



Comparing halal certification pathways in Japan: Muslim Professional Japan Association (MPJA), Halal Japan Corporation (HJC), and Halal International Trust Organization (HITO)

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ABSTRACT

Japan's expanding halal lifestyle market has grown alongside increasing numbers of Indonesian migrants and tourists, though governance remains fragmented in the absence of a national halal standard and dependence on multiple non-state certifiers. This study offers a document-based comparative analysis of three key halal certification bodies in Japan, namely the Muslim Professional Japan Association (MPJA), Halal Japan Corporation (HJC), and the community-based Halal International Trust Organization (HITO), to understand how the application mechanisms of each institution shape everyday access to halal products and services. Drawing on market intelligence reports, institutional documents, and official websites, the study maps differences in application flows, documentary requirements, cost profiles, and bases of shariah authority across the three outlined institutions. The results obtained from the analysis showed that MPJA functions as an independent certifier with transnational recognition, connecting Japanese firms to Southeast Asian halal food and tourism markets. HJC was observed to operate as a corporate intermediary that structures graded labels from JAKIM halal certification to Muslim-friendly schemes. Meanwhile, HITO was found to embed halal authority within Indonesian diaspora networks through an SME-oriented, digitally mediated pathway that lowers informational and financial barriers. The present study argues that these divergent certification logics co-produce an uneven, potentially complementary non-state halal ecosystem, where export-oriented firms and community-based SMEs access distinct routes to religious legitimacy and integration into Japan's halal lifestyle economy. It concludes by outlining implications for standard harmonization, mutual recognition with Indonesian authorities, and policy support for community-based certifiers as part of the broader development of the global halal ecosystem.

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Diaspora-based certification
Global halal ecosystem
Halal lifestyle economy
Non-state halal governance
SME-oriented halal pathways

History:

Received 10-02-2026
Revised 06-04-2026
Accepted 09-04-2026

1 Introduction

Japan is a country that has experienced significant demographic transformations characterized by an aging population, declining fertility rates, and a growing dependence on foreign labor, particularly from developing countries such as Indonesia (Gandhi *et al.* 2025a). Based on observation, more than 149,000 Indonesian nationals currently reside in Japan, predominantly as Muslim workers and students, while Indonesian tourist arrivals exceeded 430,000 in 2023, marking the highest level recorded to date. These dynamics have contributed to a rising demand for halal products and services, extending beyond food and beverages to include accommodation, tourism, and broader lifestyle sectors consistent with Islamic principles (Kamila 2024).

The observed increasing demand is often described as a "halal boom," though existing studies point to persistent mismatches between demand and supply in the Japanese context (Adidaya 2016; Gandhi *et al.* 2025a; Yusof & Shutto 2014). Gandhi *et al.* (2025a) observe that the availability of halal products in Japan remains limited, resulting in relatively high prices and constrained access. Similar concerns appear in recent investigations on halal consumption and tourism. These studies show that halal-oriented facilities and certified restaurants are concentrated in major cities, while access in smaller cities and rural areas remains problematic for Muslim consumers (Nabila *et al.* 2024; Kamila 2024). Despite Japan's global reputation for *omotenashi*, or hospitality, this cultural orientation has not been accompanied by comprehensive regulatory frameworks for halal governance, and the government has not established standardized national laws or official institutions dedicated to halal certification (Gandhi *et al.*

2025a; Pratiwi 2019). Simultaneously, the development of digital halal applications and certification institutions since the 2010s has created a technology-mediated halal ecosystem in which mobile platforms, private certifiers, and diaspora organizations provide information and regulatory gaps (Gandhi *et al.* 2025b).

Without robust state regulation, non-state halal certification bodies have taken on the role of key actors in governing halal standards and practices in Japan (Adidaya 2016; Mulyadi 2023; Yusof & Shutto 2014). Within this context, earlier studies have drawn attention to the proliferation of certification bodies with varying standards, a condition that can create confusion among businesses and consumers regarding institutions possessing credible authority. For instance, ITPC Osaka (2020) identified the Muslim Professional Japan Association (MPJA) as a prominent certification body that has adopted recognized halal standards to strengthen consumer trust both domestically and internationally. Halal Japan Corporation (HJC) has also made efforts to strengthen institutional legitimacy through collaborations with established overseas halal authorities, bringing its procedures closer to widely accepted global benchmarks (ITPC Osaka 2020).

