

The Muslim Culinary in Ho Chi Minh City: Production and Consumption Against the Backdrop of Tourism

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Abstract

Ḥalāl food is a common feature in Muslim lives across the world. In Muslim quarters of Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, locally-made food products are self-recognized as ḥalāl by the community. Ḥalāl food self-recognition is a tradition that exists within closed Muslim communities based on a process of production and consumption standardized by Muslims alone. However, the urban culinary scene has changed as the Vietnamese government issued policies for enhancing the tourism industry and exhorting Muslim enterprises to produce their typical local products. Using qualitative research methods in combination with document analysis, this article shows the sophisticated and varied culinary trade techniques of the Muslim market in Ho Chi Minh City and Southern Vietnam. Products that are not ḥalāl or that falsely claim to be ḥalāl have been introduced to the market. As a result, the involvement of the local Muslim community in the manufacturing process of these ḥalāl-standardized goods is analysed and examined to prevent the products from falsely claiming to be ḥalāl as well. Cultural aspects of the local Muslim community in food processing of ḥalāl products are often applied in creating tourist products in Muslim neighbourhoods. This research also argues that the market economy in Vietnam brings profits for the country, yet is also challenging for Muslims to produce and consume ḥalāl food.

Keywords

Vietnam, culinary, culture, production, Muslims, ḥalāl.

Introduction

Islam is the religion of an ethnic minority group in Vietnam, a majority non-Muslim country. Most Muslims are from the Cham people. As a result, Islam is understood as the religion of the Cham, one of the 54 recorded ethnic groups in Vietnam. The Cham currently live in Ninh Thuan and Binh Thuan provinces (Central Vietnam) and Binh Phuoc, Tay Ninh, Ho Chi Minh City, Tra Vinh, and An Giang provinces (the Southeast of Vietnam). Before the 1960s, Cham settling in central Vietnam practised Brahmanism (Hinduism) and Bani (old Islam). However, Islam

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later spread amongst the Cham in Central Vietnam, resulting in the gradual development of a Muslim community.¹

Ho Chi Minh City, also known as Saigon, is the country's largest city and the trade, financial, and cultural hub of Southern Vietnam. The city's Muslim community is largely made up of migrants from An Giang province from the early twentieth century.² The Cham Muslims of Saigon are known to be well-versed in trade. Their expertise has led them to bridge connections between Saigon and Chau Doc (An Giang province). Based on their commercial dynamics, the Cham Muslims have formed a river trade network from the cities to isolated villages in Southern Vietnam and Cambodia.

Living in a non-Muslim country, the Cham Muslims are constantly concerned with *ḥalāl* food both for daily nutrition and as a source of identity. In classical Arabic, *ḥalāl* means, "permitted" and refers generally to anything allowed according to Islamic law.³ In contrast, *ḥarām* means "forbidden" and applies to any act that Muslims believe to be against God's commands. For culinary culture, *ḥarām* describes food forbidden in Islamic dietary laws. As part of their practice, the Cham Muslims in Vietnam keep their faith by consuming and practising only what is *ḥalāl*.

Literature Review

Although an ethnic minority compared to the Viet or the Khmer, the Cham Muslims of Southern Vietnam have created an Islamic cultural identity that is an important contribution to the national culture. As such, the Cham Muslims have become a subject of study for both domestic and international researchers. Locally, scholars have focused on examining the Cham Muslim's social structure, culture, religious practices, trade, and labour immigration to promote state policy.

Although there are many studies on the Cham Muslims in Southern Vietnam, no study focuses on their *ḥalāl* food despite its important role in the religious life of the community. Analysing the works of Cham Muslims, the previous literature makes only vague references to *ḥalāl*

¹ Phu Van Han and Nguyen Thanh Tuan, "Cham Muslims People in Ho Chi Minh City Today," *Journal of Ethnic Minorities Research*, 9, no. 1 (2020): 105; Nguyen Van Luan, *Nguoi Cham Hoi giao o mien Tay Nam phan* (The Cham Muslims in Southwest Vietnam) (Saigon: Ministry of Culture, Education and Youth, 1974), 39.

