
MALAYSIA: OPPORTUNITY IN THE HALAL FOOD MARKET IN JAPAN

(MALAYSIA: PELUANG DALAM PASARAN HALAL DI JEPUN)

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ABSTRACT

Halal is an important concept in Islam where an object or action is considered allowable in Islam. It is a similar to the concept of kashrut (kosher) practised by the Jewish communities, which have a significant market in North America and Europe, and it is especially a fundamental issue among the more observant of the minority Muslim community in predominantly non-Muslim countries. Though in Islam, the concept of halal is not too stringent, there are certain criteria that should be met before a product, especially food products are considered as halal. In Malaysia, efforts to control the quality of halal food products are carried out by the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM). The status of JAKIM, as a formal programme with government support that issues halal certificates, allows the JAKIM-issued halal logo to be recognised internationally. Malaysia's position as a respected Muslim country among the Muslim community in Japan provides Malaysia with the advantage to market food products with internationally-approved halal certifications to Japan. The halal food market is generally a large market, with a value of US\$500 billion a year, and Japan contains a vacuum of this particular market that Malaysia could potentially fill, especially for the needs of the 70,000-125,000 minority Muslims in Japan. This vacuum of halal food market in Japan is due to 1) the failure of Japan to understand the dietary regulations of Muslims and to provide halal food products domestically, and 2) the lack of involvement of Muslim countries in providing halal food products allows for non-Muslim countries to act as providers, leading to the question of confidence on the status of the products. Therefore, Malaysia could potentially play the role of supplier and exporter of halal food products to meet the needs of the Muslim community in Japan.

Key words: halal food market, Muslim community Japan, Look East Policy, JAKIM

ABSTRAK

Halal adalah satu konsep yang penting dalam Islam di mana pekara atau tindakan yang diakui dibenarkan dalam Islam. Ia adalah sama dengan konsep kashrut (kosher) yang diamalkan oleh masyarakat Yahudi, yang mempunyai pasaran yang besar di Amerika Utara dan Eropah, dan ianya menjadi isu dan panduan asas dikalangan masyarakat minoriti Islam di negara bukan Islam. Walaupun dalam Islam, konsep halal tidak terlalu ketat tetapi terdapat kriteria tertentu yang perlu dipenuhi sebelum sesuatu produk, terutama produk makanan adalah dianggap halal. Di Malaysia, usaha untuk mengawal kualiti produk makanan halal dijalankan oleh Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (JAKIM). Status JAKIM, sebagai program rasmi dengan sokongan kerajaan yang mengeluarkan sijil halal, membolehkan logo halal JAKIM yang dikeluarkan untuk diiktiraf di peringkat antarabangsa. Kedudukan Malaysia sebagai sebuah negara Islam yang dihormati di kalangan masyarakat Islam di Jepun menyediakan Malaysia dengan kelebihan kepada produk makanan pasaran dengan pensijilan halal antarabangsa yang diluluskan ke Jepun. Pasaran makanan halal secara amnya adalah pasaran yang besar, yang bernilai AS \$ 500 bilion setahun, dan Jepun mengandungi peluang yang besar daripada pasaran ini bahawa Malaysia berpotensi mengisinya terutama untuk keperluan minoriti umat Islam di Jepun yang berjumlah 70,000-125,000 orang. Peluang pasaran makanan halal di Jepun adalah kerana 1) kegagalan Jepun untuk memahami peraturan pemakanan orang Islam dan untuk menyediakan produk makanan halal dalam negara, dan 2) kekurangan penglibatan negara-negara Islam dalam menyediakan produk makanan halal membolehkan bukan negara-negara Islam untuk bertindak sebagai pembekal, yang membawa kepada persoalan keyakinan mengenai status produk. Oleh itu, Malaysia berpotensi

memainkan peranan sebagai pembekal dan pengeksport produk makanan halal untuk memenuhi keperluan masyarakat Islam di Jepun.

Kata kunci: pasaran makanan halal, masyarakat Islam Jepun, Dasar Pandang ke Timur, JAKIM

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia, compared to other Islamic countries, has an advantage in its relations with Japan. Malaysia-Japan economic relations is quite strong, with Malaysia's economic policy favouring and benefiting Japan results in Japan placing much trust in trade with Malaysia.¹ Malaysia also forges close relations with the Muslim community in Japan in terms of da'wah (proselytization) and Islamic studies, and this provides Malaysia with the opportunity of marketing halal food products to this Muslim consumer group. In addition, Malaysia also has the advantage of a developed and detailed network system involved in quality control and halal status of food products, and this could help Malaysia in marketing their products to Japan.

