



Establishment of a community-based halal certification body: A case study of Halal International Trust Organization (HITO) in Japan[†]

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ABSTRACT

Japan's aging society, driven by declining birth rates, urbanization, and sociocultural factors, has necessitated increased labor migration from countries such as Indonesia, which now accounts for over 149,000 residents (2023) and 430,000 annual tourists (2023). This demographic shift has amplified the demand for halal products among Indonesia's Muslim majority, yet Japan lacks formal halal regulations, relying instead on third-party certifications such as the Japan Halal Association (est. 2010). To address this gap, the Indonesian Embassy (KBRI) in Tokyo and Keluarga Masyarakat Islam Indonesia or Indonesian Muslims Association (KMII) Japan initiated the establishment of a community-based halal certification institution for Indonesian Muslims in Japan to address this gap. This study aimed to determine the establishment of the Halal International Trust Organization (HITO) in Japan. The methodology of this study was descriptive qualitative. The data collection process was conducted through interviews to obtain data and observations. This study was conducted in Tokyo. The informants were selected using purposive sampling techniques. The informants involved in the study were the management of KMII, HITO, and officials at KBRI Tokyo. HITO operates under KMII Japan Ippan Shadan Hojin (a legally recognized non-profit). HITO's five functions include setting locally adapted halal standards, auditing products, training auditors, and fostering socioeconomic integration. Its organizational structure features a supervisory board, advisory council, and daily management team supported by 31 trained assistants across nine prefectures. The certification process involves online submissions, facilitator validation, approval of 'fatwa' council, and digital certificate issuance, prioritizing affordability for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs).

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1 Introduction

Japan is a renowned country that is currently facing the challenges of an aging society. Based on observation, this demographic shift is driven by a complex interplay of factors, including declining birth rates, rapid urbanization, evolving lifestyles, restrictive government policies, rigid corporate structures, and deeply rooted patriarchal cultural values. These elements, combined with the broader socioeconomic and cultural context of Japan as a developed country, have been reported to contribute significantly to a trend in which many Japanese women delay or forgo marriage and childbearing (Iskandar 2020).

The aging population of the country has stimulated the international migration of skilled labor from developing countries such as Indonesia. According to the Immigration Services Agency of Japan (2023), more than 149,000 Indonesian citizens currently reside in Japan, comprising primarily Muslim workers and students (Economic Attaché of the Indonesian Embassy Tokyo 2024). In addition to this resident population, Indonesian tourists frequently travel to Japan. Data from the Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) showed that the number of Indonesian tourist arrivals surpassed 430,000 in 2023, signifying the highest figure recorded to date (Economic Attaché of the Indonesian Embassy Tokyo 2024).

Regardless of the reality that Japan is not a member of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the country ranked third among Muslim-friendly destinations in the Global Muslim Travel Index (Nuraini 2021). The Japanese government has set an ambitious goal of attracting 60 million tourists annually by 2030, with projections suggesting that Muslim tourist arrivals will grow by approximately one million each year, reflecting an estimated annual increase of around 8.7% (Kunio 2002). This upward trend in the number of Muslim Indonesians working, studying, and traveling in Japan has intensified the demand for halal products. Masayuki Numajiri

refers to this novel trend as the "halal boom" (Adidaya 2016). The halal boom in Japan also shows the importance of halal food not only for the Muslim community (Gandhi *et al.* 2024).

As observed, the high demand for halal products in Japan is not currently met with an adequate supply, resulting in relatively high prices and limited availability. This scarcity persists despite the absence of societal resistance to halal food production, typically reflecting an openness partly rooted in Japan's omotenashi culture. Omotenashi, which translates to "hospitality," reflects a cultural ethic of wholehearted service extended to guests and tourists of diverse faiths and cultural backgrounds, including Muslims (Janti 2020). However, it is essential to comprehend that Japan's embrace of omotenashi has not translated into formal regulatory support for halal products. This is evidenced by the fact that the government has yet to establish specific laws or standards for halal certification. In this regulatory vacuum, the role of non-profit organizations, such as the Japan Halal Association, founded in 2010 and based in Osaka, has become very important in facilitating halal certification.

The absence of formal halal regulation in Japan is largely due to the lack of Islamic judicial institutions or specialized fatwa councils capable of overseeing and legitimizing certification process. This elucidation is in line with the results from Hasnan & Kohda (2023), who argued that the lack of global halal standards remained a significant barrier to the industry's development. As a result, halal certification in Japan depends on partnerships with recognized halal authorities from Muslim-majority countries, such as Indonesia.

