

POLICY, PRACTICE AND PERCEPTIONS OF QINGZHEN (HALAL) IN CHINA

Yukari Sai

Abstract

This article examines how Muslims and non-Muslims share halal values in everyday life by exploring top-down standardisation of halal and bottom-up daily food practices in non-Muslim society, specifically, case study among the Hui and Han people in the People's Republic of China. As global awareness of the halal market has increased, local governments in China and around the world have introduced regulations to manage halal food production. This policy environment also facilitates the entry of various actors into business — and uses international connections and co-operation to ensure the reliability and authority of halal marks in China. Additionally, in terms of access to and the culinary image of halal food in everyday life, it was found that Muslims prioritise service providers' honesty and responsibility, while non-Muslims consume halal food as an alternative to local cuisine or as an economic tool.

Keywords: halal food, standardisation, food culture, ethnic policy, Hui minority.



doi:10.15364/ris14-0102-01

Corresponding author:

Yukari Sai, PhD
Organization for
Islamic Area Studies,
Waseda University,
Tokyo,
JAPAN.

sai@aoni.waseda.jp

Introduction

In China, halal food is generally referred to as 清真食品 (*qingzhen shipin*), meaning “Islam,” “Islamic,” or “Muslim” food. Alternate terms include 哈俩勒 (*haliale*), 哈俩里 (*haliali*), and 哈拉 (*hala*), all of which are phonetic equivalents of the original Arabic term.

Hui people rarely use the word “halal” or phonetic equivalents; rather, they prefer “*qingzhen*,” and consider this to denote cleanliness, goodness, and an indicator that the provider of the food or services is Muslim.¹ However, religious specialists argue that *qingzhen* only means “adhering to Islamic law.” Furthermore, attitudes and practices surrounding the consumption of halal food vary among individuals and ethnic or religious groups. Thus, the operational definitions of *qingzhen* and halal are not necessarily completely synonymous.

With the increasing global awareness of the halal market,² local governments in China have introduced standards for *qingzhen* food management. The drive to take economic advantage of this market, as well as to address food safety concerns, has raised the need for agreement between domestic *qingzhen*

¹ See: Gillette, Maris Boyd. *Between Mecca and Beijing: Modernization and Consumption among Urban Chinese Muslims* (California: Stanford University Press, 2000), 118-120; Sai, Yukari. “Multiple voices and practices in Halal food and eating”, *Waseda Asia Review*, 14 (2-13): 82-85 (砂井紫里「食のハラールをめぐる多様な声と実践」『ワセダアジアレビュー』).

² Increasing concern about global halal industry also affects to halal food policy in China.

and internationally accepted halal standards. Additionally, there is considerable variance between official *qingzhen* definitions and the perceptions of *qingzhen* among Muslims and non-Muslims.

This article does not regard this variance as a drawback, but rather as evidence of the richness and possibility of human agency. As such, in the author's analysis, it is suggested that it is possible to share halal values between various actors from diverse backgrounds. Based on ethnographic fieldwork,³ this article compares top-down *qingzhen* management and promotion with the bottom-up *qingzhen* needs and practices of both Muslim and non-Muslim Chinese in the People's Republic of China (PRC), describing how each conceives, values, and utilises *qingzhen* food and service.

Standardising Local Government's Top-Down Halal Policies

*Traditional Qingzhen Marks*⁴

Qingzhen marks on food labels, commodities, and shops means Muslims are able to use or consume them. Before halal certification and standardisation were introduced in China, two characters were traditionally used to denote *qingzhen*, in the forms of an illustration with a water pot and a hat. In the early 20th century, one American missionary in China described these "traditional" signs as follows:⁵

The water-pot signifies ceremonial cleanliness, and is a guarantee that no pork is used, while the hat indicates respect to customers ... the two characters on the tea-pot are "pure and true."

³ Research for this article was conducted using a mixed approach, including review of halal and *qingzhen*-related articles in Chinese publications and websites, interviews with Hui and Han people, and participant observation at respondents' homes, a mosque, restaurants, and halal food industry events. Data collection was conducted during fieldwork in Fujian Province, China, in February and September 2010 and 2011 (approximately six weeks), and in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in April 2010 and 2011 (approximately 20 days).

⁴ In this context, "traditional" means before halal/*qingzhen* standards were officially regulated in China.

⁵ Broomhall, Marshall, *Islam in China* (London: Darf Publishers, 1987), 224.

These images employed voluntary for Muslim consumers. Needs for official guarantee of *qingzhen* are rarely found previously.⁶ After standardisation, these traditional signs disappeared, and they are replaced by *qingzhen* mark.

