

## Urban Culture and Islamic Design for Halal Products

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### Introduction:

In Thailand Halal products are presented to the public with packaging of a general character. This research intends to inquire how Islamic principles can be utilized to reflect the Islamic character of Halal products. The research findings will in turn be applied to the packaging designs for these products.



*Picture 1: Halal logo*

Three stages are envisioned for the conduct of the research process:

1. Exploring the history and structure of Islamic art and design applicable to product design.
2. Exploring the meaning of Islamic faith applicable to establishing design practices.
3. Exploring the life style and consumption patterns of Thai Muslim Communities in the Bangkok area.

A few studies have been made on the application of Islamic principles. In 2003 Yupin (Yupin Hasan, 2003) presented her research on lifestyles and consumer patterns for Halal food by Muslim consumers. However, none of these studies provide any guidance for applying Islamic principles to the graphic design for Halal foods.

### The Principles of Islam

Islam is the principle of human conduct created by Allah. In 610 A.D., the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be with him) conveyed this message from God to the world in the city of Macca (Saudi Arabia). Islam is the way of seeking happiness and peace. The pillars of the Islamic religion are Iman (faith), Ibadat (practice), and Ishan (ethics).

Iman (faith) consists of six articles of belief:

Belief in God (Allah), belief in all the prophets (nabi) and messengers (rusul), belief in the angels (mala'ika), belief in the Quran and the holy books (kutub), belief in the day of judgment (qiyama) and in the resurrection (life after death), and belief in destiny (quadar).

Ibadat (practices) consist of five pillars of Islam, the term given to the five duties incumbent upon every Muslim. These duties are Shahada (profession of faith), Salah (prayers), Zakah (giving of alms), Sawm (fasting during Ramadan), and Haji (pilgrimage to Mecca). Furthermore, every Muslim must follow the ethic (Ishan). One

of Ishaan is Halal, the laws regarding which foods can and cannot be eaten and also on the proper method of slaughtering an animal for consumption.

All Muslims has to observe the Halal order in relation to designated edible and non-edible food, including the proper methods of slaughtering animals for consumption. A variety of substances area considered as harmful (haram) for humans to consume and forbidden according to Qur'anic verses: pork (Qu'ran 2:173), blood (Qu'ran 2:173): all carnivorous and birds of prey, alcohol, and other intoxicants (Qu'ran 5:90), food over which Allah's name is not pronounced (Qu'ran 6:121) etc. Halal and Haram are universal terms that apply to all facets of life. They are especially related to food products, food ingredients, and food contact materials, and cosmetics, and products of personal care.



*Picture 2: Instant noodle package*



*Picture 3: Logo of Islamic Bank of Thailand*

## 1. Islamic Art and Design

### a. The History of Islamic Art

Islamic art encompasses the visual arts produced from the 7<sup>th</sup> century onwards by people (not necessarily Muslim) who lived within the territory that was inhabited by culturally Islamic populations. It includes fields as varied as architecture, calligraphy, painting, and ceramics. Islamic art has focused on the depiction of patterns and Arabic Calligraphy, rather than on figures, because it is thought by many Muslims that the depiction of human form is idolatry, forbidden in the Quran, and thereby a sin against Allah. Islamic art is not connected to religion only. The term “Islamic” refers to the rich and varied culture as well, frequently adopting secular elements and elements that are frowned upon, if not forbidden, by some Islamic theologians.

Islamic art developed from many sources: Roman, Early Christian art, and Byzantine styles which were taken over in early Islamic art and architecture; the influence of the Sassanian art of pre-Islamic Persia was of paramount significance. Central Asian styles were brought in through various nomadic incursions. Chinese influences also had an important effect on Islamic painting, pottery and textiles. The Sassanian Dynasty (224 – 651) is the period of rapid expansion of the Islamic art forms,

After the death of Muhammad (peace be with him) in 632 A.D. Islamic art flourished under the Umayyad Dynasty until the establishment of the Abbasid Dynasty in 750 AD. and the movement of the capital from Damascus to Baghdad. This move came to influence politics, culture, and art, from Baghdad to Samarra. This period was followed by the Fatimid Dynasty (900 – 1171) long period of political unrest and struggle for power. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century the Mongols, under the leadership of Genghis Khan swept through the Islamic world.

The Ottoman Empire whose origins lie in the 14<sup>th</sup> century continued in existence right up to the First World War. This impressive longevity, combined with an immense territory (stretching from Anatolia to Tunisia) naturally led to a vital and distinctive art, including plentiful architecture, important jewel art, an exceptional art of manuscript illumination, mass production of ceramics (Iznik ware), tapestries, and carpets.

The Iranian Safavid Dynasty, stretching from 1501 to 1786 distinguishes itself from the Ottoman Empire partly through the Shi'a faith and the Shahs. Persian ceramics arts were influenced by Chinese Porcelain executed in blue and white. Architecture attained a high point with the building programs of Shah Abbas in Isfahan, which included numerous gardens, palaces such as Ali Qapu, an immense bazaar and a large imperial mosque.