Recent work on halal consumption and lifestyle further shows how halal certification shapes Muslim consumer confidence and purchasing decisions, including in relation to Japanese food products and restaurant chains (Ramadhani 2024; Pangestu & Attas 2022). For example, studies conducted in Indonesia reported that halal certification, religiosity, service quality, and lifestyle orientations positively influenced the purchase decisions of Muslim consumers for Japanese-branded restaurants, emphasizing the broader role of halal labels in mediating trust in cross-

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cultural consumption (Ramadhani 2024; Marzuki & Triyono 2021). Qualitative explorations focusing on Indonesian Muslims in Japan similarly showed that halal certification played an essential role in meeting daily food needs. In the same vein, barriers related to cost, information, and uneven distribution of halal products continue to limit accessibility, specifically outside large metropolitan areas (Kamila 2024; Pg Hj Idris 2024). Building on Adidaya's (2016) early diagnosis of fragmented and sometimes opaque halal certification practices during Japan's "halal boom," the reviewed studies present a picture of an uneven halal infrastructure in which questions of authority, standardization, and accessibility remain unresolved.

Considering the stated backdrop, community-based initiatives have begun to take shape to address both regulatory gaps and practical access constraints. The Halal International Trust Organization (HITO), initiated by the Indonesian Embassy in Tokyo (KBRI Tokyo) and the Indonesian Muslims Association in Japan (KMII), represents the first explicitly community-based halal certification institution for Indonesian Muslims in Japan (Gandhi *et al.* 2025a). HITO was established to provide a more accessible and context-sensitive certification mechanism, particularly for small-scale food businesses and local entrepreneurs who face high costs and complex procedures in existing schemes. This development complements the roles of MPJA and HJC and reflects a broader diversification of halal governance arrangements within Japan's non-state regulatory landscape. However, comparative analyses of how different non-state certification bodies operationalize halal standards and shape everyday access to halal lifestyles in Japan remain limited, particularly in relation to newer community-based initiatives such as HITO.

Building on the outlined developments as well as the existing body of halal studies and tourism investigations, this study comparatively examines the halal certification application mechanisms of MPJA, HJC, and HITO in Japan (Adidaya 2016; Mulyadi 2023). Specifically, it addresses three key questions: (1) how do the application procedures and requirements differ across these institutions, (2) what forms of religious authority and institutional orientation underpin the certification systems of each institution, and (3) what are the implications of these differences for certification accessibility and the broader development of Japan's non-state halal ecosystem? By situating these three bodies within the broader literature on halal markets, Muslim lifestyles, and non-state certification regimes, this study contributes to ongoing debates about how halal governance develops in non-Muslim-majority contexts such as Japan (Pg Hj Idris 2024; Yusof & Shutto 2014), while extending earlier analyses of Japan's halal boom by foregrounding the comparative dynamics among private and community-based certifiers.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Halal Ecosystem and Halal Lifestyle in Japan

The literature on halal development in Japan consistently points to a fragmented governance configuration in which, without a national halal standard, regulatory authority is dispersed among multiple non-state certification bodies and foreign religious authorities. In practical terms, firms are compelled to navigate a plural landscape of standards and, in many cases, to depend on schemes recognized by bodies within Muslim-majority countries such as JAKIM, Malaysia, and MUI, Indonesia. This institutional fragmentation generates governance frictions in the form of high certification costs, complex procedural requirements, and difficulties in securing reliable halal-certified inputs. Gandhi *et al.* (2025a), drawing on Yamaguchi's (2019) analysis of halal food development in Japan, stated that the process of obtaining halal certification has often been regarded as both complex and costly, to the point that many companies and local governments abandoned certification initiatives altogether.

Work on Japan's halal supply chains further shows how the coexistence of multiple certification bodies with differing scopes, recognition regimes, and ties to local communities produces uneven fields of authority. For instance, Hasnan & Kohda (2023) argued that the absence of globally accepted halal standards constituted a structural barrier to the consolidation of halal value chains in Japan, as firms must constantly arbitrate between overlapping and sometimes competing standard-setting jurisdictions. Seen through a governance lens, the rise of community-based organizations such as HITO can be interpreted as a bottom-up attempt to re-embed halal regulation within specific diaspora networks, thereby introducing a distinct modality of authority that is more closely attuned to localized religious practices and everyday consumption needs.

2.2 MPJA and HJC as Key Certification Bodies

Within the observed fragmented field, the MPJA has taken shape as a central private regulator that mediates between transnational halal authorities and Japan-based firms. Historically, MPJA has been recognized by JAKIM in Malaysia and MUI in Indonesia, as documented in ITPC Osaka (2020) and contemporaneous institutional materials. More recently, MPJA's official information points to recognition by JAKIM (Malaysia) and BPJPH (Indonesia), reflecting the institutional transition of halal authority in Indonesia from MUI to BPJPH. These developments position

