The Roles of Southeast Asian Muslim Tourists in Promoting Japan Halal Business

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Abstract. This study explores Japan's transformation by taking halal tourism as a case study by analyzing Japan's tourism strategy in targeting Southeast Asian Muslims successfully. The research looks at Japan's halal business development up to 2019, before the COVID-19 outbreak. The introduction of halal tourism has gained popularity among Muslim travelers, especially Southeast Asians. The *omotenashi* (hospitality) has become a currency in Japan's tourism industry and has been a significant national economic driver for the last ten years. The advent of halal tourism transforms Japan significantly, from a 'developing country' in the context of tourism to a 'tourism-oriented nation.' The transformation is necessary for Japan's survival, considering the weakened progress in the national economy in the post-Bubble economy. Based on experience, Japanese tourism suffered stagnation due to the 'Kokusaika' (internationalization) policy. The 2008-2009 crisis led the Japanese government to look for alternatives to improve the national economy by promoting Japanese identity by introducing *omotenashi*. The research finds that *omotenashi* has successfully altered Japanese perception of Muslims as Japan becomes more multicultural than before. This study is explanatory and qualitative. Data were obtained from both observation and document/literature study.

Keywords: halal tourism, Japan, identity, *omotenashi*, Southeast Asia

Introduction

Despite the richness of traditional culture, the beauty of nature, and technological innovation, Japan was surprisingly not a popular destination for Muslim foreign tourists until the early 2000s. Tourism was not seen as a priority and not an actual vehicle for the country's prosperity. Japanese economy is heavily dependent on economic reconstruction based on an expansion of external demand, using *"monozukur"* (manufacturing) and foreign trade as "two wheels of one cart." However, this strategy proved to fail to sustain the long-term economy [1]. Until the end of 2013, only two Asian countries (China and Thailand) ranked in the top 10 rankings of the most popular tourist destinations. Fewer foreign tourists visited Japan than Malaysia, South Korea, and Singapore [2].

Furthermore, Japan's tourism sector was still developing compared to the world's leading tourist destinations, such as Hong Kong, Singapore, Italy, and France. Against this background, the administration of Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi in 2001

launched numerous structural reforms. Most importantly, in January 2003, he launched "Japan, a tourism-oriented nation," to revitalize the beauty of Japan, realizing a culture-creating nation. With Japan's changing orientation to become a tourism nation, Japan designated universal policies to accommodate tourists' needs. Furthermore, policies that supported international tourism in the previous administration, namely Welcome Plan 21 and Visits Japan, were improved by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2013. These policies have been integrated into the Action Program toward the Realization of Japan as a Tourism Nation, emphasizing Japan's transformation into a Muslim-friendly country.

Southeast Asia is Japan's marketing target as this region has a relatively large Muslim population and the largest market for halal products. Muslims in Southeast Asia predominantly live in Indonesia, Brunei Darussalam, and Malaysia. Southeast Asian countries are home to approximately 40 percent of the Muslim population and become a new attractive market for the Japanese tourism industry. In addition, Southeast Asian countries' economies are progressing well in recent years, improving their people's purchasing power. Besides, Southeast Asian countries are located not too far from Japan.

Furthermore, the Japanese government and the governments of ASEAN countries have stronger relationships than before since they agreed to strengthen cooperation in the ASEAN-Japan Comprehensive Economic Partnership (referred to as the "AJCEP") Agreement force in July 2010. This partnership allows the two sides to benefit from trade, investment, and service mutually. Thus, it means the halal industry has a good prospect in Japan.

Accordingly, it is not surprising that Japan has projected to reap an exponential benefit from opening halal business with the countries in the region. Since 2012, the Japanese tourism industry has focused on attracting inbound Muslim tourists from Southeast Asia. The Japan Tourism Agency (JTA) and the Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) have been trying to create a favorable environment for visitors from the region (JTA, 2013) by cooperating with the ASEAN-Japan Centre. Along with the increasing number of middle-class Muslim tourists and the emergence of low-cost airlines offering flight packages to Japan, many tourists from countries with large Muslim populations, such as Indonesia and Malaysia, have made Japan one of their tourist destinations. The Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI) report 2013 showed that Japan was ranked 23rd as a favorite destination for Muslim tourists in the non-OIC (the Organization of Islamic Countries) destination category with 3.9 points. (Crescent Rating, 2013). Japan rose in 2016 to the eighth position after Taiwan, scoring 49.1 (MasterCard and Presentation, 2016). Japan also won the "World Best non-OIC Emerging Halal Destination" award during the 2016 World Halal Tourism Award held in Abu Dhabi, UAE [3]

Literature Review

This part explains the existing literature on how the introduction of halal tourism in Japan up to 2019, before the Covid-19 outbreak. Albeit limited, some works of literature outline the development of Islam in Japan and how Muslims worldwide

contributed to the many aspects of Islam, which finally led to the introduction of halal tourism. Japan is a unique country. As a monocultural country, Japanese views of Islam are mixed. In one sense, despite Islam being a minority religion in Japan and religion not having an essential role in society, Japanese people are tolerant. They consider themselves Buddhist, Confucius, or Shintoist [4]. Muslims in Japan accounted for only 0.5 percent of the total Japanese population [5]. Another statistic showed that the number of Muslims at the end of 2016 was about 170,000 people, less than 0,2 percent [6].