Government Regulation of Halal Food in China: Halal Mark and the Standardisation of Halal Food Production

The process of government regulation of halal food in China can be summarised as follows:

- 1) Government regulation was conducted under the aegis of ethnic policy.
- 2) The increased economic motivation to sell halal food by both Muslims and non-Muslims, as well as increased calls for food safety, have highlighted the need to align localised and domestic halal standards with the internationally accepted definition of halal.

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China in the 1950's, special meat and food service measures for Muslim ethnic minorities were enshrined in written policy.⁷ Here, *qingzhen* was defined as an "ethnic minority custom," and the "food of the Hui, Uyghur people."

⁶ The author's colleague, Dr. Hirofumi Okai informed the author of a historical material which mentioned business motives to produce processed food for Muslim with guarantee by imam in the 1940's. According to a draft for workshop seminar of the Greater Japan Muslim League (Dai Nihon Kaikyo Kyokai 大日本回教協会) in 1945, a converted Manchurian Muslim, Aixinjueluo Puguang who is a cousin of the Manchurian Emperor Puyi, suggested the possibility of tinned food guaranteed by imam for Muslim consumers in the world during Wartime Japan. Waseda University Islamic Collection of Historical Materials deposited by the Greater Japan Muslim League, namely 'Islamic Library,' classified, no. 161. For details about 'Islamic Library', see Hirofumi Tahada, "Islamic Studies in Japan during World War II period", Waseda Studies in Human Sciences, 15(1) (2002): 85-90.

⁷ See: Suzuki, Ken. "Islamic law in China" (鈴木賢「中国のイスラム法」千葉正士編『アジアにおけるイスラム法の移植』成文堂) in *Transplanting Islamic Law in Asia*, edited by Chiba Seiji (Tokyo: Seibundo, 1997), 39-103; Guojia Minzu Shiwu Weiyuanhui Zhengce Faguisi bian. *Domestic and International Regulations for Halal Food Management* (国家民族事務委員会政策法規司編『国内外清真食品管理法律法規和政策匯編』北京: 法律出版社), (Beijing: Falu Chubanshe, 2006).

The policy focused on meat, especially about treaty for ritual slaughter during Islamic festivals and avoiding pork; hence, Muslims in this era were sometimes referred to as a “pork-prohibiting minority.”

Starting in the mid-1990’s, some local governments began establishing official rules and regulations for *qingzhen* production and management.⁸ These policies also defined *qingzhen* as an ethnic minority custom, emphasising the ethnicity of those engaging in *qingzhen* production, service, and consumption.

In the mid-2000’s, state-run publishers began producing *qingzhen* and halal-related books that treated “*qingzhen* food” and “halal food” as nearly equivalent terms. For example, in definitions of the terms “*qingzhen* food industry” and “*qingzhen* food management,” *qingzhen* was defined as “adhering to the laws of Islam,” similar to the meaning of the term halal in Arabic.⁹ Some of these texts excerpted regulations for domestic *qingzhen* and halal food management.

Around 2010, *Guidelines for Halal Food Certification* was introduced in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region. This document also equated *qingzhen* with halal, citing the Codex Alimentarius Commission’s *General Guidelines for Use of the Term ‘Halal’*.

In 2013, five provinces in western China agreed to establish these confederal guidelines. The new halal logos and certificates, which were issued by Islamic associations, not only incorporate *qingzhen* in Chinese characters, but also halal in English or Arabic in some instances.

In addition to halal standardisation, China’s economic policy has facilitated international co-operation and collaboration between halal industries in China and

⁸ Gillette discussed government involvement with *qingzhen* food in Xian, China (2000).

⁹ See: Ge, Zhong Xing ed. *Development of Qingzhen food industry: theory and measures* (葛忠興主編『清真食品產業發展: 理論与对策』北京: 民族出版社), (Beijing: Minzu Chubanshe, 2005); Zhou, Rui Hai ed. *Outline of Halal/Qingzhe Food Management* (周瑞海主編『清真食品管理概述』北京: 民族出版社). (Beijing: Minzu Chubanshe, 2005); Wu, Jun Zhu ed. *Economies of Islamic Food* (吳俊主編『清真食品經濟』銀川: 寧夏人民出版社), (Yinchuan: Ninxia renmin chubanshe, 2006); Yang, Huai Zhong ed. *Chinese Muslim Business Culture* (楊懷中主編『中国回商文化』銀川: 寧夏人民出版社), vol. 2. (Yinchuan: Ninxia Renmin Chubanshe, 2010). Simultaneously with publication, halal expo and conference have started to be held in the mid of 2000’s.

other countries.¹⁰ For example, China has participated in international halal expos, held international trade fairs, and launched a joint industry park with Malaysia in the city of Kuantan. This globally motivated standardisation and international connection has facilitated openness — that is, the entry of various actors into business and engagement with various actors in halal food industries.¹¹ Moreover, such efforts seem to reinforce the government’s commitment to ensuring the reliability and authority of the halal mark which made in China.