MPJA as a major halal certification body in Japan, with cross-border recognition and a formalized certification procedure covering application submission, document evaluation, fee agreement, on-site auditing, and a fatwa committee decision. ITPC Osaka (2020) specifies that the process comprises five distinct stages: (1) registration for halal certification, (2) application evaluation, (3) approval and quotation, (4) field audit, and (5) evaluation by the Fatwa Committee. Substantively, MPJA operationalizes classical Islamic legal requirements for food by prohibiting pork and intoxicants, mandating the use of animal-derived ingredients sourced from halal-certified slaughterhouses, and excluding other impure materials such as carrion and blood (ITPC Osaka 2020). Institutionally, MPJA exemplifies a form of transnationally anchored private authority, translating global halal norms into audit procedures that are legible to both Japanese firms and overseas halal markets. Such transnationally oriented certifiers play an important upstream role for export chains, as with halal wagyu, where layered halal assurance covering everything from slaughter to logistics is a prerequisite for accessing premium Muslim markets (Gandhi & Triyanto, 2026).

HJC occupies a somewhat hybrid position as a strategic intermediary that combines transnational recognition with a differentiated labeling strategy. ITPC Osaka (2020) portrays HJC as a company that has signed a comprehensive partnership agreement with JAKIM and offers a one-stop service for firms seeking JAKIM halal certification, while simultaneously providing Muslim-friendly and non-alcohol/non-pork labels for a broader range of businesses. Its service portfolio includes specimen inspection, facility audits, arrangements for JAKIM examiners, preparation and translation of documents, and ongoing liaison with JAKIM (ITPC Osaka 2020). Accommodation facilities such as hotels and foodservice operators may choose between JAKIM halal certification and HJC Muslim-friendly certification, while processed-product manufacturers can opt for JAKIM halal certification or HJC non-alcohol and non-pork certification (ITPC Osaka 2020). This layered labelling architecture shows how private certifiers in Japan construct a graded spectrum of "halal" and "Muslim-friendly" designations, thereby stratifying access to religious legitimacy and segmenting Muslim consumers along different thresholds of piety, risk perception, and market orientation.

2.3 HITO as a Community-Based Institution

Scholars have recently begun to document the rise of explicitly community-based halal certification initiatives that reposition religious authority within diaspora networks. A fitting case is the HITO, described by Gandhi *et al.* (2025a) as a community-based halal certification body established under the legal entity KMII Japan Ippan Shadan Hojin and oriented primarily toward products and services consumed by the Indonesian Muslim community in Japan. Gandhi *et al.* (2025a) further observed that HITO "operates under KMII Japan Ippan Shadan Hojin, a legally recognized non-profit," and its core functions include "setting locally adapted halal standards, auditing products, training auditors, and fostering socioeconomic integration." HITO's institutional architecture is organized around four interlinked pillars, namely a certification organization, a fatwa council, a network of local facilitators, and a digital platform for certification applications, all designed to lower informational and financial barriers for small and medium-sized enterprises. The certification process draws on "online submissions, facilitator validation, approval of the fatwa council, and digital certificate issuance, prioritizing affordability for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)" (Gandhi *et al.* 2025a).

Analytically, HITO exemplifies a form of community-embedded halal governance that diverges sharply from the more export-oriented and transnationally calibrated authority of MPJA and HJC. Meanwhile, MPJA and HJC primarily aim to connect Japanese producers with global halal markets and a heterogeneous Muslim clientele; HITO explicitly frames its mandate around serving the Indonesian diaspora, mobilizing community trust, and rescaling certification practices to the everyday capacities of small-scale entrepreneurs. Existing studies, however, tend to examine these institutions in isolation, focusing either on market expansion and supply-chain challenges or on the sociocultural significance of community initiatives. A limited body of comparative work systematically analyses how the distinct application mechanisms, cost structures, and configurations of religious authority across MPJA, HJC, and HITO shape the accessibility of halal certification and the lived experience of halal lifestyles in Japan. Addressing this gap allows for a more nuanced understanding of non-state halal governance in non-Muslim-majority settings and of the ways in which diaspora communities co-produce regulatory orders alongside transnational and corporate actors.

3 Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach with a document-based comparative design. The units of analysis consist of three halal certification bodies in Japan, namely MPJA, HJC (in relation to JAKIM's certification process in Japan), and HITO as a community-based institution serving Indonesians in Japan. Secondary data were obtained from three principal sources: (1) the report "Bisnis