According to Yamaguchi (2019), the process of obtaining halal certification in Japan was both complex and costly, prompting many companies and local governments to abandon the effort altogether. This result was supported by Idris (2024), who further described the path toward halal certification in Japan as fraught with challenges, ranging from cultural

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sensitivities and regulatory ambiguities to prohibitive costs and the limited availability of certified materials. In order to effectively identify halal products in Japan, an application called “Halal Jepang” was developed with the aim of providing information on certified halal products, restaurants, and services nationwide (Cahyadi *et al.* 2024). The application categorizes food information into three groups namely halal, questionable, and haram, with multiple certification levels, including Halal LV1, LV2, LV3, Questionable, Haram LV1, and Haram LV2, each with specific meanings (Halal Jepang 2025).

In response to the growing demand for halal products and the absence of a regulatory framework in Japan, KBRI Tokyo, which is the guardian and representative of Indonesian citizens in Japan, initiated the establishment of a community-based halal certification body specifically intended for Indonesian Muslims living in the country.

2 Methodology

This study aims to thoroughly examine the founding and operations of Halal International Trust Organization (HITO) in Japan. In order to achieve the stated objective, a descriptive qualitative study design was adopted to gain an in-depth understanding of the initiative. Data were collected through interviews and direct observations conducted in April 2025, with the fieldwork centered in Tokyo. Accordingly, study informants were selected using purposive sampling approaches, targeting key stakeholders such as administrators of the Keluarga Masyarakat Islam Indonesia (KMII), known as the Indonesian Muslims Association in Japan, representatives from HITO, and officials from the Indonesian Embassy (KBRI) in Tokyo.

3 Result

KBRI Tokyo serves as the official diplomatic mission of the Republic of Indonesia to Japan, and concurrently represents the Indonesian government to the Federated States of Micronesia. Located at 5-2-9 Higashi Gotanda, Shinagawa-ku, Tokyo 141-0022, the embassy is headed by an ambassador appointed directly by the President of the Republic of Indonesia. The first ambassador assigned to serve at KBRI Tokyo was Rudolf Alexander Asmaun (1958–1960), while the current officeholder, Ir. Heri Akhmadi has held the position since 2020.

KBRI Tokyo has five legal functions, as outlined in Presidential Regulation No. 108/2003, which defines the embassy's core duties as official representatives safeguarding national interests. The five functions include:

- a. Diplomatic Representation
Serving as Indonesia's official governmental representative in Japan, managing bilateral relations in politics, economics, and security, including negotiating international agreements and cooperation.
- b. Protection of Indonesian Citizens
Providing legal advocacy, emergency assistance, and support to Indonesian nationals facing issues such as document loss, health crises, or legal conflicts in Japan.
- c. Consular Services
Issuing electronic passports (implemented at KBRI Tokyo in July 2024), legalizing documents (birth certificates, marriage certificates, diplomas), notarial services, and offering repatriation assistance and crisis management.
- d. Economic-Cultural Promotion
Facilitating bilateral trade and investment, including halal product development in Japan, and organizing cultural events to introduce Indonesia's heritage.
- e. Monitoring and Reporting
Analyzes Japan's political, economic, and social development to support Indonesia's foreign policy decisions.

3.1 The Roles of KBRI Tokyo in Developing Halal Product Ecosystem in Japan

Halal product ecosystem in Japan is built on four essential pillars, namely halal certification organization, a fatwa council, halal facilitators, and an online system. As the diplomatic representative of Indonesia in Japan, KBRI Tokyo plays a very important role in nurturing and expanding this ecosystem through a series of strategic initiatives. First, the embassy actively advocates to Japanese authorities for improved access to halal products, particularly to serve the dietary needs of Indonesian Muslims residing in the country. This advocacy becomes specifically important during Ramadan, a period marked by significantly increased demand for halal goods.

Second, KBRI Tokyo collaborates closely with KMII Japan. On September 29, 2024, the embassy officially launched HITO, which is Japan's first Indonesian community-based halal certification body. This initiative not only aims to ensure halal integrity of products but also contributes to the development of the broader halal ecosystem in Japan.

Third, KBRI Tokyo promotes the establishment of a Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA) with Japan, which would streamline the bilateral recognition of halal certifications and facilitate halal product trade without

redundant inspections. This move was fully supported by Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs.

