insights into the integration of cultural and religious practices in contemporary urban settings.

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