Table 1: Key Comparative Table: MPJA, HJC, and HITO

Aspect	MPJA	HJC	HITO
Institutional status	Independent halal certification body (ITPC Osaka 2020).	Company acting as the strategic partner of JAKIM in Japan (ITPC Osaka 2020).	Community-based certification body under KMII Japan Ippan Shadan Hojin (Gandhi <i>et al.</i> 2025a).
Basis of shariah authority	Internal fatwa committee integrating JAKIM–MUI/BPJPH standards (ITPC Osaka 2020).	JAKIM and Malaysian standards, plus HJC Muslim-friendly schemes (ITPC Osaka 2020).	Internal fatwa council operating under KMII/HITO (Gandhi <i>et al.</i> 2025a).
External recognition	Historically recognized by JAKIM and MUI; currently recognized by JAKIM and BPJPH and other halal certification bodies in Asia (as stated on the MPJA official website) (ITPC Osaka 2020).	Facilitates JAKIM certificates widely accepted in global halal markets (ITPC Osaka 2020).	Focuses on the Indonesian community; cross-border recognition still in development (Gandhi <i>et al.</i> 2025a).
Main target segment	Restaurants, manufacturers, general tourism facilities.	Hotels, restaurants, caterers, and producers targeting JAKIM markets.	Indonesian-owned SMEs in Japan (food, cosmetics, etc.) (Gandhi <i>et al.</i> 2025a).
Application mechanism	Application form, evaluation, quotation, audit, fatwa decision (ITPC Osaka 2020).	Consultation, ingredient check, audit, submission to JAKIM (ITPC Osaka 2020).	Online registration, facilitator validation, fatwa council approval, digital certificate (Gandhi <i>et al.</i> 2025a).
Cost and procedural profile	Documented as comprising multiple formal stages, on-site audit, and cross-border halal compliance requirements, suggesting a comparatively demanding certification pathway.	JAKIM-oriented certification is documented as more procedurally demanding, while the Muslim-friendly and non-alcohol/non-pork schemes of HJC are presented as lighter alternatives with fewer requirements.	Described in Gandhi <i>et al.</i> (2025a) and institutional materials as a streamlined, SME-oriented mechanism emphasizing affordability, local facilitation, and digital processing.
Operational reach	Nationwide in Japan, with export-oriented certification.	Nationwide in Japan as a gateway to JAKIM (ITPC Osaka 2020).	Network of 31 assistants in 9 prefectures/cities (Gandhi <i>et al.</i> 2025a).
Primary orientation	Compliance with cross-border halal standards.	Access to global JAKIM certification and Muslim-friendly solutions.	Community empowerment and inclusion of Indonesian SMEs (Gandhi <i>et al.</i> 2025a).

Source: Authors (2026)

Restoran di Jepang" (Restaurant Business in Japan), which outlines halal certification procedures by MPJA and HJC (ITPC Osaka, 2020); (2) the study "Establishment of a community-based halal certification body: A case study of Halal International Trust Organization (HITO) in Japan" (Gandhi *et al.* 2025a); and (3) publicly available information from the official websites of MPJA and HJC, as well as JAKIM's lists of recognized foreign halal certification bodies.

The analysis proceeded in three steps: first, information was extracted regarding application flows, documentary requirements, and bases of shariah authority in each institution. Second, a comparative matrix was constructed to identify key similarities and differences. Third, the differences observed were interpreted in terms of respective implications for certification accessibility and the strengthening of Japan's non-state halal ecosystem. Considering the fact that the evidence is drawn entirely from documents and institutional websites without additional interviews or observations, this study is best understood as a document-based comparative analysis rather than an in-depth case study in the strict sense.

Based on the discussion above, it becomes important to state that this study does not compile standardized quantitative data on certification fees, total compliance expenditures, or processing times across the three institutions. References to "high-cost," "low-cost," "affordable," or "simple" certification pathways are used as document-based analytical descriptors derived from the number of procedural stages, the breadth of documentary and audit requirements, the participation of external halal authorities, and the way each institution positions its services toward particular applicant groups, specifically export-oriented firms or SMEs. Therefore, these terms reflect relative procedural and accessibility profiles within the documentary evidence rather than independently verified price rankings.

To strengthen the credibility of this document-based analysis, the study adopts validation strategies appropriate for secondary-data investigations. Rather than transferring validation procedures from field-based case studies that draw on interviews or observations, this study emphasizes source triangulation across multiple documents, temporal consistency checks on institutional recognition status, and procedural transparency in reporting analytical steps and inclusion criteria.

4 Results

4.1 Institutional profiles of MPJA, HJC, and HITO

The MPJA, HJC, and HITO can be seen as three key nodes in the halal certification landscape of Japan, each connecting businesses to different markets and halal authorities, particularly in Southeast Asia. Institutionally, each differs in organizational form, reference standards, governance models, and target segments, forming a mosaic of institutions that serve both export-oriented firms and community-based halal needs in Japan.