Daily Halal Practices and Interpretations

Access to Qingzhen Food

This section examines how Muslims access halal food in areas where the Muslim population is diffused. Research was conducted in Fujian Province in southern China, where there are few Muslims, no *qingzhen* food shops, few *qingzhen*/halal restaurants, and no official halal standards. The following cases from this area suggest two principles that are essential to halal matters: honesty and responsibility.

Case 1: Qingzhen food distribution and individual courtesy

Respondents told the author that there are two avenues of obtaining *qingzhen* food, i.e.:

- Ask the local imam to participate in animal slaughter.
- Obtain *qingzhen* food from a personal contact.

The first, asking the local imam to slaughter ritually is the ordinary way to obtain *qingzhen* meat in various areas in China. This is not only for personal use but also for the use by restaurant owners. Regarding the second avenue, one of the Hui respondents,

¹⁰ For more on international co-operation and the globalization of the halal industry, see Tomizawa, Hisao. “Globalization or counter-globalization? The emergence of the modern halal industry and its significance in southeast Asia (富沢寿男「グローバル化、対抗グローバル化?—東南アジアを中心とする現代ハラール産業の立ち上げとその意義」), in Yakudo-suru-Shou-Seisanbutsu, edited by Ogawa, Ryo, (Tokyo: Kobundo, 2007), 317-348. and Fisher, Johan. *Halal Frontier: Muslim Consumers in a Globalized Market*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

¹¹ A similar effect of globalization can be observed in the sportification of judo (Sato 2013).

who is an Arabic translator, personally distributes both fresh and frozen *qingzhen* meat and ingredients to local Muslims. One of his customers told the author, “He is so honest. He is not doing this for his own personal gain, he is doing it for us.”¹² This indicates that the honesty of the provider is an important element for consumers of *qingzhen* goods.

Case 2: Opinions about improper display

Case 2 illustrates local points of view of the improper display of *qingzhen* marks. According to the local imam,¹³ this occurred when a Muslim owner of a noodle shop sold his business and all its furnishings to a non-Muslim owner. The imam visited the shop with a colleague and explained the rules and significance of *qingzhen* to the new owner, ultimately convincing him to remove the *qingzhen* marks. The imam later recounted the incident on a local bulletin board system (BBS) and provided photos. Interestingly, readers of the post commented that, “[The] imam is excellent, the non-Muslim owner is excellent, but the previous Muslim owner is wrong,” and, “That was the problem with the [previous] Muslim [owner]: he has no sense of responsibility.” These comments seem to indicate that they feel that the Muslim owner was irresponsible because he did not remove the *qingzhen* marks before selling the shop. These responses further underscore the significance of honesty and responsibility in *qingzhen* matters.

Perception of the Culinary Image of *Qingzhen* by Non-Muslim Chinese

The complex culinary image of *qingzhen* is influenced by religious, ethnic, and local factors. *Qingzhen* cuisine is considered a culinary category in China,¹⁴ and is perceived as having a specific character, with qualities that contrast and overlap with *qingzhen* food and local cuisine. Similar to its treatment in government policy, *qingzhen*

¹² Interview with a female Muslim halal restaurant owner. conducted March 2010. The restaurant is specializing in local cuisine in Xinjiang, western China.

¹³ “Muslim Noodle Shop sold to Non- Muslim, Remain Putting up Qingzhen signs (穆斯林拉面館 轉讓給非穆斯林，遺留清真標志禍害穆斯林大眾),” 2muslim.com(中穆網), accessed August 20, 2014, <http://www.2muslim.com/forum.php?mod=viewthread&tid=249678>

¹⁴ The covers of *qingzhen* cookbooks tend to emphasize Islamic motifs, such as the moon, the dome of the Grand Mosque, and mutton dishes.

cuisine is usually regarded as the food of ethnic minorities. Non-Muslim Chinese tend to know little about the relationship between *qingzhen* and halal; most are only aware that Muslims require complex food preparation, and that this has something to do with “cleanliness.” *Qingzhen* cuisine is also perceived as characterising the local fare of northwestern China.