This article discusses Malaysia's opportunity in the halal food market in Japan by looking at Malaysia's experience in the halal food market in other regions. This article attempts to answer one main question, which is whether or not Malaysia has enough experience in the halal food market in other regions to serve as advantage in efforts to market halal food products to Japan.

This article is divided into three sub-topics: first, Japan's interest in entering the halal food market in the Middle East region, and limited efforts by Japan to fulfil demand of access to halal food in the domestic market. Second, Malaysia's experience in the halal food market, the high recognition of the Malaysian halal logo, and Malaysia's involvement in the halal food market outside, and in halal food fora. Third, Malaysia's opportunity in Japanese market via economic cooperation and Malaysia's role as a halal hub.

JAPAN'S INTEREST IN THE HALAL MARKET: THE MIDDLE EAST AND DOMESTIC MARKET

There is an estimated 1.7 billion consumers of halal products in the world (0.2 billion of them being non-Muslim residing in Islamic countries such as Bangladesh, or Indonesia),ⁱⁱ valued at US\$500 billion annually.ⁱⁱⁱ This market does not only involve food, but also other products, such as cosmetics and beauty, finance and banking, and so on. From the total global Muslim population, the strongest market for halal food products are the Southeast Asian and Middle-East regions.^{iv} The Middle-East region is among the main consumers and importers of the largest halal food products in the world, where almost all countries in this region do not have large food exports. According to the statistics of Food Imports and Exports of Selected Countries, Year 2000, in Saudi Arabia, 7.3% of the total imports are food products, but there is no record of export percentages. The same situation could be seen in other Middle East countries, such as Bahrain (12.8% import, -% export), Egypt (21.2% import, -% export), Iraq (42.7% import, -% export), Oman (12.2% import, 1.9% export), Qatar (13.2% import, -% export), and Syria (13.8% import, 1.3% export).^v

Middle East dependence on food imports made this region attractive to meat export countries, such as Australia, which saw the Middle East as the largest and most important consumer of Australian meat products.^{vi} In this situation, it is not surprising for Japan to show interest in exporting Japanese beef to the Middle East. Since 2007, Japan has begun exporting halal *wagyu* beef^{vii} to the Middle East via the Azhar Halal Foods agency.^{viii} In 2009, Japan targeted the United Arab Emirates (UAE) by exporting Japanese rice, Fuji apples, pear and persimmon, fish and *wagyu* beef. Japanese food export value to the UAE is US\$3 billion in 2006, in increased to US\$4 billion in 2007.^{ix} For its domestic market, increase of Muslim population in any given area saw a necessity to meet the demand for halal food, and there are limited efforts by Japanese authorities to address this demand. In 2009, Kyoto University began providing halal food in school cafeterias to attend the demands of Muslim students there. This is because Kyoto is

home to 1,000 Muslim families, and many members of these families study at Kyoto University.^x

However, Japan's efforts in this market do not deny the argument that Japan is still unable to supply halal meat or food products in domestic and foreign market.^{xi} In the case of Kyoto University, even though it is a positive development for Muslim students there, it is still an isolated case, and no other higher institution of learning or schools in Japan show enthusiasm in providing halal food to their Muslim students. In the meantime, Zenkai Meat Corp., which in March 2011 announced they desire to supply halal meat to the domestic market, would only continue with this plan with a business partner from Malaysia or Indonesia.^{xii} Therefore, Malaysia has an opportunity in entering the halal food market in Japan if they cooperate with the food manufacturers there.

MALAYSIA'S EXPERIENCE IN THE HALAL FOOD MARKET

In order to prove Malaysia has the opportunity of penetrating the halal food product market in Japan and generating profits from it, an explanation of profits made by Malaysia in halal food market is necessary.

MALAYSIA'S SUCCESS IN EXPORT OF HALAL FOOD PRODUCTS

Since achieving independence, Malaysia was involved in halal market in the international stage and also in forming relations with Islamic countries, which are consumers of halal products. Malaysia is a member of the OIC (Organisation of Islamic Cooperation) and this means Malaysia is on good terms with the Middle East, and since the 1970s, Malaysia formed good relations with all countries regardless of ideology. Therefore, Malaysia has no problem being involved in the global halal food product market and forging trade relations with other countries.