4.1.1 MPJA

As an independent halal certification body, MPJA has historically maintained recognition by JAKIM in Malaysia and BPJPH in Indonesia. By calibrating its internal standards to JAKIM and BPJPH requirements and operating through its own internal fatwa committee, MPJA effectively bridges global Muslim market requirements with the local Japanese business environment while remaining institutionally autonomous. MPJA

provides certification services for restaurants, accommodation facilities, and other food-related businesses, positioning itself as a nationwide body promoting consistent halal standards in Japan. This makes MPJA a strategic option for Japanese firms seeking entry into halal markets in Malaysia, Indonesia, and other parts of Southeast Asia through mutual recognition arrangements with major Southeast Asian halal authorities (ITPC Osaka 2020).

4.1.2 HJC and the JAKIM Ecosystem

Dissimilar to MPJA's association-based model, HJC operates as a company that explicitly positions itself as JAKIM's strategic partner in Japan, focusing on facilitating JAKIM halal certification as well as its own Muslim-friendly schemes (ITPC Osaka 2020). Through this partnership, HJC functions as an intermediary institution connecting Japanese businesses with Malaysia's halal authority, including through training programs supervised by the Malaysia International Halal Academy. HJC's services cover raw material verification, facility audits, coordination of JAKIM auditors, and comprehensive support in preparing and translating application documents (ITPC Osaka 2020). For hotels and restaurants, HJC offers a spectrum of options ranging from full JAKIM halal certification, which requires formal procedures and fixed deadlines, to simpler Muslim-friendly and non-alcohol/non-pork certification, thereby lowering entry barriers for firms at an early stage of halal adoption. Within the broader halal global value chain, HJC functions as a gatekeeper to JAKIM's widely recognized standard and as an institutional conduit that translates JAKIM's regulatory and technical requirements into the supply chain practices of export-oriented Japanese companies.

4.1.3 HITO

HITO represents a distinct institutional model, having been established in 2024 as a community-based halal certification body under KMII Japan Ippan Shadan Hojin, with support from the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in Tokyo and various Indonesian stakeholders (Gandhi *et al.* 2025a). Gandhi *et al.* (2025a) describe HITO as a legally recognized non-profit entity that aspires to be a reliable community-based halal certifier in Japan, with a strong emphasis on integrity, quality, and service.

Organizationally, HITO consists of a supervisory board, advisory council, daily management team, fatwa commission, and secretariat, supported by 31 trained halal certification assistants across nine prefectures and cities in Japan (Gandhi *et al.* 2025a). It operates an online application system that combines business self-declaration, intensive support from local facilitators, and decision-making by the internal fatwa council, and is institutionally framed around affordability and accessibility for Indonesian SMEs. This community-oriented model is geared primarily toward domestic halal consumption in Japan, specifically among Indonesian diaspora businesses, rather than export-oriented certification.

4.2 Comparison of Application Flows and Certification Requirements

This section synthesizes how MPJA, HJC (via JAKIM), and HITO operationalize halal certification through distinct application flows and requirements, reflecting the differing institutional roles, target segments, and governance arrangements of each institution. Drawing on ITPC Osaka (2020) and Gandhi *et al.* (2025a), the section compares the application

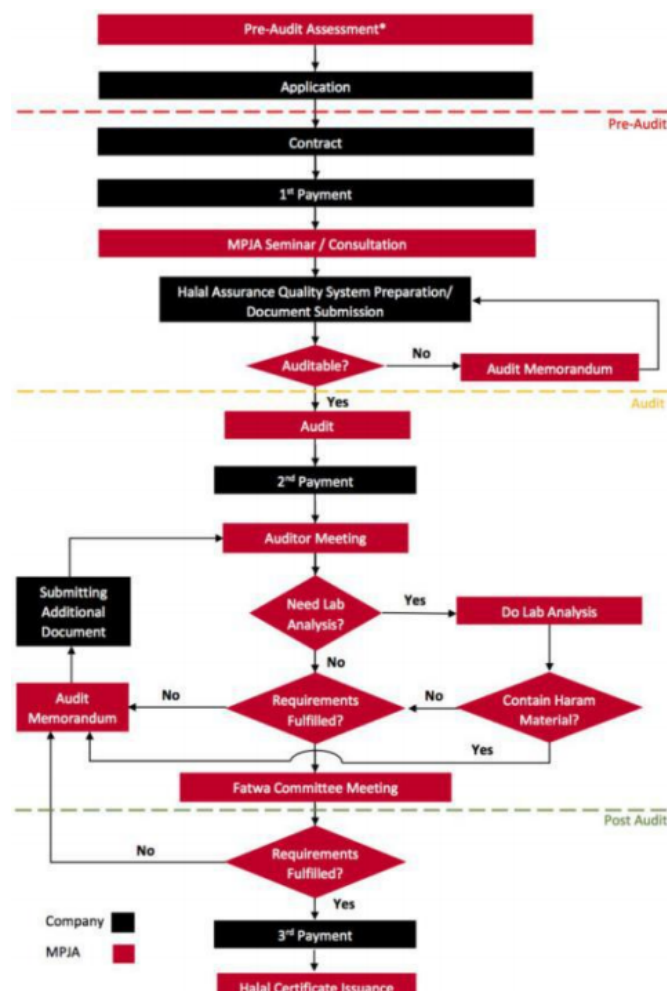


Figure 1: The certification application process of MPJA (Muslim Professional Japan Association)

procedures, documentary and shariah requirements, and relative procedural-access profiles of the three bodies, with a particular focus on how these features shape access to halal certification for export-oriented firms versus community-based Indonesian SMEs in Japan.