Case 3: The association of Islamic imagery with non-Muslim local cuisine

Case 3 illustrates how non-halal cuisine sometimes incorporates religious images and Islamic motifs to attract Muslim customers. An owner of a restaurant specialising in local cuisine in western China features an image of a mosque on his business card. When asked why he associates his restaurant with Islamic imagery, he explained:¹⁵

It will attract more consumers. I used to provide pork dishes, but have stopped because they were rarely ordered.

Muslim consumers advise each other not to eat at these restaurants, and provided tips for obtaining *qingzhen* or halal cuisine via chat or other online communication.

Case 4: Revaluing *qingzhen*

The following conversation with a non-Muslim Chinese person suggests the culinary image of *qingzhen* is changing in response to economic demand:¹⁶

Originally I didn't like qingzhen, because when I visited areas such as Yunnan, where the Hui Muslim population is concentrated, I felt there was bad hygiene there...Subsequently, now that I know qingzhen is clean and good, I am more and more interested in it. I have participated in MIHAS¹⁷ several times. At first, I didn't expect a lot [of the economic effectiveness], but gradually I have become

¹⁵ Interview with a restaurant owner in Fujian, February 2011. He is a non-Muslim Han Chinese in his 40s. The restaurant is specializing in local cuisine in Xinjiang, western China.

¹⁶ Interview with a distributor of agricultural products at Kuala Lumpur in April 2011. He is a non-Muslim Han Chinese in his 50's. The author has to consider the relationship between him and the author. Perhaps, the information he gave with the knowledge that the author was from Japan. However, other respondents also value Japanese possibilities similarly.

¹⁷ Malaysian International Halal Showcase, an international halal industry event held annually in Kuala Lumpur.

convinced of [its potential]... I have been to Tokyo, Aichi, Okinawa, Kyoto, Nikko, Sizuoka, and other cities in Japan. Japan should move aggressively [into the halal market]. Japanese products have high standards and quality. [Japan] should fit naturally into qingzhen. Perhaps even though Muslim population is not so large there, the qingzhen industry might hold the promise of future growth in Japan.

As exemplified by this narrative, it is apparent that non-Muslim Chinese people have come associate *qingzhen* with cleanliness, goodness, high potential, high quality, and future growth.

Conclusion

This article explored the evolution of *qingzhen* marks and perceptions in China through top-down (government halal policies) and bottom-up (Muslims' and non-Muslims' *qingzhen* practices and perceptions) analyses. The main conclusions of this study are as follows:

1. The government regulation of halal food facilitates the entry of various actors into domestic and global business, and reflects a commitment to maintaining the reliability and authority of halal logos and certificates in China.
2. Methods of *qingzhen* access suggest that Muslim Chinese prioritise service providers' honesty and responsibility.
3. The overlapping culinary image of *qingzhen* and local cuisine in Northwest part of China influences the marketing of and access to *qingzhen* in the country.
4. Non-Muslim Chinese have recently come to associate *qingzhen* with positive values, such as cleanliness, high quality, and economic potential.

In light of the above analysis, how can halal values be shared between Muslims and non-Muslims? According to the Shariah law, the original meaning of halal is "permitted" and "lawful." In China, the concepts of *qingzhen* is effected by ethnic, religious, and local concepts. Awareness of global halal market and standardisation brings *qingzhen* closer to contemporary concepts of halal, that is, *qingzhen* and halal also has come to be associated with many positive values, including safety, health, hygiene, quality, and others. The previously analysed case studies therefore suggest it is highly possible to share halal values, even across diverse interpretations and cultural backgrounds.

Acknowledgement

The article is updated from a paper presented in a conference proceeding, 'Halal Policy, Practice, and Perceptions in China', in *Islam and Multiculturalism: Coexistence and Symbiosis*, edited by Asia-Europe Institute and Organization for Islamic Area Studies, (Organization for Islamic Area Studies, Waseda University, 2014), 187-193. This work was supported by Islamic Area Studies Program of the National Institutes for the Humanities (NIHU), JSPS AA Science Platform Program, JSPS KAKENHI Grant Numbers 20320113 and 25870825.

References

- Broomhall, Marshall. *Islam in China*. London: Darf Publishers, 1987. Originally published in Marshall Broomhall, *Islam in China*. (London: Morgan & Mission, 1910).
- Fisher, Johan. *Halal Frontier: Muslim Consumers in a Globalized Market*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
- Chen, Shushi, Cai Shuowen, and Lai You zhen. *Going for Halal Market* (陳漱石·蔡硯文·賴又禎『揭開 16 億穆斯林商機：伊斯蘭清真產業』台北：中華民國對外貿易發展協會). Taipei: Taiwan External Trade Development Council, 2013.
- Ge, Zhong Xing ed. *Development of Qingzhen Food Industry: Theory and Measures* (葛忠興主編『清真食品產業發展：理論与对策』北京：民族出版社), Beijing: Minzu Chubanshe, 2005.
- Gillette, Maris Boyd. *Between Mecca and Beijing: Modernization and Consumption among Urban Chinese Muslims*. California: Stanford University Press, 2000.
- Guojia Minzu Shiwu Weiyuanhui Zhengce Faguisi bian. *Domestic and International Regulations for Halal Food Management* (国家民族事務委员会政策法规司編『国内外清真食品管理法律法規和政策匯編』北京：法律出版社). Beijing: Falu Chubanshe, 2006.