Fourth, in coordination with the Tokyo Representative Office and various stakeholders of Bank Indonesia, the embassy has organized competency training for 15 Indonesian community representatives in Japan. This initiative was organized with the primary aim of laying the foundation for a reliable halal product assurance management body.

Fifth, the embassy engages the Indonesian Students Association (PPI) Japan in promoting halal products through cultural programs, academic studies, and public outreach. During these engagements, students are motivated to explore Japanese food technologies that are in line with halal principles.

Sixth, KBRI Tokyo fosters synergy with Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs to support Indonesian entrepreneurs in Japan. This includes facilitating the expansion of halal-based businesses and enhancing the visibility of Indonesia's halal culinary market abroad.

3.2 Profile of HITO Japan

The Indonesian Muslim community in Japan is organized under the umbrella of KMII Japan (Keluarga Masyarakat Islam Indonesia). This group has established a legally recognized entity under Japanese law, known as KMII Japan Ippan Shadan Hojin, which is a general incorporated association. Furthermore, the legal entity subsequently established HITO, a community-based halal certification body designed specifically to serve the needs of Indonesian Muslims residing in Japan. HITO was officially launched on September 29, 2024, and is headquartered at Parasuto Meguro 3 Chome 506, 3-8-10 Meguro, Meguro-ku, Tokyo 153-0063. For inquiries, HITO can be reached via email at halalhito.japan@gmail.com

HITO envisions becoming a reliable and trusted community-based halal certification body in Japan, emphasizing integrity, quality, and service. To realize this vision, the organization pursues several missions, namely increasing the availability of Indonesian halal products in Japan, assisting local producers, particularly those owned by Indonesian citizens, in meeting halal certification requirements, and educating the Japanese public about the principles and importance of halal product compliance.

As the only independent, community-driven halal certification body in Japan specifically oriented toward the Indonesian Muslim population, HITO carries out a broad range of responsibilities. These include developing and implementing halal certification standards adapted to local contexts while maintaining international credibility, conducting halal audits and issuing certifications for products such as food, cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, and other consumables, as well as organizing training programs and certification for halal auditors. Moreover, the organization aims to generate socioeconomic benefits by promoting the growth of halal businesses within Japan, expanding domestic market reach, facilitating halal product exports, and promoting the inclusion of Muslim communities through halal literacy and integration initiatives.

As a point of comparison, institutions such as the Japan Halal Association (JHA), established in 2010 and based in Osaka, are among halal certification bodies recognized by several Muslim-majority countries, including Indonesia. However, JHA operates on a broader national level and is not specifically designed to address the unique needs of the Indonesian Muslim community in Japan. Considering this gap, HITO serves as a complementary institution with a more focused, community-specific approach, directly responding to the unmet needs of Indonesian Muslims residing in Japan that have not been fully accommodated by existing halal certification bodies.

The establishment of HITO is projected to support four key areas. First, HITO aims to fulfill local needs by addressing the specific requirements of Indonesian Muslims in Japan for halal food, cosmetics, and pharmaceuticals. Second, it seeks to build consumer trust by providing recognized and reliable certifications. Third, HITO emphasizes stakeholder collaboration by partnering with local governments, businesses, and non-governmental organizations. Fourth, the establishment gives public education, raising halal awareness among Muslim communities, producers, and service providers in Japan.

The presence of HITO is expected to support the development of halal tourism in Japan, which, according to research by Kodir *et al.* (2019), is still considered inadequate to this day. This inadequacy is attributed to several factors, including the limited number of certified halal restaurants, the lack of prayer facilities such as musalla and ablution areas at major tourist destinations, and the insufficient availability of clear and accessible information regarding halal services for Muslim tourists. The benchmarks used to determine whether halal tourism is adequate include the availability of certified halal food, Muslim-friendly accommodations, easily accessible prayer facilities, as well as education and training for tourism industry stakeholders concerning the specific needs of Muslim travelers.



Figure 1: KMII Logo



Figure 2: HITO Logo

3.3 HITO Organizational Structure

The formation of the HITO was based on three core strategies approaches which community ownership, collaboration with Islamic scholars and experts, and education and training. HITO is owned and managed by KMII Japan, which ensures that all HITO activities and policies align with community values and needs.

In its operations, HITO consistently involves Islamic scholars and 'shariah' ('ulama') experts in the certification process to guarantee that all certified qualifications meet general halal standards while considering local conditions. Furthermore, beyond its core function of halal certification, HITO plays an active educational role by offering structured training programs for both halal auditors and other stakeholders included in certification ecosystem.