² Luan, *Nguoi Cham Hoi giao o mien Tay Nam phan*, 39-40.

³ Abu Azizah, "Thi truong san pham Halal tai Viet Nam?" (How is the Market of Halal Products in Vietnam?)," 2010, accessed June 11, 2024, <http://chanlyislam.net/home/traloi-thac-mac-ban-doc-ky-ba-thi-truong-san-pham-halal-tai-viet-nam-534/>; Han and Tuan, "Cham Muslims People in Ho Chi Minh City Today," 110.

food. For instance, the terms *ḥalāl* and *ḥarām* were mentioned in the book *The Cham Muslims in Southwest Vietnam* (1974)⁴ and the article “The Changes in Cultural Life of the Cham in Ho Chi Minh City Today” (2017).⁵ The *ḥalāl* cuisine mentioned in the above article is an indispensable item for wedding ceremonies, birthday parties, and the meals of Cham Muslims in Ho Chi Minh City. Furthermore, *ḥalāl* food is considered in the article “Cham Muslims People in Ho Chi Minh City Today” (2020).⁶

Moreover, *ḥalāl* food was partly studied in several works by Phu Van Han, such as *Cham Culture of Ho Chi Minh City* (2013),⁷ *Cultural and Social Life of Cham People in Ho Chi Minh City* (2005),⁸ and *Cham People in Southern Vietnam in the Process of Social Development* (2008).⁹ Besides these studies, *ḥalāl* and *ḥarām* food issues for ceremonies, customs, and the social life of Cham Muslims can be seen in the following works: *The Ceremony of Conversion of Cham Islam in Ho Chi Minh City* by Nguyen Thi Thanh Tam (2008);¹⁰ *The Customs of An Giang Cham People* by Lam Tam (1993);¹¹ and *The Cham Muslim Community in the South in Gender Relations and Development* by Phan Van Dop and Nguyen Thi Nhung (2006).¹² Recently, the Vietnamese tourist market opened to the Islamic world. The Cham Muslim culture is an essential resource for promoting tourism to Muslim countries. As a result, research has begun to focus more attention on the relations between Muslim culture, Cham Muslims, and tourism. One such project involving *ḥalāl* food is “Exploitation of Cham Muslim Culture in Tourism Development” by Vu Thu Hien,¹³ which analysed *ḥalāl* food as locally-made products in Ho Chi Minh City and An Giang province. The author

⁴ Luan, *Nguoi Cham Hoi giao o mien Tay Nam phan*.

⁵ Truong Quang Dat and Nguyen Ngoc Truong Xuan, “The Changes in Cultural Life of the Cham in Ho Chi Minh City Today,” *Journal of Religious Studies* 3-4 (2017): 108-21.

⁶ Han and Tuan, “Cham Muslims People in Ho Chi Minh City Today,” 105-12.

⁷ Phu Van Han, *Cham Culture in Ho Chi Minh City* (Ha Noi: National Culture Publishing House, 2013).

⁸ Han, *Doi song Van hoa va Xa hoi nguoi Cham thanh pho Ho Chi Minh* (The Cham Culture and Society in Ho Chi Minh City) (Ha Noi: National Culture Publishing House, 2005).

⁹ Han, *Cham People in Southern Vietnam in the Process of Social Development* (Ha Noi: National Culture Publishing House, 2008).

¹⁰ Nguyen Thi Thanh Tam, *Ceremony of Conversion of Cham Islam in Ho Chi Minh City* (Ha Noi: Social Sciences Publishing House, 2008).

¹¹ Lam Tam, *The Customs of an Giang Cham People* (Ha Noi: Social Sciences Publishing House, 1993).

¹² Phan Van Dop and Nguyen Thi Nhung, *The Cham Muslim Community in the South in Gender Relations and Development* (Ha Noi: Social Sciences Publishing House, 2006).

¹³ Vu Thu Hien, “Exploitation of Cham Muslim Culture in Tourism Development” (PhD diss., University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University in Ho Chi Minh City, 2020).

suggested a strategy for *ḥalāl* cuisine promotion to attract Malaysian tourists to Vietnam.