4.2.1 The certification application process of MPJA

The document "Bisnis Restoran di Jepang" explains that the halal certification application process through MPJA consists of five main stages, including "1) registration for halal certification, 2) application evaluation process, 3) approval and quotation, 4) field audit, 5) evaluation by the Fatwa Committee" (ITPC Osaka 2020). For restaurants, the core requirements include prohibitions on pork and its derivatives, intoxicating substances, and other impure materials, alongside a requirement that animal-derived ingredients must be obtained from halal-certified slaughterhouses, as evidenced by halal certificates (ITPC Osaka 2020).

The MPJA process is built around document screening followed by on-site inspection of kitchens, storage, and handling practices to verify that everyday operations comply with declared halal standards. Consistent with its export-oriented mandate, MPJA generally does not audit overseas factories, but instead requires that imported ingredients and semi-processed products carry halal certificates issued by recognized foreign certification bodies, thereby externalizing upstream verification to accredited partners. This approach reflects MPJA's emphasis on on-site verification in Japan while leveraging transnational recognition to manage the complexity of global supply chains for restaurants and food businesses.

4.2.2 HJC (JAKIM) certification application process

HJC provides a one-stop service for JAKIM halal certification applications for hotels, restaurants, and catering facilities, as well as Muslim-friendly and non-alcohol/non-pork certification under its own schemes. ITPC Osaka (2020) observes that the JAKIM-oriented process typically includes initial consultation with HJC, specimen and ingredient checks, facility audits by JAKIM-recognized auditors, preparation and bilingual translation of documents, submission to JAKIM, and support throughout the evaluation process until certificate issuance. HJC also offers post-certification support, such as assisting in the operation of internal halal committees and training for halal persons in charge, to help businesses maintain compliance over time.



Figure 2: HJC (JAKIM) certification application process

JAKIM halal certification operates under specific schedules and application deadlines, which can make planning and lead times consequential for hotels and restaurants wishing to obtain or renew certification. HJC's Muslim-friendly and non-alcohol/non-pork certification, by comparison, follow simplified procedures with fewer documentary requirements and greater flexibility in timing, targeting businesses that seek to signal partial compliance to Muslim customers without fully meeting JAKIM's strict standards (ITPC Osaka, 2020). HJC therefore positions itself simultaneously as an intermediary between Japanese businesses and Malaysian halal authorities and as a provider of lighter, more accessible certification schemes that can serve as an intermediate step toward full JAKIM compliance.

4.2.3 The certification application process of HITO

HITO has developed an online halal certification application flow that begins with account creation on the official website, followed by the application submission of SMEs, verification and validation of halal facilitators, HITO document review, fatwa commission deliberation, and issuance of a digital halal certificate downloadable by applicants. As presented in Gandhi *et al.* (2025a), the certification process draws on online submissions, facilitator validation, fatwa council approval, and digital certificate issuance, and is structured with a clear orientation toward affordability and accessibility for SMEs. The online system is one of the four pillars of HITO's ecosystem, alongside a halal certification organization, a fatwa council, and a network of locally trained facilitators supported by KBRI Tokyo and KMII Japan.

This process is built upon self-declaration by businesses, the designation of a person-in-charge (PIC) for halal matters at the firm level, and intensive guidance by facilitators to prepare documents and ensure understanding of shariah obligations (Gandhi *et al.* 2025a). Compared to the more formalized and procedurally demanding certification pathways associated in the literature with MPJA and JAKIM-linked schemes, HITO's mechanism is presented in Gandhi *et al.* (2025a) as a simpler and more affordable model for SMEs, drawing on a distributed network of 31 certification assistants across nine prefectures to reduce transportation and consultation burdens. The scheme specifically targets lower- and middle-tier enterprises, including small restaurants and home-based industries that previously refrained from seeking certification due to financial