Japan first contacted Islam when it was introduced as a Western religious thought in 1877. Islam at that time was known as a part of cultural history. Another critical contact occurred in 1890 when the Ottoman Turks sent a naval ship to Japan to introduce Islam diplomatically. Following the arrival of Tartar Muslims fleeing from the Russian Revolution, the formation of the Muslim community in Japan was further enhanced by the construction of the first mosque in Kobe (Kobe Mosque) in 1935. Three years later, the second mosque was built in Tokyo (Tokyo Mosque). However, these mosques did not represent the identity of Japanese Muslims. The Imams of the mosques were mainly foreign Muslims [7]. Japan experienced an Islamic Boom during World War II and after the oil shock in 1973. During the oil shock, Japanese media gave massive publicity about the Arab countries and the Muslim world and how they could benefit the Japanese economy. However, with the end of World War II and the oil shock, the coverage of Islam also disappeared.

On the other side, however, some Japanese people have xenophobia, even Islamophobia, although this attitude has not been explicit. The phobia could be witnessed by the Han Gurōbarizumu Kokusai Hoshu Rengō, or Anti-Globalism International Conservative Alliance (AICA), who started to show their resentment toward Islam in 2014 and the Toshiko Hasumi Manga Incident in 2015 [8]. In daily life, it is not wrong to say that the people exposed to peer pressure the most in Japan are Muslims. Japanese employers generally had negative and strict attitudes toward Muslim employees regarding prayer breaks and fasting. The time spent on worship was a loss of time and work, which may lead to the company's loss. Muslims working at Japanese companies usually give up their five daily prayers [9]. Negative impressions of Islam strengthen among the Japanese due to violence, prosecution, and terrorism in many places. Japan's xenophobic attitude was widely understood since Japan is one of the most monocultural and insulated countries in the world.

However, the Japanese economy performed better, and the yen strengthened (labeled as an 'economic bubble') during the late 1980s to the beginning of the 1990s, thanks to the immigrant workers from Islamic countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Iran. Apart from the 'economic bubble,' Japan needed foreign workers since Japan had experienced a labor shortage and an aging society. By the 1990s, Japan's number of non-Japanese Muslims reached more than 100,000 [10]. Slowly, the perception of Japanese people has changed toward Muslims in recent years. Anti-muslim discourse slowly has not appeared in mainstream newspapers like Asahi Shimbun and Yomiuri Shimbun. There is a growing acceptance of Muslims due to many factors, such as better education, a better understanding of Islam, the influence of the media, and civil society's role. More importantly, the Japanese government has reinforced the popularity of *omotenashi* as "a spirit of selfless hospitality" [8]. The *omotenashi* drew international attention while selecting locations for the 2020

Olympics and is now officially used by the government to stimulate Japanese national pride. *Omotenashi* symbolizes the relentless effort of Japan to welcome tourists, including Muslims further. The spirit of *omotenashi* is extended to visitors of all cultures and creeds. The study of Islam is now being encouraged. Japan is eager to reach a goal: offering halal *omotenashi* to meet Muslim travelers [11].

Halal has become necessary in the tourism industry recently; thus, Muslim and non-Muslim countries are tapping into this new market by providing tourism products, facilities, and infrastructures to cater to the needs of Muslim travelers. A significant influx of Muslim travelers has recently fueled a boom in Japan's halal restaurants and Sharia-compliant hotels. The halal tourism (sometimes called Muslim-friendly tourism) segment continuously shows incredible growth, allowing non-Muslim countries to become popular destinations among Muslim travelers. The halal industry is a lucrative business and one of the significant sources of economic growth. Besides halal tourism, the halal industry, Islamic fashion, Islamic finance, and the Islamic way of life have become new trends globally [12].

These emerging industries are because many Muslim-majority markets are now among the fast-emerging economies. With the advance of technology and communication, demands to visit other places are escalating. As a result, traveling becomes easy, in particular for middle-class Muslims. MasterCard Cresent Rating (2019) indicates seven critical drivers of Muslim travel growth: (a) Growing Muslim population; (b) Growing middle class/disposable income; (c) Younger population; (d) Increasing access to travel information; (e) Increasing availability of Muslim-friendly travel services and facilities; (f) Ramadan travel; and (g) Business travel. As shown in the table below, the Muslim travel market is continuously growing as one of the fastest-growing sectors of the global travel industry.

Before explaining the boom of halal tourism in Japan, it is important to briefly look at how some available texts depict that the number of foreign tourists to Japan has helped improve the economy of Japan. Some factors have contributed to Japan's increase in inbound tourists since 2013.