There are several works on Cham Muslims written in the Vietnamese language. However, the approach to Vietnamese written works is limited in scope, while foreign scholars have dedicated more work to groups such as the Cham Muslims. As an inevitable consequence of Muslim historical awareness, foreign scholars tend to identify Islam with the Cham community. For example, Philip Taylor shows how the liberal market and renewed economic system of Vietnam impacted Cham Muslims. From the results of long-term research (1999-2005) on the Cham Muslim community in the Mekong Delta, he stated that the Cham Muslim community still maintains a lifestyle limited by the ecosystem of riverine areas in the Mekong Delta. They are dynamic traders, specializing in conducting transactions beyond their villages by selling local products throughout the territories. Taylor mentions *ḥalāl* food as a type of local product.¹⁴

Methodology

To undertake this research, I conducted 21 days of fieldwork. These days included a week in July 2021 in the Chau Giang commune, An Giang province, a week in Tan Buu commune, Ben Luc district, Long An province, and a week in September 2021 in districts 1 and 5, Ho Chi Minh City. Among these locations, An Giang, Tan Buu, and Ho Chi Minh City established a long-term trading exchange where the Muslims in An Giang and Tan Buu provide *ḥalāl* materials to Ho Chi Minh City that are used to produce *ḥalāl* industrial goods. The study uses an anthropological approach and the quantitative research method, while the fieldwork included taking field notes, observing and participating in local ceremonies, conducting in-depth interviews with villagers, communal leaders, food-producing enterprises, restaurants, and food stall owners in Ho Chi Minh City and An Giang province. A total of ten representative individuals were interviewed regarding issues such as the multicultural society in Vietnam, Muslim livelihood, and the challenges for Muslim life in the city. As a result, the interviews provided essential material for the arguments of *ḥalāl* food via the records of varying views of non-Muslims and Muslims themselves. Following the field research, I used the theory of religious and cultural studies to explain how minority Muslims strive to exist in a Buddhist-majority environment. Finally, I utilized published

¹⁴ Philip Taylor, *Cham Muslims of the Mekong Delta: Place and Mobility in the Cosmopolitan Periphery* (London: Profile Books, 2007).

works on Islam and Southern Vietnam to describe Muslim trading activities from rural to urban areas via a riverine trading network.

The Settlements of the Muslim Community in Ho Chi Minh City

According to the survey conducted in An Phu, Tan Chau, Phu Tan, and Chau Phu districts, which are part of the An Giang province, Muslim villages are located along riverbanks, and mosques are also built in the centre of residential areas. From An Giang province, the Cham Muslims tend to move to Saigon to earn a living. The thriving trading and labour market in Saigon attracted the Cham Muslims, kick-starting an immigration wave. The primary residential areas of Cham Muslims in Saigon can be found in district 1, district 6, district 8, and Phu Nhuan district. There are currently 16 Cham Muslim residential areas in Ho Chi Minh City. In each area, the Cham Muslims have formed gathering points along the roadsides. Mosques are also erected in convenient locations.¹⁵ After the renovation, the number of Cham people increased and communities began appearing in suburban districts such as Can Gio, Cu Chi, and Binh Chanh.¹⁶

When the Cham migrated to Saigon, a handful of Muslim Malays and Indians had already settled there during the colonial era. These foreign Muslims quickly intermingled with the Cham Muslims, forming the varying groups of the Muslim community in Saigon. Inter marriages were a way to unify the different ethnic groups of the same faith. Many of the Muslims in Ho Chi Minh City today are from the Viet and Chinese ethnic groups who have converted to Islam.

According to my survey in Ho Chi Minh City, the religious conversion of the Viet and ethnic Chinese often occurs due to marriages between non-Muslims and Muslims, while some others convert while studying or working abroad in Muslim countries. The remaining individuals are those who converted after independent study of Islam.