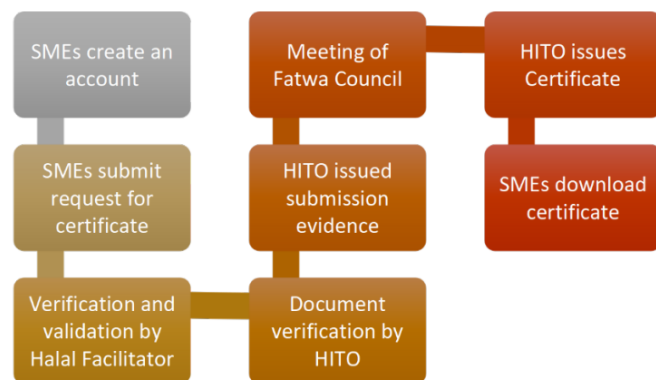


Figure 3: The certification application process of HITO

and procedural constraints, and early evidence from pilot certification in 2025 suggests the model can substantially lower entry barriers for Indonesian-owned SMEs.

The three application flows show differentiated pathways into halal certification that map onto distinct positions in halal global value chains. MPJA and HJC represent comparatively more formalized and procedurally demanding routes geared toward export-oriented upgrading and compliance with internationally recognized standards such as JAKIM and, historically, MUI/BPJPB-linked recognition frameworks, making the standards particularly relevant for firms seeking to access or deepen participation in regional and global halal markets. HITO's digitally mediated and facilitator-driven process, as portrayed in the available sources, offers a more accessible pathway for Indonesian-owned SMEs and micro-businesses that have often been constrained by financial, geographic, and procedural barriers in conventional certification arrangements. In governance terms, this configuration points to a multi-tiered halal ecosystem in Japan, where independent, state-linked, and community-based certifiers jointly structure opportunities for both functional upgrading by larger firms and social upgrading and market entry for smaller diaspora businesses.

5 Discussion

The comparative analysis carried out in this study shows that the three institutions occupy distinct niches within Japan's halal ecosystem, and these niches have concrete implications for who can access certification and how different forms of halal authority are constructed. MPJA serves as an independent certification body accommodating businesses targeting Muslim markets in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the wider Southeast Asian region, drawing on standards consistent with JAKIM and MUI/BPJPB (ITPC Osaka 2020). In practical terms, this cross-border orientation and dependence on transnationally recognized standards made MPJA particularly relevant for firms that were already integrated into formal supply chains and capable of meeting the documentary and procedural requirements associated with export-oriented halal assurance (ITPC Osaka 2020). Simultaneously, the emphasis on upstream halal-certified inputs and on-site audits in Japan suggested that micro- and small enterprises with limited bargaining power vis-à-vis suppliers may face greater challenges in entering this certification pathway, even if the scheme remained formally open to a wide range of businesses (ITPC Osaka 2020).

HJC, through its formal partnership with JAKIM, functioned as an institutional bridge that facilitated access to JAKIM halal certificates, which are consequential for exporting halal products to Malaysia and other markets that recognize JAKIM's standard (ITPC Osaka 2020). This intermediary role strengthened institutional credibility in the eyes of external regulators and buyers, since JAKIM certification is widely perceived as a high-standard benchmark in the global halal economy (ITPC Osaka 2020). However, the structured procedures, scheduled application windows, and requirements for bilingual documentation and internal halal management systems also meant that HJC's JAKIM-linked pathway was more readily accessible to hotels, larger restaurants, and corporate chains possessing sufficient administrative capacity, while smaller outlets may have found these demands more difficult to meet and instead opted for HJC's lighter Muslim-friendly schemes (ITPC Osaka 2020). In this sense, HJC simultaneously extended the reach of a state-backed Southeast Asian standard into Japan and reproduced a stratified access profile in which firms with higher capabilities could leverage the strongest forms of transnational recognition.

HITO, by comparison, offered a community-centered approach that placed self-declaration, local facilitators, and an institutionally framed affordable-access mechanism at the core of its strategy to reduce certification barriers for Indonesian SMEs in Japan. Gandhi *et al.* (2025a) characterize HITO's mechanism as simpler and more cost-effective, particularly for SMEs operating across Japan; in this study, that characterization is treated as a source-based description of HITO's institutional design rather than as a directly measured comparative cost

finding. Interpreted in light of earlier studies that identified certification costs and procedural demands as major barriers for SMEs in Japan, this configuration positioned HITO as an attempt to recalibrate entry conditions so that diaspora-owned micro and small enterprises, which had historically remained outside formal certification regimes, could obtain formal halal assurance without facing prohibitive financial and administrative burdens (Yamaguchi 2019). Through this effort, HITO advanced a different accessibility logic from MPJA and HJC: rather than primarily serving firms that were already export-ready, it aimed to widen the base of certified actors by embedding halal governance within Indonesian community networks and everyday business practices in Japan (Gandhi *et al.* 2025a; Yamaguchi 2019).