Nor Aini Haji Idris and Norlaila Abu Bakar estimated the potential of global halal food products around US\$350 billion-\$400 billion annually, and from this total, Malaysia managed to enter 5% of the global market through the local halal food processing industry, and this number increased national expenditure by US\$ 17 billion.^{xiii} Malaysia's profit in halal food products is quite significant. In 2003 alone, exports of halal food made Malaysia RM5.5 billion, through exports of processed halal food products to over 80 countries.^{xiv} This number alone showed Malaysia has experience in producing and marketing halal food products and generating profits from it.

Export of Malaysia's halal products to the United Kingdom is one example of Malaysian success in marketing their products outside. In 2006, Malaysia succeeded in marketing halal products valued at RM1 billion to the United Kingdom in five years through the multinational supermarket chain, Tesco. Tesco bought fresh products (such as fruits and vegetables, fish, chicken, and meat) valued at RM100 million from the Perak government, and ensured the food products not only carry the halal certification, but also pass the British Retailers' Consortium (BRC) standard.^{xv}

In addition, Malaysia showed interest in the halal market in the Middle East. According to the Deputy Minister of International Trade and Industry, Datuk Mukhriz bin Mahathir, Malaysia's trade relations with the Middle East region saw a growth to RM 54.53 billion in 2008, compared to RM 39.87 billion in 2007, and among the top five products exported to the region were processed food that is valued at RM2.1 billion. To encourage growth of the food industry, the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (Miti) forwarded a grant of RM15.25 million (by April 2009) for development and promotion of halal products.^{xvi}

Malaysia's success in involvement in export of halal food products to other countries, such as the United Kingdom and the Middle East region, and seizing the opportunity in this profitable market, showed Malaysia has the experience in playing the role of supplier and exporter of halal food products, and this experience could arguably be applied to Japan as well.

There are a number of factors that led Malaysia to success in the manufacturing and export of halal food products to other countries compared to other Islamic countries. First is the advantage of the Malaysian halal logo. Malaysia is one of the few countries where the issuer of the halal certificate is a government organisation, compared to other countries where their certificates are issued by their respective Islamic organisations. This means the Malaysian government places the importance of issuing quality halal certificates (by JAKIM) in a more structured manner. As a result, the JAKIM halal logo is the most recognised and respected halal symbol in the world.^{xvii} In addition, the launch of the Malaysian Halal Standard MS1500:2004 in August 2004 reflected government commitment to a clearer and more practical halal status guideline. MS1500:2004 is formed in line with the ISO (International Organisation for Standardisation) methodology and is the first halal standard formed by an Islamic country. This standard is prepared by SIRIM (Standards and Industrial Research Institute of Malaysia), and it follows the GMP (Good Manufacturing Practices) and GHP (Good Hygiene Practices), as well as the IMP (Islamic Manufacturing Practices), where the IMP serves as the index determining whether a product carrying the halal label deserves the certification.^{xviii}

Second are the efforts of the government to promote Malaysian export overseas. In 2003-04, JAKIM (Department of Islamic Development Malaysia) released a list of food and beverage manufacturers, with 266 manufacturers on the list.^{xix} This high number of producers show there are a lot of halal food producers in Malaysia, and in Malaysia that could potentially serve as suppliers of halal food products to other regions, such as the Middle East. Therefore, there are efforts by the Malaysian government to aid in the export of their products overseas. For this reason, MATRADE (Malaysian External Trade Development Corporation) was founded, and

MATRADE's mission to promote Malaysia's export has enabled many local companies to carve new frontiers in global markets. Today as we continue to put the spotlight on capable Malaysian companies on the international stage, we are helping make the phrase

‘Made-In-Malaysia’ synonymous with excellence, reliability and trustworthiness.^{xx}

MATRADE is responsible in helping to promote Malaysian export overseas, and carrying out research on potential markets for Malaysia. In 2005, MATRADE identified five high-potential countries in West Asia to market their halal food products, which were Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Oman, Qatar, and Bahrain,^{xxi} and the Malaysian government would take this opportunity by promoting Malaysian export products to these countries, and generate revenue from this export trade.