***Ḥalāl* Food Sources in Ho Chi Minh City and Its Regional Links**

Ho Chi Minh City's population and housing census in 2019 show that there are 10,499 Cham Muslims, accounting for 2.24% of the city's population.¹⁷ The presence of the Cham Muslims in Ho Chi Minh City plays an important role in forming the mosques that are called "Cham pagoda (*chùa Chắm*)."¹⁸ However, the earliest mosques built by Malay and Indian merchants are identified as historical and cultural sites to present

¹⁵ Han, *Đôi song Văn hóa và Xã hội người Chăm thành phố Hồ Chí Minh*, 10.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁷ General Statistics Office, "Population Census and Houses Investigation the Year of 2019-Migration and Urbanism: The Reality, Trend and Differences," 2020, accessed June 11, 2024, www.gso.gov.vn.

the diverse heritage of the city. Currently, the city has fourteen mosques and one *surao* (prayer hall). Masjid Al Rahim (located at 45, Nam Ky Khoi Nghia Avenue, district 01) was built by Malay Muslims in 1885. The previous structure was demolished to make way for a new one. Another mosque, Masjid Jamin Al Muslimin (also known as Dong Du mosque), was founded by Indian Muslims in 1935. The former is also known as the “international mosque” due to its popularity amongst expats and diplomats who come from Muslim countries and pray the Friday prayer there every week alongside the Viet and Chinese Muslims.

The strong presence of the Muslim community in Ho Chi Minh City has led to the birth of a *ḥalāl* food industry. Within the residential areas of Cham Muslims, *ḥalāl* eateries are common and centralized around the mosques, as it is a convenient location for both local Muslims and visitors. Selling food is a livelihood that Muslims like to do because they both earn income and assist the Muslim community in enjoying *ḥalāl* meals. There are numerous famous eateries in the city enjoyed by both Muslims and non-Muslims such as Musa stall on Nguyen Tri Phuong street, district 5. In ensuring that *ḥalāl* criteria are fulfilled, the food is prepared by Muslim cooks.

The suburb of Ho Chi Minh City, however, formed the living areas for the newly arrived Muslims who chose to settle down in Binh Chanh district and district 9. In total, there are two Cham Muslim villages with approximately 30 households living in each. Markets around the area sell full *ḥalāl* food and household items for the Muslims. To buy *ḥalāl* food, they must go to stores in Phu Nhuan district or district 8. Specifically, Muslims in Binh Chanh often go to *ḥalāl* stores on Duong Ba Trac street, district 8, Ho Chi Minh City, for meat and costumes. More than 1,500 Cham Muslims are residing in Duong Ba Trac street, which can be considered a distribution centre for Muslims who live far away from Binh Chanh (Ho Chi Minh City) and Tan Buu commune, Ben Luc district (Long An province) as well. Whenever the Muslims in the suburb organize weddings, funerals, or religious events, they go to Duong Ba Trac street to buy. The distance is 20 km for them to go by motorcycle and boat.

Ḥalāl food sources in Ho Chi Minh City are either unofficially recognized by the community as *ḥalāl* or possess certifications from Muslim organizations. The former is found to be the most common method of recognition. For instance, when a Muslim opens a stall in a highly populated Muslim area, fellow believers lend support by patronising their business. In this case, they do not require *ḥalāl* certification as their religious background serves as proof that food is

prepared in a *ḥalāl*-compliant way. This is common for small businesses that are limited to one area. The Islamic proof is an effective statement for the local eateries in Ho Chi Minh and Southern Vietnam, where the Muslims are densely populated. Han and Tuan stated, “In terms of cuisine, Islamic law allows the use of meat of animals such as chickens, ducks, goats, cows, etc. . . . But must be prepared by a Cham Muslim reciting takbir before killing, and pig meat is completely prohibited. The food used to worship (other gods) is also prohibited to use.”¹⁸

Large-scale businesses that market goods and services to Muslims in Vietnam and abroad are obligated to receive *ḥalāl* certification from the Representative Board of the Muslim Community. Applying for a certificate requires an official dispatch attached with a list of items that will be sold to the Representative Board of the Muslim Community in Ho Chi Minh City or An Giang province. Upon receiving the documents, the Representative Board will set up an evaluation committee that is in charge of inspecting and issuing *ḥalāl* certificates for the products registered by the enterprise.