*Picture 4: The Iranian Safavid Dynasty miniature*

The Mughal Empire in India lasted from 1526 until 1858, when the English seized the country and exiled the last Mughal Emperor. Various art forms, particularly architecture was accorded a place of honor in Mughal art, with the development of a distinctive style of Islamic architecture.

#### b. The Structure of Islamic Art and Design

One of the universal languages is the visual communication: a set of images, which can be used to communicate concepts. The elements of visual communication are

delineated through the elements of art and the principles of design. Graphic design can be divided into four groups of elements. The first is the conceptual elements of point, line, plane, and volume. The second is the visual elements of shape, size, color, and texture. The third is the relational elements of direction, position, space, and gravity. The last is the practical elements of representation, meaning, and function. (Wucius Wong, 1993). The primary organization principles governing graphic design are unity, figure and ground relationships, emphasis, hierarchy, and proportion. The secondary supporting principles are scale, balance, direction and movement, contrast, rhythm, and repetition (Araya Srikanianabuth, 2007). The structure of Islamic design consists of three characteristic parts as follows:

The first is the *Arabesque*; the flowing lines of an ivy plant branching out and the idealized intertwining pattern of leaves and flowers. The Arabesque takes its basic vocabulary from Middle East, Greco-Roman, Sasanian, and Byzantine artistic traditions. The antique motif adopted by the Umayyad Dynasty from acanthus leaves, vines, bunches of grapes, rosettes, and palmets. Islamic artists continued along the same lines, gradually distancing themselves from the natural model (Dominique Clenot, 2000)



*Picture 5: The Arabesque*

The second is *geometric form*; the harmony and symmetry in adorning and decorating objects to express artistic design. From a circle it is possible to generate any regular polygons once the circumference is divided equally into the required number of parts and points of division are joined with a straight line (Issam El-Said, 1997). The basic geometric patterns are formed with the square repetitive unit.



*Picture 6: The Geometric Form*

And the third category is *Islamic calligraphy*; beautiful handwriting of Arabic script skillfully crafted. The styles of calligraphy have evolved over the centuries. The earliest Qur'ans were written in a style known as Hijazi (Lynette Singer, 2008), soon to be overtaken by a strict angular style Kufic. Gradually more curvilinear forms emerged, especially in the east, influenced partly by the secular style used by scribes known as Naskh, Thuluth, Muhaqqaq, Rihani, and Taliq.



Picture 7: The Islamic calligraphy

## 2. The Relationship of structure and meaning in the art of Islam

In the following, we will on the basis of the teachings of the holy Qur'an try to set forth the relationship between the structure of art and the main principles governing Islamic conduct: *unity, respect, knowledge, balance, modesty, and remembrance*. The Qur'an never directly mentions art, but ever refers to the beauty (meaning), which God created. All Muslims were applying that meaning to lead a valuable life with intelligence and faith. *Value, function, consistency, and reason* are a priority for Islamic designers in representing this beauty through the Arabesque, calligraphy and geometric form.

“And your God is one God; there is no God except him, the all-merciful. The ever-merciful” (Qur'an 2:163)

This verse means *unity* (Tawhid). God is the creator and the center of all things in the universe. The nature of space, forming, ordering, and orienting, places man in the presence of divine unity. This is especially demonstrated through the presence of the Ka'bah towards which Muslims face in their five daily prayers.

“O you mankind, surely we created you of a male and a female, and we have made you races and tribes that you may get mutually acquainted. Surely, the most honorable among you in the Providence of Allah are the most pious; surely Allah is ever-knowing, ever-cognizant” (Qur'an 49:13)

This verse means *respect* (Ihtiram), faith and Muslim practices. A state of propriety, a virtue, and attitude of good manners; transcendent and mindful of actions are those respectful for the sake of God and what he has revealed.

“And in no way were they commanded anything except to worship Allah, making the religion His faithfully (and) unswerving, and to keep up prayer, and bring the Zakat; (i.e. pay the poor-dues) and that is the religion most upright” (Qur'an 98:5)

This verse means *sincerity* (Ikhlas), the one and only. The heart, there are two further concerns: belief and sincerity. Belief is achieved by removing doubt from the heart, whilst sincerity of the heart involves the contemplative spiritual nature of man.

“Read: and your Lord is the most honorable, who taught by the pen. He taught man what he did not know” (Qur'an 96:3-5)

This verse means *knowledge* (Ilm), Qur'an's creation of life wisdom. The knowledge is clear vision as narrated by God. The light is synonymous with truth for all Muslims. Sunlight is a moving point source, adding to the individuality of everyone's sensory experience.

“And do not turn your cheek away haughtily from mankind, and do not walk in the earth merrily. Surely, Allah does not love anyone (who is) always conceited, (and) constantly boastful” (Qur'an 31:18)

This verse means *balance* (Iqtisad), objectivity and equality. A delicate balance between functional and spiritual elements through the understanding of nature and subsequent meaning of harmony, Muslims knew that in all the polarities of the universe, it is the point of intersection that is the most beneficial to the stability of the soul.