MALAYSIA’S INVESMENT IN INTERNATIONAL FORA

Other than its involvement in export market, Malaysia also shows its interest in the halal food market by being involved in international-level fora related to the halal market. Malaysia is strongly interested in fora discussing halal issues in various aspects, and in identifying some weaknesses that could help all trading nations achieve profit. Among the fora attended by Malaysia are the World Halal Forum (WHF), the Malaysian International Halal Showcase (MIHAS), and the Malaysian International Food and Beverage Trade Fair (MIFB). In 2006, the World Halal Forum (WHF) was held for the first time in Kuala Lumpur. This idea came up because stakeholders in the Halal market—the producers, processors, manufacturers, logistics providers, retailers, restaurants, food service providers and others, actually constitute a new kind of industry in their own right; a diverse, complex, yet integrated industry with a global reach that crosses geographic, cultural and even religious boundaries...It became evident that there was a need for a dedicated Halal industry forum that would enable the stakeholders in the Halal market to gather on a regular basis.^{xxii}

This forum, officiated by the former Prime Minister Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, outlined seven objectives: 1. To create a focal point for the global halal community, 2. To gather halal industry leaders, experts and specialists to share their views, knowledge and expertise, 3. To establish an arena for discussion and collaboration to

stimulate the growth and development of the Halal market, 4. To facilitate problem resolution within the Halal industry, 5. To coordinate subject-specific industry groups and technical committees to support excellence, innovation and improvement in the Halal market, 6. To develop World-Class Halal Industry standards covering the entire value chain, and 7. To promote the concept of halal to realise its full potential as a globally recognised symbol of quality and safety.^{xxiii}

Other than the WHF, Malaysia is also responsible, as a strong proponent of the halal food product, in establishing MIHAS (The Malaysian International Halal Showcase). MIHAS is a trade fair organised by Miti annually in Malaysia.^{xxiv} MIHAS has two main objectives. First, to show the strength and potential of a global network; and second, to expand the foundation of MIHAS to include activities adaptable to halal requirements.^{xxv} In addition, a group from Malaysia called the International Halal Integrity Alliance is writing a draft of the same halal standard for all Islamic countries that can be used to manage this \$2 trillion global industry, from food to finance.^{xxvi}

Malaysia is also involved in the Malaysian International Food and Beverage Trade Fair (MIFB). MIFB is an annual festival held in Kuala Lumpur and seeks to bring together “F&B industry players and professionals from around the world to interact, transact and explore unlimited business opportunities from a multi-billion dollar global marketplace.” Malaysia plays the role of host to exhibition and promotion of new food and beverage products, where Malaysia becomes the intersection of a 1.5 billion people halal food market, and also the entrance gate to the 550 million people ASEAN food market.^{xxvii}

Other than the aforementioned fora, Malaysia also plans to become a halal hub that processes and packages halal food. As a halal hub, Malaysia would be the centre of processing and packaging Islamic food products, and the suggestion forwarded by Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, Deputy Prime Minister and former Minister of Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs states Malaysia’s readiness to serve as a centre of packaging and producer of halal certification for products produced in China and the Middle East.^{xxviii} However, a hub is not solely a

storehouse that collects products from other countries. Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi suggested the halal hub status is used whereby Malaysia develops areas such as logistics and mechanism of supply network, which at this time is dominated by Western firms.^{xxix} The Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dato' Seri Najib Tun Razak stated in 2004 "...Plans to turn Malaysia into a Halal hub does not mean operations to produce Halal food must be based only in the country. Malaysian investors could invest in countries where research and development facilities and expertise are available to produce and export Halal food."^{xxx}

Malaysia's efforts to promote the halal market in the international stage shows Malaysia is very experienced as manufacturer and producer of halal food products, and for this reason Malaysia could definitely supply halal food products in order to meet the demand of Muslim residents in Japan.

MALAYSIA'S OPPURTUNITY TO ENTER THE JAPANESE MARKET

According to Yuslinawati Mohd Yusof, MATRADE Trade Commissioner in Japan, Malaysia's opportunity to export products to Japan is quite good, especially in the food industry. This is because Japan only possesses 40% self-sufficiency and imports 60% of their food supply. Japan is currently dependant on food products from China, but some cases such as melanin in milk and contaminated spinach could potentially threaten Japan's food supply. Therefore, Malaysia should step in and function as a new food source for Japan.^{xxxi}

This study identifies some problems in halal meat and food product supply in Japan, and Malaysia could take the important step to enter this market.

The first and most important matter, Malaysia should collect the proper and exact information on the number of residents in Japan of the Islamic faith, which are the consumers and target group of this market. As previous researches found difficulty in identifying the number of Muslim residents there, Malaysia could work to recognise

the proper number, in order to understand and identify the proper size and target area. In this situation, Malaysia should establish an institution that serve as a centre of information on the Muslim market and community in Japan. This institution should work together with existing Islamic organisations, such as the Islamic Center-Japan, to collect the necessary information. Furthermore, Malaysian students associations, as well as Muslim students associations, in Japan are groups that could be used by this institution to collect information on the true number of Muslim residents in Japan, the situation of Islam in Japan, and the status of supply and access of halal food products by Muslims there. This collection of information is very important in order to facilitate delivery of halal food products to properly identified centres of Muslim community.