According to Decree Number 01/SK/II/2025 issued by KMII Japan on February 7, 2025 (S1), the organizational structure of HITO consists of a supervisory board made up of nine members and an advisory board comprising four members. Its daily management team includes a chairperson, vice chairperson, secretary, treasurer, and assistant treasurer.

The organization also has a dedicated fatwa commission composed of an advisor, a chairperson (who also serves as a member), a secretary (also serving as a member), and two additional members. Moreover, the commission is supported administratively by a secretariat consisting of a head of secretariat, a deputy head, and a logistics coordinator.

To date, HITO has trained 31 halal certification assistants who received respective qualifications through the Indonesian Halal Certification Center. These assistants are strategically based across various prefectures and cities in Japan, including Hokkaido, Ibaraki, Saitama, Tokyo, Chiba, Ishikawa, Shizuoka, Aichi, and Kyoto, allowing HITO to maintain a broad and responsive operational reach throughout the country.



Figure 3: HITO Halal Certification Logo

3.4 Submission Flow of HITO Halal Certification

Halal certification application procedure through HITO begins with account creation on the official website, <https://halalhito.com>. After registration, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) may proceed to submit respective requests for certification. This submission is then followed by a verification and validation process conducted by halal facilitators at HITO. Upon completion, HITO performs document verification and subsequently issues a confirmation of submission. Subsequently, a fatwa council meeting is convened to deliberate on the application, and after approval, HITO issues halal certificate, which SMEs can directly download via the link provided by the system. The complete flow of HITO's halal certification process is shown in Figure 4.

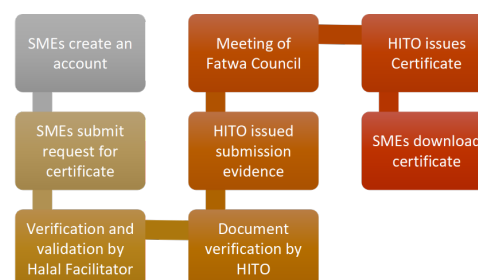


Figure 4: Submission Flow of HITO Halal Certification

4 Discussion

As observed from the obtained data, five key features distinguish HITO from other halal certification bodies operating in Japan. These features include the fact that, first, HITO emphasizes a self-declared halal product or service identity, placing initial responsibility for halal compliance on the producers. Second, producers or service providers seeking certification must designate a person-in-charge (PIC) for halal process within respective SMEs. Third, HITO assigns facilitators to guide companies alongside respective designated PICs throughout certification procedure, including assistance with documentation preparation. Fourth, certification is granted only upon the approval of the submitted documents by the Fatwa Council. Fifth, this mechanism is designed to be significantly simpler and more cost-effective, particularly for SMEs operating across Japan.

These distinctions are expected to address longstanding challenges related to the high cost of halal certification in Japan. Previously, SMEs were often unmotivated to obtain certification due to the need to bring in assistants from Tokyo or the country of origin of the certifying body. HITO addressed this issue by training and stationing halal certification assistants in various cities across Japan, thereby reducing costs to only local transportation expenses.

Historically, the prohibitive costs of certification have deterred many mid- to lower-tier producers and restaurants in Japan from pursuing halal certification. The establishment of HITO aims to reduce this reluctance by eliminating financial barriers and providing a more accessible certification process. Accordingly, as a pilot initiative in 2025, HITO is currently certifying several businesses, including "Bakso Koga" in Koga, Ibaraki Prefecture; "Warung Rupa-Rupa" in Oobushi, Aichi Prefecture; "Mongol Moro" Resto

in Shinjuku, Kanto Prefecture; “Maruzen Meat” in Kagoshima, Kagoshima Prefecture; and “Ani & Ivan Product” in Hamamatsu, Shizuoka Prefecture.

5 Conclusion

In conclusion, the establishment of the HITO in 2024 significantly addressed Japan’s lack of formal halal regulations by introducing and offering a community-driven certification framework designed specifically to cater to the needs of Indonesian Muslims. Through its four-pillar ecosystem, comprising standardized certification procedures, religious oversight, locally trained facilitators, and digital infrastructure, HITO prioritized accessibility for SMEs while promoting the integration of Islamic practices into Japan’s broader socio-economic landscape.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Associated Content

Supporting Information

† Decree Number 01/SK/II/2025 issued by KMII Japan on February 7, 2025 were submitted in PDF form as supporting information.

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