Mera and Ozaki (2013) listed five significant factors:
1. Recovery after the Great East Japan Earthquake
2. The depreciation of the Japanese yen against other currencies
3. The increasing number of Asian middle classes with a latent travel demand
4. The increase in Low-Cost Carriers (LCC) that link Japan and Asian countries
5. The easing of visas for many Asian countries

To add to the list, as Halal Navi (n.d) suggested, other factors that contributed to the growing number of Muslim tourists in Japan were (6) significant festivals and events in Japan; (7) the awareness of halal business opportunities in Japan; (8) the increase in Muslim-friendly and halal food availability; (9) the increase in Muslim-friendly accommodations in Japan; (10) the increase in Muslim-friendly facilities; (11) the growing number of halal expos and events held in Japan [13]

Other than these factors, it is essential to note that there is a global demographic change which gives a future trend for halal-tourism growth in Japan. According to Lipka and Hacket from Pew Research Centre (2017), Muslims will grow more than twice as many as the world population between 2015 and 2060. To compare, in the coming decades, the world's population and the number of Muslims

are projected to grow 32% and 70%, respectively. The number of Muslims is growing from 1.8 billion in 2015 to nearly 3 billion in 2060. While the number of Muslims in 2015 was 24.1% of the global population, it is expected to make up 31.1% forty-five years later. From this number, the total ASEAN population in 2020 is 670 million. Mastercard-Crescent Rating 2020 (2020) suggests that an advantage of ASEAN is that the people in these countries, 31% of the population aged between 20-40 years, from which age group is eager to travel. Japan reaps many benefits from this demographic change. It can be seen from the information about the Muslim market in Japan that the number of travelers to Japan has also dramatically increased over the years. For example, in 2004, there were about 15,000 inbound Muslim travelers. This number increased to 700,000 in 2016 and is projected to rise to 1,4 million in 2020 [14]. However, due to the Covid-19 global pandemic, the number most likely will not surge dramatically.

    Since the Asia-Pacific countries have been proactive in marketing and reaching out to the Muslim segment, this region is the most popular destination. Japan has been included as one of the most popular destinations for Southeast Asian millennial (aged between 18 and 36) Muslim travelers, as shown in this table:

Table 1: Top 10 most popular travel destinations for Muslim millennial 2018

Rank	Country
1	Malaysia
2	Indonesia
3	Japan
4	Thailand
5	Australia
6	Singapore
7	The United Arab Emirates
8	Britain
9	The United States
10	India

Source: Noohu (2017)

    This age group is projected to spend about US$100 billion by 2025 annually on traveling, and Japan's travel industry needs to cater to their needs. While desiring to seek new experiences and learning local cultures and heritage, millennial Muslim travelers usually value authenticity, affordability, and accessibility without sacrificing their faith. Aisha Islam, Mastercard's vice president of core and digital products in Indonesia, Malaysia & Brunei, claims that as the market continues to expand, the millennials "are the critical driver of growth for the travel industry" [15]. According to research, young Indonesians and Malaysians plan to visit an average of four countries, and Japan is one of the top destinations. Research also shows that despite unpleasant experiences, such as Islamophobia and stereotyping of travelers dressed in Islamic attire, millennials continue to travel [16].

    By 2050, the number of Muslims worldwide will almost be the same as the Christian population [17]. It is projected that Muslims will make up almost one-third

of the world's population, or nine billion people. It is logical for a country's market share to adapt to the dynamic changes in the modern Muslim community because halal food consumption has grown beyond the need to practice religious principles. Based on market segmentation, halal tourism has promising market opportunities and can drive the local economy through small businesses and creative industries. In 2016, the total number of tourists who arrived in Japan was more than 24 million. This number was ahead of the 20 million target set by the national government for 2020. JNTO recorded that nearly 271,000 Indonesians visited Japan in 2016, an increase from 63,000 in 2009. Meanwhile, there were more than 394,000 Malaysian visitors, a rise from 89,000 in seven years [18]. These figures show that Japan's position in the global halal market continuously enhances yearly, giving the Japanese government confidence to provide better services. Most Muslim travelers who come to Japan are from Southeast Asian countries. Even though Islam is a minority religion in the country, Japan is ready to meet Muslim visitors' growing demands by improving halal facilities, such as prayer rooms, Muslim-friendly restaurants, and water-friendly toilets. With many newly added facilities and better services, Japan is ready to become a halal-hospitality global player. Japan's *omotenashi* strategy has worked well, as evidenced by increasing inbound tourists for almost a decade. In 2003 the Japanese government established the Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO), promoting the Visit Japan Promotion Project. This project was one of Japan's efforts to target 10 million foreign tourists to Japan by 2010 [1]. In October 2008, Japan established the Japan Tourism Agency (JTA), initiated by Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda. JTA supported the Japanese community in developing tourism sites, increasing global competition in the tourism industry, and promoting Japanese tourism internationally [19]. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe announced the Japanese tourism policy in his first policy speech on the 'National Diet' in 2012. He stressed Japan's urgency in managing its country's identity as a 'tourism nation' in the eyes of the global community [20]. The Southeast Asian population was an essential target of the JTA. It hoped it could provide a comfortable environment for Southeast Asian tourists from Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Brunei Darussalam, and the Philippines by removing all barriers that might hamper their travels [21].