Seen through a governance lens, the three institutions exemplified different forms of private and community-based governance filling the state's regulatory gap, though they operated with uneven bases of shariah authority and recognition networks. MPJA and HJC derived much of their authority from formal linkage to state-backed Southeast Asian standard-setters, which strengthened their credibility in cross-border trade and tourism but tended to prioritize firms with greater organizational capacity (ITPC Osaka 2020). HITO's authority, by comparison, was more strongly embedded in diaspora social relations and in its responsiveness to the everyday constraints of Indonesian SMEs, which strengthened trust and uptake within the specific community but faced limitations in terms of broader international recognition (Gandhi *et al.* 2025a; Yamaguchi 2019). This uneven configuration raises strategic questions about standard harmonization, mutual recognition among certification bodies, and the potential development of mutual recognition agreements between HITO, MPJA, and Indonesian halal authorities to facilitate the movement of halal products to and from Japan, while ensuring that efforts to strengthen institutional credibility do not unintentionally reintroduce the very access barriers that community-based schemes aim to lower (ITPC Osaka 2020; Gandhi *et al.* 2025a; Yamaguchi 2019).

6 Implications for the Development of the Halal Ecosystem of Japan

Differences in application mechanisms among MPJA, HJC, and HITO can be leveraged complementarily to strengthen Japan's halal ecosystem. Accordingly, businesses targeting global markets may prioritize JAKIM schemes via HJC or cross-border certification via MPJA, while Indonesian community SMEs may begin with HITO's more accessible SME-oriented certification pathway and later explore more internationally recognized schemes as they grow.

The results carry important policy implications for both Indonesia and Japan. Indonesian policymakers could support HITO as a community-based body and initiate memoranda of understanding with national halal authorities such as BPJPB and MUI to reinforce the country's role in shaping halal governance in Japan while expanding market access for Indonesian halal products. Similarly, the Japanese government could recognize the roles of these institutions to provide a foundation for developing clearer guidelines or co-regulation mechanisms for businesses adopting halal as part of their tourism and export strategies.

7 Limitations

A key limitation of this study concerns the temporal imbalance between data sources. Information on MPJA and HJC is largely derived from a 2020 market intelligence report and institutional documents available around 2020–2021 (ITPC Osaka 2020), while information on HITO is based on more recent publications and official documents from 2024–2025 (Gandhi *et al.* 2025a). As certification procedures and recognition statuses evolve, the comparative analysis presented here should be interpreted as a historically situated snapshot of how these institutions' certification pathways were documented in those specific periods, rather than as a fully synchronized assessment of their current operational configurations.

A further limitation concerns the interpretation of cost and complexity. Because this study does not draw on synchronized fee schedules or a uniform dataset on certification expenditures, comparative expressions such as "higher-cost," "lower-cost," or "affordable" should be understood as historically situated, source-based assessments drawn from institutional materials and prior studies, not as precise economic measurements.

8 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study shows that halal certification application mechanisms in Japan are diverse and shaped by the institutional configurations of their respective bodies. Based on the observations made, MPJA prioritized an independent scheme with cross-border recognition, HJC provided structured access to JAKIM certification while offering lighter Muslim-friendly schemes, and HITO developed a community-based model for Indonesian SMEs in Japan that is presented in the available sources as relatively simple and accessible. This diversity creates opportunities for differentiated strategies among Muslim-oriented businesses, but also

calls for efforts to harmonize standards and strengthen coordination among institutions to ensure Muslim consumers receive consistent halal assurances and certification becomes inclusively accessible across business scales.

Building on the presented results, this study addressed three interrelated questions concerning how non-state halal certification bodies operate and shape certification accessibility and governance in Japan. First, the comparative analysis showed that MPJA, HJC (via JAKIM), and HITO configured their application flows, documentary requirements, and relative procedural-access profiles in markedly different ways, thereby directing firms into distinct certification pathways. Second, the investigation showed how these procedural contrasts were underpinned by divergent forms of religious authority and institutional orientation, ranging from transnationally anchored private authority consistent with JAKIM–MUI/BPJPH standards in the cases of MPJA and HJC, to a community-based, diaspora-embedded governance model in the case of HITO. Third, it was found that the observed differentiated arrangements generated uneven, though potentially complementary, implications for institutional credibility, certification accessibility, and the broader development of Japan's non-state halal ecosystem, with MPJA and HJC primarily enabling export-oriented upgrading for larger firms, while HITO was positioned as expanding access for Indonesian SMEs and micro-enterprises seeking to participate in Japan's growing halal markets.

Acknowledgments

The authors sincerely thank all individuals and organizations whose valuable input, constructive feedback, and support contributed to the completion of this study. The authors also hope that this study will provide meaningful insights for readers.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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