Currently, companies and enterprises in Vietnam use the model of *ḥalāl* recognition because they often have favourable conditions to approach the Representative Board. As a result, most of their proposed products are recognized as *ḥalāl* after the production process and the Muslim labour force are checked.¹⁹ Enterprises in Ho Chi Minh City and An Giang province often accept this type of *ḥalāl* certificate. For example, ANAS Enterprise, which specializes in the production of beef sausages (called *tung-lò-mò* in Cham language and *lạp xưởng bò* in Vietnamese), received its *ḥalāl* certification from the Representative Board of the Muslim Community in An Giang province. This allows the company to sell products to local Vietnamese Muslims. Recently, Saigon Trading Corporation (SATRA) opened a food store called Satrafoods Halal, the first large-scale *ḥalāl* food hub in district 5, Ho Chi Minh City. The store carries 300 *ḥalāl* products, including ready-to-cook meals.

However, the *ḥalāl* certificates issued by the Representative Board are valid within the country only and not in others. As such, ANAS Enterprise has not been able to export beef sausages (*tung-lò-mò*) to Malaysian markets despite being a Muslim-owned business that exclusively employs Muslims. Mohamad S, the owner of ANAS, confirmed that the *ḥalāl* certificate issued by the Representative Board of

¹⁸ Han and Tuan, “Cham Muslims People in Ho Chi Minh City Today,” 110.

¹⁹ Mohamad S. (the owner of ANAS Enterprise in Phum Soai hamlet, Chau Phong commune, Tan Chau Town, An Giang province), in discussion with the author, July 20, 2021.

the local Muslim community is only valid for domestic consumption. As for exporting abroad, it is necessary to have *ḥalāl* certification from an organization or a representative office that is recognized by the Islamic world.²⁰ Additionally, Mohamad found that Malaysians share the closest cultural and culinary relationship with the Cham Muslims. Mohamad also believes that Malaysians often support Cham Muslims, as he has seen Malaysian tourists buying local Cham products in An Giang province. Recently, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development recognized beef sausages (*tung-lò-mò*) as a One Country One Priority Product (OCOP)²¹ of An Giang province and recently supported a project to upgrade the product packaging as well. Although *tung-lò-mò* is well-known in Vietnam, there are plans to promote the product to the Malaysian market. Mohamad explained that many Malaysian tourists buy his products when travelling to Ho Chi Minh City and An Giang province. He has also sent samples to Malaysian food traders to evaluate and consider his product for distribution there. He recognizes that to export to Malaysia, his goods would require an international *ḥalāl* certificate.²² In our September 2021 interview, he mentioned, “There are, currently, many Malaysian tourists who buy my products when travelling to Ho Chi Minh City and An Giang province. Depending on my relatives who are working in Malaysia, I also sent the samples to the enterprises that are trading food business there to try to evaluate my products. They all praised the taste. It is delicious and suitable for Malaysians, but if I want to export to Malaysia, I need an international *ḥalāl* certificate.”²³

The brand of *tung-lò-mò* (beef sausage) is a popular Vietnamese delicacy, and the Vietnamese market is currently dominating consumers’ tastes. The local government of An Giang province championed ANAS Enterprise’s decision to register its trademark and promote products at tourism events in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi. Through advertising, ANAS hopes that *tung-lò-mò* will be associated with Cham Muslims, making them indispensable gifts for tourists that visit Cham villages in Chau Phong and Chau Giang communes. The Ministry of

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ One Commune One Product (OCOP) is a national programme that seeks to facilitate the development of regional agricultural specialties and rural tourism. The programme is managed by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. It aims to empower local communities for sustainable social and economic welfare development, protect the environment, and preserve tradition.

²² Mohamad S., interview.

²³ Ibid.

Agriculture and Rural Development has issued a certificate for the product quality, *tung-lò-mò*, and the merits for ANAS Enterprises.

Since 2019, there have been several international conferences held in Vietnam to encourage the export of *halāl* products to Muslim-majority countries, such as “Global Market of Halal Food and Opportunities for Vietnam” held on November 30, 2020; “Halal Market in Southeast Asia-South Pacific: Potential and Opportunities” held on November 20, 2021; and the Conference on “Promoting International Cooperation to Develop Vietnam’s Halal Industry,” held on June 28, 2022. These conferences attest to the extremely important role of the *halāl* industry in Vietnam’s economic development. However, their production standards need to meet the *halāl* standards of Muslim-majority countries. The drive to export has prompted some businesses to develop a strategy for product upgrading. If their products are exported to the markets of Muslim countries, it will be assessed as a new success in the economic field for Vietnam.