In 2012, the Japanese government manifested The Tourism Nation Promotion Basic Plan prepared by the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Tourism, and Transportation, listed in Article 10, paragraph 4 of the Tourism Nation Promotion Basic Law Act **X**

The document mentioned the government's immediate plan to materialize the tourism nation, expand the tourism base, and improve the tourism quality by strengthening the understanding of different cultures to increase the satisfaction of foreign tourists visiting Japan [21]. With the change in Japan's orientation to become a tourism nation in 2012, Japan made a universal policy to accommodate tourists' needs. In this case, JNTO and JTA tried to create strategies that benefited the country by providing tourists with information about tourism in Japan and halal tourism facilities. During the second cabinet meeting at the Prime Minister's office, PM Shinzo Abe refined the Japanese government's policy in supporting international tourism in 2013. This policy mentioned that halal tourism was an essential focus of the government. Therefore, Japan started to develop halal tourism in 2013 as an integral part of its development program to attract more Muslim tourists to visit

Japan. This program continued the Visit Japan Promotion Project launched in 2003. An increase in demand for halal products and services and demographic changes in Muslim societies have become significant driving forces for the fast-growing halal business in the global market. There is also a growing awareness of halal products worldwide, not only among Muslims but also non-Muslims, such as among the Japanese, due to ethical and lifestyle reasons.

The Japanese government and local businesses positively responded to this policy. Even the Japanese government decided to designate several prefectures, such as Kyoto, Hokkaido, Chubu, and Okinawa, as friendly regions to Muslim tourists. Besides, international airports, train stations, shopping centers, and public places in Japan also began to develop more Muslim-friendly facilities, worship rooms, and halal foods. The seriousness of the Japanese government was seen when the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) issued visa-free regulations in July 2013 for countries in Southeast Asia in commemoration of 40 years of friendship and cooperation between ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) and Japan. These countries, Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Singapore, Brunei Darussalam, and Indonesia, got the Japanese visa-free policy on December 1, 2014, for IC passport/e-passport holders **x** multi-entry visas applied for tourists from the Philippines and Vietnam. As for Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, and Thailand, visa-free visits were a maximum of 15 days [22]. In 2013, Japan experienced a surge in foreign tourists to reach over 10 million, and an estimated 30 percent or as many as 300 thousand visitors were Muslim tourists. To achieve an increase in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to reach JP ¥ 15 trillion in the tourism sector, Japan also targeted one million Southeast Asian tourists per year, equivalent to the projected growth of 8.7 percent per year [23].

Research Method

This study is explanatory and qualitative. Data were obtained from observation during the author's visit to Japan. This research employs several techniques that combine human resource information in observations and interviews and non-human resource information through library research. Collecting information from human resources is conducted through observation and unstructured interviews. This technique is due to the sensitiveness around the halal business since the author did not precisely convey the intention of researching the halal industry in Japan. The sensor element is significant in this case due to several factors, such as the novelty nature of the halal business, in which this novelty leads the business actors not fully understand the rules related to halal. In addition, some business actors have not fully complied with halal regulations due to several technical circumstances. Other than observations, this study consults non-human sources, such as government documents, scholarly journals, and internet-based information, from media published by Japanese mass media and others. Non-human information sources are needed to obtain past information and information not conveyed through observation and interviews.

1   First Section

1.1   A Subsection Sample

This part probes how Japan adapts to new trends in the development of the tourism industry by exploring some measures to address the industry's current global change. The author uses the idea of transformation to delineate how Japan has changed in the past two decades, involving changes in the people's perception and behavior that occur at the national level due to changes at the global level. This transformation embraces many factors that contribute to the fabric of Japanese society. The discussion about the transformation also includes the rejuvenation of the omotenashi concept. Besides changes in behavior, the transformation can also be seen to occur in the government's willingness to provide infrastructure to facilitate the growth of the halal industry. Therefore, we should first discuss the behavioral changes followed by infrastructural development.

The *omotenashi* factor undeniably has the power to contribute significantly to the Japanese behavioral changes in the halal industry. Long before the development of halal tourism and the popularity of *omotenashi*, the people of Japan were welcome to receive and provide the best service for guests. The development of *omotenashi* cannot be separated from *kokusaika* (internationalization). *Kokusaika,* which first emerged in the late 1960s and became popular until the 1990s [24], was used to show Japan's ambition to gain status as a significant country worldwide and reaffirm Japanese identity at home. *Kokusaika* enjoyed a discursive currency among Japanese intellectuals, academicians, politicians, and journalists for about three decades. *Kokusaika* was one of the "most compelling and ubiquitous catchwords" [25]. This concept has contested meanings and has a centrifugal component that can be seen from its purpose.

t is widely known that during the time of *kokusaika*, the Japanese people were attempting to become *kokusaijin* (international citizens). Also, there were a significant number of Japanese traveling abroad. For example 1990, there were nearly 11 million, and in 1993, the number increased to 12 million outbound Japanese travelers [25]. The numbers suggest that traveling overseas, including tourism, is "one of the areas in which Japanese seem to perceive a measure of success in achieving *kokusaika*" [26]. As a result of *kokusaika*, the tourism sector confirmed the imbalance between inbound and outbound travelers. 18,500,000 Japanese were traveling overseas; in contrast, only 8,370,000 visitors visited Japan [11]. The government tried to close the gap by regulations, like easing visa requirements for Southeast Asian countries to encourage many inbound tourists from this region.