However, this information collection might take a considerable amount of time. Some gross estimate of the total population, distribution, and access of halal food products by Muslim in Japan, were provided by earlier scholars, and could be used by Malaysia as well. Clearly, supply of halal food shops and restaurants that provide halal food is available in Japan. In fact, there is access to halal food product in Tokyo, and some shops in Yokohama, Kobe, Nagoya, and Sapporo. However, based on the distribution of Muslims in Japan based on a map in an article by Bushra Anis (dated 1998-still not updated), six out of twelve areas marked as areas with Muslim population do not have shops or restaurants that provide halal food products (Shizuoka, Kyoto, Hiroshima, Sendai, Tokushima, and Hakodate). From these facts, Malaysia should take the opportunity to become a distributor and exporter of halal food products to areas with Muslim consumers that require access to the products. This effort would give Malaysia an advantage over other countries, for entering into a market with little competition, while supplying products to areas with existing halal food shops and restaurants.

Furthermore, in order for Malaysia to easily enter the Japanese market as an exporter and distributor of halal food products, Malaysia could provide a mutually-beneficial cooperation with Japan as well. Japan has shown interest in entering the halal market in the Middle

East, especially the meat market. Japan's failure to fulfil the halal criteria in its food products (judging from the Ajinomoto Co. and Saga beef controversy cases) provides an opportunity for Malaysia to enter the Japanese market, especially as a trade partner and a halal hub. Malaysia's role as a halal hub, a centre of processing and export of halal food, provides a great opportunity for Malaysia to export halal food products to meet the demand of Muslim consumers in Japan. This is because Malaysia uses the status of a halal hub to export Malaysian halal products to Muslim consumers there, while issuing halal certification and playing the role of middleman in the halal food market channel between Japan and the Middle East.

In addition, Malaysia's experience as an aggressive and developed nation in promoting global halal trade places it in a position of strategic trade partner if Japan desires to place itself in the halal food market. The Halal food product certification provided by Malaysia is one of high quality and internationally recognised. Therefore, the export of Malaysia's halal food products to Japan is the export of high quality products that meet the demand of Muslim consumers in that country.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this chapter seeks to explain Malaysia's opportunity in the halal food market in Japan by judging Malaysia's experience in other regions. Malaysia does possess valuable experience in its halal food trade with other countries and regions, generating profits valued at RM5.5 billion annually. Malaysia's experience and advantage is due to certain factors, such as Malaysia's halal logo, widely recognised as a symbol of high quality and sanitation, government effort to promote products overseas, and the active involvement in halal fora to discuss the issue of halal food products.

The a fore mentioned factors advertise Malaysia as a good strategic partner if Japan desires to be involved in the halal food market in Japan, such as its interest in the Middle East. This close relationship, plus Malaysia playing the role of the halal hub, facilitates Malaysia's

chances in entering the Japanese market and exporting and supplying halal food products to Muslim consumers there.

ⁱ For detailed relations on Malaysia-Japan economic relations, see Md Nasrudin Md Akhir, "Five Decades of Malaysia-Japan Relations." In Md. Nasrudin Md. Akhir and Rohayati Paidi (ed.) *Japan and the Asia-Pacific*. Kuala Lumpur: Japan Studies Program. pp. 53-86.

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ⁱⁱⁱ (2006, 8 May) "Halal menu 'should appeal to all'," *BBC News*.

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^{iv} Riaz, M. N., dan Chaudry, M. M., *Halal Food Production*. p. 31

^v *Ibid.*, pp. 36-38

^{vi} North Queensland Register (2009) "Halal red meat exports up 17pc."

Taken from <http://www.halaljournal.com/article/3991/halal-red-meat-exports-up-17pc> (Accessed 6 April 2011)

^{vii} The history of the *wagyu* beef is an interesting one. This particular cattle was brought to Japan in the 2nd century CE, but later, due to the Tokugawa Shogunate policy of isolation, the *wagyu* cattle went through a unique process of breeding, which later produced high quality beef and is considered the best beef in the world. "Wagyu Beef History" *Kobe Beef America*.

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