***Halāl* Food and Tourism in Ho Chi Minh City**

In 2012, to realize Malaysia as a new market for Vietnamese tourism, the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (VNAT) prepared and approved the scheme “Promoting and Attracting Malaysian Tourists to Vietnam in the period 2012–2015.” In addition, the VNAT also evaluated the market for Muslim tourists since the late 2020s, noting that Malaysian tourists are in the top ten Asian tourists who came to visit Vietnam with 407,574 in 2016 and 295,517 in the first eight months of 2017.²⁴ According to statistics from the Department of Tourism in Ho Chi Minh City, by January 2020, Vietnam welcomed 50,000 Muslim visitors, a 5.5 times increase over the previous year.²⁵ The rise of Malaysian tourists led to the formation of trading streets for Muslims in Ho Chi Minh City. The main highlight is the night market on Nguyen An Ninh street, district 1. Due to the large concentration of Malaysian tourists and the appeal of services for Muslims, the street is currently known as “Malaysian Street” (*Phố Mã Lai* in Vietnamese). Tourists, however, know it by another name, Saigon Halal Street, where they can easily find Vietnamese dishes prepared by Muslims. Malaysian Street is an area that is meant to attract foreigners. Hence, the prices tend to be higher than other popular markets patronized by local Muslims.

²⁴ “Đẩy mạnh thu hút thị trường khách du lịch Malaysia đến TP Hồ Chí Minh” (Increasing to attract Malaysian Tourists to Ho Chi Minh City), accessed June 11, 2024, <https://vietnamtourism.gov.vn/post/24805>.

²⁵ General Statistics Office, “Population Census and Houses.”

Vietnamese enterprises have quickly seized the opportunity to produce goods for Muslim tourists. As such, companies labelled their products with *ḥalāl* logos for profit. There are instances where food products contain pork derivatives and yet carry the *ḥalāl* logo, as in the case of products produced by a food company in Tien Giang province. The Representative Board of the Muslim Community in Ho Chi Minh City has issued several warnings regarding the existence of such products.²⁶ Local Muslims tend to avoid such products, but Muslim tourists might be less aware.

Muslim tourists may also find that some restaurants claim to be *ḥalāl* even though they do not adhere to *ḥalāl* food preparation standards. The lack of awareness and carelessness can be traced to two reasons. First, businesses are profit-driven and may push ethics aside. Second, due to limited religious and cultural knowledge among business owners, they might assume that pork is the only prohibited ingredient and that other dishes are safe for Muslims to consume.

Interviews were conducted with five non-Muslim restaurant and stall owners in district 1 of Ho Chi Minh City to gain a better understanding of their perception of *ḥalāl* food. All five agreed that a dish is *ḥalāl* when it does not contain pork. They claim that their restaurants or eateries can prepare *ḥalāl* dishes because they have removed all pork derivatives, using only beef, fish, or chicken. They also confirm that in trading, they respect Muslims. If a Muslim asks them to provide food, they will cook with their own kitchen appliances. In their view, it makes the dish purified so that Muslims do not violate their religion when they enjoy the meals.²⁷ These understandings are also the common view of the Vietnamese regarding *ḥalāl* food. Most Vietnamese assume that a Muslim simply needs to worship Allah, pray five times a day, and avoid pork at all costs.²⁸

However, there are profit-driven companies that intentionally label their goods as *ḥalāl* to deceive Muslim customers. Most of the time, they manage to escape the scrutiny of authorities. They are only hindered when the Representative Board of the Muslim Community investigates and reports to the relevant authorities. Unfortunately, this might be a

²⁶ “Trả lời thắc mắc bạn đọc: Thị trường *Ḥalāl* tại Việt Nam” (Answers to the Question that the Readers to be interested in: The Market of Halal Product in Vietnam), accessed June 11, 2024, <http://chanlyislam.net/home/tra-loi-thac-mac-ban-doc-ky-ba-thi-truong-san-pham-halal-tai-viet-nam-534/>.