However, since globalization has become a buzzword, the term *kokusaika* seems to have eroded and is "losing its stature" [24]. There was a separation between *kokusaika* and the Japanese national policy on rejecting immigrants resulted in the loss conception of 'place' among Japanese. Gradually, *tabunka kyosei* (multicultural coexistence) replaced *kokusaika* since Japan was becoming more inclusive to foreigners, adopting global norms, and promoting the global value of multiculturalism [27]. Since *kokusaika*, Japan has become more open to the outside world, and the awareness of cultural diversity is perceived to contribute to Japan's development to

the well-accepted international citizen status. The author argues that *omotenashi* is reconnecting Japan to the world, which would serve as a Japanese 'survival kit' to address many contemporary Japanese problems.

Omotenashi has gained prominence and now has become a buzzword among the Japanese to advocate Japanese identity globally. The quality and excellent service to Muslim tourists in Japan is a form of the *omotenashi*, which originates from Japanese culture not found in Western hospitality concepts [28]. *Omotenashi* is more than ordinary hospitality. It originates from the culture and philosophy rooted in Japanese tradition for a thousand years. As a fundamental national tourism policy, *The Tourism Nation Promotion Basic Plan, omotenashi* is stated*:*

"…we should promote bilateral international exchange carried out by young and other citizens, cultivate Japanese cultural groundings that will be accepted in the world, encourage people from overseas to have a better understanding of Japan, and disseminate the importance of nicely welcoming visitors from overseas with the spirit of "*omotenashi*." [29]

With the promotion of *omotenashi*, the Japanese government has introduced halal tourism as a significant platform to increase the number of inbound tourists, especially Southeast Asian Muslims. There are several measures to adjust to the new demands in the tourism industry. The author aims to specifically look at cultural adjustment, in this case, norms, religious and ethnic factors that have a fundamental role in opening a new market.

Cultural adjustment refers to the cultural norms, values, and social beliefs that shape people's behavior. Various societies have different attitudes toward globalization and market power. Differences in religious beliefs, race, social norms, and languages can create problems and difficulties in relationships among different countries, and these differences matter in doing business. In general, Muslims in Japan face typical problems concerning food, language, and work [30]. Most Japanese have less information about Islam except the limited and negative ones from the news. The Japanese's lack of knowledge of Muslim culture should be addressed. A country needs to take steps to juxtapose cultural differences. To transform the country toward a 'tourism nation,' especially to accommodate the Southeast Asian Muslims' needs, the Japanese government has taken various measures, showing their awareness about being open to different cultures. For example, recently, there has been an effort to overcome negative stereotypes towards the Islamic world.

Japanese academia's role in spreading Islamic values significantly improves people's understanding of Islam. Some universities have a role in bridging the communication between Muslims and non-Muslims. Prominent universities have centers for Islamic studies, such as Kyoto University, Sophia University, University of Tokyo, Waseda University, Doshisha University, Keio University, Tuffs University. Experts like Shimoyama Shigeru, Keiko Sakurai, Hisanori Kato, Atsushi Kamal Okuda, Hirofumi Tanada, Atsushi Yamagata, Nordeen Nobuo Mori, Kumiko Yagi, Shin Yasuda, Tonaga Yasushi, Nagaoka Shinsuke, Imamat Yasushi, Futatsuyama Tatsuro and many more, are among professors whose work has contributed to the change of positive impression about Islam among Japanese people. Shun Matsuzaka, a younger-generation digital creative director at McCann Kuala Lumpur and the founder of McCann Millennials Asia-Pacific, is actively promoting an understanding of the truth about Muslim millennials through the digital campaign [31]. Furthermore,

civil society's role is also essential to transforming the way of thinking in Japanese society. A civil organization, such as the Japan Muslim Society, is responsible for helping them learn Islam comprehensively by providing practical activities and programs related to Islam, Qur'an, and Arabic studies (Mori, 2018). This organization helps gain a better understanding and support for the Muslim society in Japan. Research conducted by Yulita and Ong (2009) suggested that intensive interactions between Muslims and non-Muslims in Japan helped to improve harmony and lift some stereotypes about Islam, particularly those exposed by the media, which often presented negative news about Muslims and the Islamic world. Moreover, they noted that the planned 2020 Olympic games, even though postponed due to the novel Coronavirus pandemic, have prepared Japan to be more Muslim-friendly. The Games give impetus to Japan in the future that it needs to be more multicultural and open-minded to differences. With the help of the media coverage of the Games, Japanese people are more familiar with halal.

As the figure below shows, contemporary Japanese society has a changing perception of Muslims. Thanks to the government and civil society's efforts to portray Islam, we can see significant progress in Japanese behavior towards Islam, which has brought positive transformation supporting halal hospitality's success.