“Say to the (male) believers, that they cast down when there are holdings (i.e. "modestly" cast down their eyes) and preserve their private part; that is more cleansing for them. Surely, Allah is ever-cognizant of whatever they work out. And say to the female believers to cast down when there are holdings, and preserve their private parts, and not display their adornment except such as is outward, and let them fix (Literally: strike) closely their veils over their bosoms, and not display their adornment except to their husbands, or their fathers, or their husbands' fathers, or their sons, or their husbands' sons, or their brothers, or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or what their right hands possess, or (male) followers, men without desire (Literally: without being endowed with "sexual" desire) or young children who have not yet attained knowledge of women's privacies, and they should not strike their legs (i.e. stamp their feet) so that whatever adornment they hide may be known. And repent to Allah altogether (O) you believers that possibly you would prosper.” (Qur'an 24:30-31)

This verse means *modesty* (Haya), living with a clear state of mind and having esteem for others. There are three words that encapsulate the meaning of modesty: humility, decency, and awareness. Each of them expresses a virtue in its outer and inner meaning and represents the conscientiously awareness of Muslims to be modest to others, to themselves, to God and regulate their public behavior.

“The ones who have believed and whose hearts (feel) composed with the remembrance of Allah -verily in the remembrance of Allah the hearts are composed” (Qur'an 13:28)

This verse means *remembrance* (Dhikr), the perpetual and omnipresent God. The Islamic Art does not avoid monotony, like a rhythmic precision mirrored in the contemplative chanting of God's innumerable attributes. The arabesque belongs to the laws of pure rhythm. The Muslims find peace in the remembrance of God, heard in their repetitive mystical chanting; as do the pulsating patterns achieve tranquility by suggesting infinity.

Principles of Design The Meaning	Balance	Contrast	Proportion / Scale	Unity	Harmony	Repetition	Radiation	Gradation	Similarity	Concentration	Anomaly	Structure	Movement	Emphasis	Rhythm
Unity	☾		☾	☾		☾	☾	☾	☾			☾		☾	
Respect	☾		☾	☾	☾	☾	☾		☾			☾	☾	☾	☾
Sincerity	☾		☾	☾	☾	☾	☾		☾			☾		☾	
Knowledge	☾	☾	☾	☾		☾			☾			☾			
Balance	☾		☾	☾	☾	☾	☾		☾			☾		☾	
Modesty	☾		☾	☾	☾	☾	☾		☾			☾	☾	☾	☾
Remembrance	☾		☾	☾	☾	☾	☾	☾	☾			☾	☾	☾	☾

*Table 1: Analysis of the Meaning*

There are six principles of design suitably for all meaning: balance, proportion and scale, unity, repetition, similarity, and structure. The analyses show those meanings had similar direction. Symmetrical balance was the main structure of Islamic art. A symmetric object was made up using the same component repeatedly. In nature, it prefers an economy of construction, utilizing the same components repeatedly in different combinations. Repetition was the simplest method in designing. Columns and windows in Islamic architecture (mosque), carpet, fabric, and tile were obvious examples of repetition. Many of Islamic patterns do not repeat exactly, but according to the principle of similarity easily found in Islamic patterns. Most Islamic designs have a structure, governing the position of forms. Structure in Islamic design generally imposes order and predetermines internal relationships of forms; it can be visible and invisible.

### 3. The life style and consumption patterns of Thai Muslims living in the Bangkok area.

In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the Islamic religion was introduced into Thailand during the Sukhothai Kingdom (1257 to 1350 A.D.) and prospered into the following Ayutthaya Kingdom (1350 to 1767 A.D.). A century later Islam had been established as a minority faith with an estimated 2.2 million believers (equivalent to 4.5% of the adult population of 49.5 million) as recorded by the 2005 statistics from the National Statistics Office of Thailand. Most Thai Muslims adhere to the Sunni faith. The popular opinion seems to hold that a vast Muslim minority is found in the three southern provinces of Yala, Pattani, and Narathiwat. However, research from the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs indicates that only 18% of Thai Muslims live in those three provinces. The rest is scattered throughout Thailand, with the largest concentrations being in Bangkok and throughout most Southern provinces. According

to the National Statistics Office Muslims in Southern Thailand in 2005 made up 30.4% of the general population above the age of 15, while less than 3% in other parts of the country.

Islam is a minority culture in Thailand, which increasingly has come to represent an urban culture, which also influences their life style and consumption behavior. As we have seen the Muslim character is represented by three main structures of design: *Arabesque*, *geometric form*, and *calligraphy*, and seven different styles: unity, respect, sincerity, knowledge, balance, modesty, and remembrance. Each style is suitable for a different category of Halal products, and created from different principles of design, which are balance, contrast, proportion and scale, unity, harmony, repetition, radiation, gradation, similarity, concentration, anomaly, structure, movement, emphasis, and rhythm.

The next steps in this research will a closer examination of:

1. The relationship of Islamic character and the principles of design
2. The relationship of Islamic character with the categories of Halal products
3. The relationship of the categories of Halal products with the structure of design

#### Curriculum Vitae

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#### Education:

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