- Ke, Zhixian. *Halal Products in Mainland China and Searching Business Opportunities in the Midwest Market* (柯至嫻『中国大陸清真產品及中西部市場商機探索』台北: 中華民國對外貿易發展協會). Taipei: Taiwan External Trade Development Council, 2013.
- Riaz, Mian, and Muhammad M. Chaudry. *Halal Food Production*. Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2004.
- Sai, Yukari. *Chinese and Islamic Food Culture on the Table: Food and Eating Field Notes in Fujian, China* (砂井紫里『食卓から覗く中華世界とイスラーム: 福建のフィールドノートから』). Tokyo: Mekong, 2013.
- Sai, Yukari. "Multiple voices and practices in Halal food and eating" (砂井紫里「食のハラールをめぐる多様な声と実践」『ワセダアジアレビュー』). *Waseda Asia Review* 14 (2013): 82-85.
- Sai, Yukari. "Halal Policy, Practice, and Perceptions in China." In *Islam and Multiculturalism: Coexistence and Symbiosis*, Asia-Europe Institute and Organization for Islamic Area Studies (eds), Organization for Islamic Area Studies, Waseda University, 2014, 187-193.
- Sai, Yukari. "Qingzhen and halal in China" (砂井紫里「中国における清真とハラール」砂井紫里編『食のハラール』早稲田大学アジア・ムスリム研究所). In *Halal Food in Various Cultural Contexts*, edited by Sai Yukari, Tokyo: Institute for Asian Muslim Studies, Waseda University, 2014, 57-69.
- Sato, Shohei. "The sportification of Judo: global convergence and evolution." *Journal of Global History* 8 (2013): 299-317.
- Suzuki, Ken. "Islamic law in China" (鈴木賢「中国のイスラム法」千葉正士編『アジアにおけるイスラーム法の移植』成文堂). In *Transplanting Islamic Law in Asia*, edited by Seiji Chiba. Tokyo: Seibundo, 1997, 39-103.

- Tahada, Hirofumi. "Islamic Studies in Japan during World War II period" (「戦中期日本におけるイスラーム研究: 早稲田大学図書館所蔵「イスラーム文庫」の概要と研究課題」『早稲田大学人間科学研究』). *Waseda Studies in Human Sciences* 15(1) (2002): 85-90.
- Tomizawa, Hisao. "Globalization or counter-globalization? The emergence of the modern halal industry and its significance in Southeast Asia" (富沢寿男「グローバル化か、対抗グローバル化?—東南アジアを中心とする現代ハラール産業の立ち上げとその意義」). In *Yakudo-suru-Shou-Seisanbutsu*, edited by Ogawa, Ryo, Tokyo: Kobundo, 2007, 317-348.
- Wang, Guo Qiang, and Ma Zong Li. *Halal Industry and Certification* (王国強・馬宗礼『清真産業与認証』銀川: 黄河出版传媒集团・陽光出版社). Yinchuan: Huanghe Chuban Chuanmei Jituan and Yangguang Chubanshe, 2011.
- Waseda University Collection of Historical Materials deposited by the Greater Japan Muslim League, classified, no. 161.
- Wu, Jun Zhu ed. *Economies of Islamic Food* (吳俊主編『清真食品經濟』銀川: 寧夏人民出版社), Yinchuan: Ninxia renmin chubanshe, 2006.
- Yang, Huai Zhong ed. *Chinese Muslim Business Culture* (楊懷中主編『中国回商文化』銀川: 寧夏人民出版社), vol. 2. Yinchuan: Ninxia Renmin Chubanshe, 2010.
- Yang, Hui Yun ed. *Chinese Hui Minority Dictionary* (楊惠雲編『中国回族大辭典』上海: 上海辭典出版社). Shanghai: Shanghai Cidian Chubanshe, 1993.
- Zhou, Rui Hai ed. *Outline of Halal/Qingzhe Food Management* (周瑞海主編『清真食品管理概述』北京: 民族出版社). Beijing: Minzu Chubanshe, 2005.