Figure 3: selected articles that mention several topics about Muslims in Japan appear in Asahi Shimbun and Yomiuri Shimbun between January 1, 2014, and June 30, 2018.
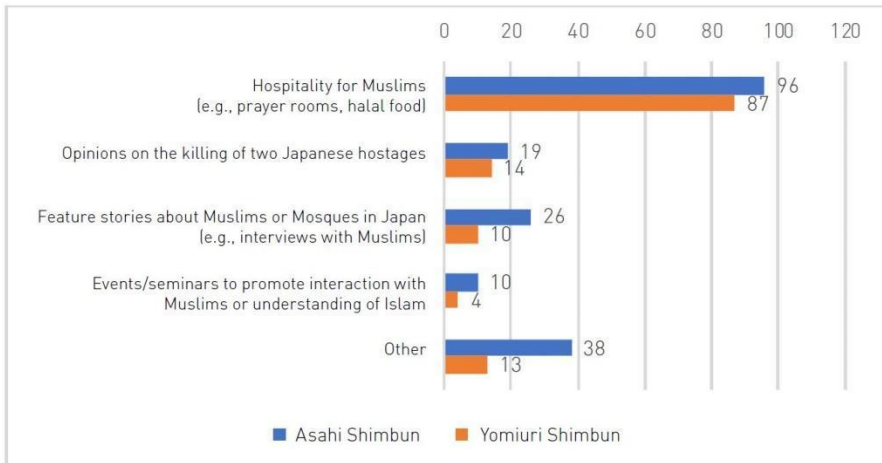
Source: Yamagata, A. (2019). Perceptions of Islam and Muslims in Contemporary Japan. *New Voices in Japanese Studies*, 11, pp. 1-25. The article is available at https://ro.uow.edu.au/lhapapers/3923

As Yamagata (2019) claims, Japanese hospitality has encouraged Japanese people to be more welcoming to Muslims as visitors and tourists, while negative attitude toward Muslims is decreasing. This evolution can be a giant leap for Japan to become a more multicultural and Muslim-friendly country. Japanese Muslims come from different backgrounds; many have settled as the second or third generation. These "hybrid Muslims" would be the key people to help bridge the local community with the Muslim community [10].

In addition to the transformation of behavior, to attract more significant numbers of Muslim visitors, Japan is restructuring its tourism industry to better serve the specific needs of Muslims. By doing this, it is hoped that infrastructural improvement will help Japan to become a popular tourist destination for Muslims. Because the Muslim market growth is fast-moving, the Japanese government and businesses are working quickly to prepare an infrastructure that is friendly to Muslim businesses and travelers. In line with creating comfort for Muslim tourists visiting Japan, the government is developing the halal industry in the service sector, together with the Nippon Asia Halal Association (NAHA), facilitating hotels with Muslim-friendly services by conducting seminars on halal certification for hotels or lodging places in Japan [32]. Not only are hotels that are officially granted halal certificates from NAHA, but several restaurants in Japan are also certified halal by the existence of halal restaurants that make it easy for foreign tourists, especially Muslims, to get halal food in Japan (PMIJ, 2016). In addition to information about large mosques in Japan, the government has provided a website called "Masjid in Japan," which contains complete information about mosques' locations in Japan [32].

More than that, the Japanese government equips its tourism policy with official Muslim guides and halal food websites, including (1) Join Halal Items, established in 2013 by utilizing social networking as a media publication to improve halal culinary information; (2) Al Habib Islamic Web Server, a site that can help Muslim tourists to determine the direction of Qibla by merely entering the name of the city being visited; (3) Islamic Finder Website, helping foreign Muslim tourists visiting Japan to determine prayer times and others. Furthermore, the Japanese government also established several halal consultants who offer specialized training for stakeholders participating in the market. Furthermore, to provide better service to cater to Muslim needs nationwide and foreign travelers, many websites are accessible. Some of them include Halal Japan Corporation (https://www.jp-halal.com/english), Japan Islamic Trust (http://www.islam.or.jp/), Muslim Professional Japan Association (https://mpja.jp/about-us?lang=en), Japan Halal Association (https://jhalal.com/english), Japan Muslim Guide (https://muslim-guide.jp/), Japan Muslim Access (https://jmahalal.com/), Halal Tour Japan (http://www.halal-tour.com/), Japan Halal Foundation (http://japanhalal.or.jp/), Halal Media Japan (https://www.halalmedia.jp), Guide on Halal in Japan (https://matcha-jp.com/en/3362.

Working with several Japanese tour companies, the Japanese government has launched a halal tour package for Muslim tourists based in Tokyo and Osaka [33]. JNTO also tried to comfort Muslim tourists by publishing a particular travel guidebook [34]. There are approximately 241 places of worship in Japan, including strategic places such as the Kansai and Narita international airports, Osaka and Tokyo stations, Nijo Palace tourist attractions, and several places such as cafes and restaurants [35]. Since the introduction of halal tourism, tours and travel providers have also reaped some profit. For example, Hiranoku-based Miyako International Tourist Company has been offering halal tours since 2012, attracting 400-500 visitors since 2014. This number made up 30 percent of the company's business. The majority of the guests, about 80 percent are people from Malaysia, 15 percent are from Singapore, and 5 percent are from Indonesia [23]. Providing halal food is essential to prepare itself to be a tourism nation and ready to welcome Muslims. Since the number

of Muslim populations has been increasing, the word halal has spread massively in society, and the halal explanation needs to be introduced to the Japanese by the Muslim community. Food is one of the biggest concerns for Muslims when traveling in Japan. Meanwhile, Muslims want to enjoy the local cuisine and taste of Japan. Regarding daily consumption, halal food discourse is essential because Muslims need to eat halal meals. Halal is about health, safe foods, faith, and worship of God. Muslim guidance for food is stated in the Quran surah al-Baqarah chapter 172-173. The surah said: "O you who have believed, eat from the good things which We have provided for you and be grateful to Allah if it is [indeed] Him that you worship. He has only forbidden to you dead animals, blood, the flesh of swine, and that which has been dedicated to other than Allah. However, whoever is forced [by necessity], neither desiring [it] nor transgressing [its limit], there is no sin upon him. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful."