²⁷ A group of restaurants and meal stall owners (district 1, Ho Chi Minh City), in discussion with the author, September 15-20, 2021.

²⁸ Ibid.

lengthy process, and Muslim tourists may have already mistakenly purchased these inauthentic *ḥalāl* products. A judge (*ḥākim*) in HCMC, Mohamad V, explained that many companies in Vietnam do not have linear procedures or guidelines to process food according to *ḥalāl* standards. Local Muslims may be aware, but tourists may not. He expressed worries regarding the situation as it takes a long time to stop these companies.²⁹ The challenges in the food market of Ho Chi Minh City can be seen as an excellent opportunity for Muslim restaurants to promote their brands. *Ḥalāl* restaurants claim they are the real places to serve *ḥalāl* dishes. For example, a restaurant in HCMC promoted as follows: “We understand that some F&B owners claim their establishments are *ḥalāl* when they are not. Only through a grassroots effort, Muslims can improve the assurance of the *ḥalāl* sector in HCMC.”³⁰

Gohalalvietnam is an online platform that promotes restaurants that sell authentic *ḥalāl* food and assists tourists and foreign Muslims in finding *ḥalāl* products and *ḥalāl* groceries in Vietnam. The website stated that there were over fifty *ḥalāl* restaurants listed in Saigon in 2010. However, HCMC currently has only 18 *ḥalāl* restaurants.³¹

Conclusion

The Muslim community in Ho Chi Minh City originated from the Cham immigrants. However, in the process of development, Islam has attracted more people who are the Viet (Kinh), the ethnic Chinese, and some from inter-married families. All have created a multi-ethnic Muslim community that flexibly integrates into the urban society in Ho Chi Minh City. Existing in a multi-ethnic, multicultural, and religious urban society, Muslims strive to preserve the spiritual values of Islam and adapt to a society where they are a minority. It can be said that the Muslims have overcome all adversities to become a community of moral qualities praised by both people and the press in Ho Chi Minh City. To maintain existence in Ho Chi Minh City, *ḥalāl* food is an important part of Muslim life. Due to Vietnam’s economic and social context, *ḥalāl* food sources are limited. Muslims in Ho Chi Minh City have produced or processed *ḥalāl* dishes and sold them to the market as a professional business model. Therefore, *ḥalāl* food produced by Muslims is self-

²⁹ Mohamad V. (In charge of Tan Buu mosque, Co Giang street, ward 2, Phu Nhuan district, Ho Chi Minh City), in discussion with the author, July 15, 2022.

³⁰ <https://gohalalvietnam.com/halal>, accessed June 11, 2024. Some restaurants confirmed that they served 100% *ḥalāl* food.

³¹ <https://gohalalvietnam.com/halal>, accessed June 11, 2024. The website posted a list of eighteen restaurants to set up their *ḥalāl* standards and attract others to join.

recognized by the community or certified by the Representative Board of Muslim Community in Ho Chi Minh City at a higher level.

Facing the attraction of Vietnam's tourism market, the number of Muslim tourists is increasing. Ho Chi Minh City has become a crucial connection with Muslim tourists. Since then, the Muslim quarters have formed in the heart of the city, also known as Malaysian Street. The culinary trade methods for Muslim tourists have also become diverse, complex, and sensitive. Foods that are not compliant with *ḥalāl* standards or pretend to be *ḥalāl* have been brought to the market. They stem from a simplistic understanding of Islam by the merchants or they intentionally ignore Islamic regulations for the sake of profit. In such circumstances, the Representative Board of the Muslim Community in Ho Chi Minh City takes charge of their religious responsibility and controls the variety of *ḥalāl* products in the market. Their timely warnings help the Muslim community in Ho Chi Minh City to identify the fake *ḥalāl* foods. However, Muslim tourists might be less aware of them. Besides, the complexity of the *ḥalāl* food market in Ho Chi Minh City has become a great opportunity for Muslim restaurants and food services to promote their brands to the tourist market in Vietnam.

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