Entering the era of the 2000s, the involvement of the Japanese industry in the halal segment slowly began to develop along with the increase in Muslim tourists in Japan. Japan is aware of this, and recently it has been actively working towards offering a variety of halal food. With an increased population and halal consumer income, demand for halal food will exceed 70 percent in 2050 [36]. To overcome any difficulties in experiencing Japanese cuisine during their visit, the number of halal restaurants increased sharply over a couple of years. Some restaurants have adapted their menus to cater to the needs of their customers. Halal food restaurants are available in major cities, offering authentic, traditional cuisine and modern ones. Examples of global brands seeking certification Halal for their products in the local market are Barry Callebaut, Givaudan, McDonalds, Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC), Monin, and Nestle SA.

In line with halal food, halal certification bodies also provide services to cater to halal restaurants. A halal certificate is issued by designated organizations that approve foods, drinks, commodities, and services as halal based on Islamic law. Halal certification is required since a halal certificate guarantees customers that they eat edible products that meet Islamic dietary requirements. The provider should follow Islamic standard procedures and processes before serving halal food in Islamic teaching. For example, the food must have been eaten, treated, and sacrificed, and the providers should have avoided animal abuse and mistreatment. Halal certification bodies are responsible for certifying products and ensuring that every product submitted for inspection fulfills the halal requirements to be consumed by Muslims. Japan's increasing local halal industry (rōkaru harāru) encourages the growth of industries specializing in Muslim tourists' needs. Therefore, the halal certificate system has started to gain significant popularity in the last few decades. In regions such as Southeast Asia, where multiple religions and cultures have coexisted, halal choices seem essential. In the last decade, Muslim minority regions such as Japan also started to recognize its importance due to the increased numbers of inbound Muslim visitors.

There have been several halal certification services in Japan recently. Research conducted by Yakin (2016:1) claimed that there were less than ten active halal certification bodies for various categories. Inside Japan, there are more than 200 halal-certified raw materials, 100 halal-certified products distributed, 150 halal-certified restaurants, and only about ten halal-certified hotels. According to

Yamaguchi (2019), the leading certification bodies in Japan were Japan Muslim Association (JMA); Japan Halal Association (JHA); Japan Halal Unit Association (JHUA); Japan Islamic Trust (JIT); Muslim Professional Japan Association (MPJA); Nippon Asia Halal Association（NAHA); and Emirates Halal Center (EHC). These bodies were established between 1986 and 2012. Earlier established certification bodies held a stricter standard compared to newer ones. The newly established agencies had a comparatively looser standard, which was known as "local halal" (Rōkaruhararu) (Adidaya, 2016: 14). These agencies were in collaboration with central halal certification bodies in Southeast Asia: Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM), Malaysia; Institute for Assessment of Food, Drugs, and Cosmetics of Indonesian Ulama Council (LPPOM-MUI), Indonesia; The Central Islamic Committee of Thailand (CICOT), Thailand; Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS), Singapore. According to a Halal Japan Corporation (HJC), a halal consultant who collaborates with JAKIM (Malaysia), they provide three types of certification: JAKIM Halal certification, HJC non-alcohol, and HJC non-pork certification.

Regarding accommodation, some hotels in major cities, like Tokyo, Kyoto, Osaka, Hokkaido, Fukuoka, Kanagawa, have been listed as providing sharia-compliant or Muslim-friendly hotels. Some of them are Park Hyatt Tokyo, Sakura Hotel Hatagaya, Hotel Chinzanso Tokyo, Kyoto Century Hotel, Hotel Granvia Kyoto, Hotel Plaza Osaka, Richmond Hotel Namba Daikokucho, Sahoro Resort Hotel, Hotel Maystays Premier, Ryokan Roppokan, Fukusenka. Masjids (mosques), as are prayer rooms in public spaces, like train stations and international airports, are available across Japan. In preparing for the upcoming Olympic Games, the Japanese government provides mobile prayer rooms for Muslim athletes and visitors to support them and stay comfortably.

The boom in non-food and beverage brands introducing halal-certified products can be seen as a strategy to win the hearts of the vast Muslim market globally. There has been a 'sharia' deepening among Muslims worldwide as they are more concerned with what they eat, how to dress, what they wear, and how they manage finance based on Islamic law. A new research finding suggests that the next disruption in travel is "the young independent, tech-savvy Muslim traveler, who won't settle," and they have more demand than the older age (TBWA\Asia, 2019). Accordingly, if countries are serious about developing a halal business, they should invest more effort in understanding this segment's behavior and seek a strategy to attract this group of travelers.

Challenges

While there is a boom in Muslim-friendly services, Japan still has many problems to overcome. The spread of the halal industry brings many opportunities and pitfalls simultaneously that create challenges for the business's survival. This section discusses the challenges faced by the industry based on existing conditions. The author has identified at least four problems that challenge the halal industry in Japan. If Japan is serious about tapping into this industry, it must address these problems.

1.2   Credibility

The halal industry boom has caused many parties to take advantage of personal profits without considering that such an attitude may harm their credibility as people may lose trust. For example, some restaurants put fake halal marks to attract Muslim customers (Adidaya, 2016) due to the difficulties in acquiring halal certification. Magazines and newspapers have criticized the halal consultants' profit-oriented attitudes that portrayed them as 'money-making' activities that may negatively affect Islamic values in the majority of Japanese [37]. Also, as people are now technology savvy, they seek online information. The accuracy of the information is on top of what they need. Thus, the people designing the web are responsible for giving accurate information. For instance, one of Japan's tourist agencies at www.japanesemuslims.com has misleadingly informed a list of halal restaurants that were not halal. This inaccuracy may confuse Muslim visitors, and worse, it can damage the image of Japan. As a result, this may create a paradox to the omotenashi tagline and contradict the Japanese culture of service [38]. Credibility is the key to the thriving service industry, as the credibility issue can be easily spread from client to client. Therefore, there is a need for evaluation among food providers in Japan.

1.3   The Absence of a Centralized Certification Body

There are many halal certification organizations in Japan, but only seven authorized agencies exist, as previously mentioned. Various bodies create difficulty maintaining a consistent standard of permissible goods and services [20], [39]. The absence of a centralized certification institution has led to competition among them, causing the certification process to become increasingly complicated and expensive, discouraging companies and municipalities from continuing the halal business in Japan. [40]. Three reasons are responsible for the difficulty for them to be united. First, between active halal organizations, there exists an ethnic division between Japanese and non-Japanese. Second, there is a competition between "moderate Islam" and "rigorous Islam." Third, an issue of different interpretations about halal standard exists, between "strict and severe" vs. "soft and negotiable" [41]. As in many countries where Islam is a minority, some concerns owing to a centralized certification body contribute to no benefits. It can even be seen as a 'discriminatory' policy since the government pays special attention to the minority religion. On the other hand, the government does not want to be accused of having an intervention in religious matters. Even though this issue is not openly discussed in Japan, people may think that discriminatory issues prevail.

1.4   Lack Knowledge About Halal

Japan is a monoculture nation, and Islam is a minority religion. Therefore, its popularity does not seem reasonable compared to other religions, such as Buddhism,

Shintoism, and Christianity. Not to mention that the Japanese are not obliged to adhere to a particular religion [33]. Halal is a sensitive issue related to religion, while religion is not openly discussed in Japan. As a result, the Japanese have the slightest knowledge and awareness of halal products and are interested in learning about halal. Unsurprisingly, Islam is detached from the Japanese native community, and the word 'halal' is unheard of. So it is irrelevant to talk about it [42]. For this reason, although Muslim-friendly tourism is developing in Japan, the dissemination of Muslim values is limited, even in areas where Muslim visitors are seen in considerable numbers[20]. The lack of knowledge, awareness, and understanding of the halal concept in Japan may lead to the declining values of *omotenashi*. Japan needs to conduct more halal-related events to improve Japanese businesses and the general audience to understand halal better.

1.5   Limited Access to Halal Food

Despite claims of the availability of halal food, there are currently few halal food producers and halal restaurants in Japan due to the alcohol culture, an issue of survival for the restaurants, and the way they prepare the dishes that are not halal in the real sense. Halal or Muslim-friendly restaurants are even more difficult or often impossible to find outside the major cities. The average supermarket in Japan does not sell halal products. Some supermarkets in major cities offer halal products but mainly frozen halal meats rather than ready-to-eat foods. In addition, typical Japanese restaurants provide convenience foods that are seemingly halal but may contain non-halal ingredients. Halal or Muslim-friendly restaurants at major airports and a few leading large hotels require prior reservations of at least a few days to prepare halal meals (www.japan-guide.com). It will be beneficial if convenience stores and vending machines across Japan provide halal products, as these are popular destinations for many tourists seeking food and beverages.

Conclusion

Japan was too late to realize that tourism is vital for its national economy. Thanks to the Japanese government-led program, branding as a 'tourism nation,' Japan's tourism sector has proliferated. It is interesting to discuss Japan's transformation from an unpopular tourist destination to one of the most popular places because Japanese society welcomes Muslim travelers. However, a massive change in the past decade has brought Japan's tourism sector to the global Muslim travel market boom. This trend bears chances and challenges for many reasons. First, halal tourism promises to improve the Japanese economy amid the declining economic situation, post-economic bubble, and aging society. As a new type of tourism, halal tourism is a lucrative business and one of the fastest-growing global sectors. Thanks to social media and the introduction of budget airlines, foreign tourists have increased sharply. In particular, Muslim Southeast Asians are increasingly motivated to travel to places that have become more friendly and accessible. For Japanese and Southeast Asian Muslims,

halal tourism is becoming a medium to understand each other. The Japanese learn new things, such as Muslim habits, food, and drinks that have been stereotyped. Southeast Asian Muslims are now eager to tap into a new experience to journey to a 'non-typical' tourist destination, enjoying *omotenashi* experience.

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