

THE WISER APPROACH FOR AN INTEGRATED AND INNOVATIVE INDIGENOUS MEDICINES

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Dear Editor

I read with enthusiasm the success of the 3rd International Conference on Malay Medical Manuscripts, spearheaded by the Health Information and Knowledge of Malay Medical Manuscripts Flagship. The conference theme, "Discovery, Integration and Innovation of the Malay Medical Manuscripts," was an eye opening and rejuvenating platform to rediscovering cures in medicine. The organisers reported 27 papers were presented in the conference with stimulating discourses: philosophy of the Malay medicine, Malay tradition in dentistry, traditional remedies for various illnesses including cancers and emerging neglected disease, challenges in implementing the traditional Malay medicine to the mainstream as well as innovations to verify the authenticity of traditional formulations.

Malay medical manuscripts are one of the Malay heritages that is still left for us to explore; albeit not many are studying them. These manuscripts are not merely about superstitious beliefs but rather, contain practical information on health sciences and healthy lifestyles. In contrast to scientific knowledge, indigenous knowledge is holistic, functional (read: *not* limited to westernised systematic Linnean classification of organisms) and adaptive to changes in social and natural environment, and it has been transmitted for many thousands of generations (Rist & Dahdouh-Guebas, 2006). This makes health sciences especially more intriguing in the current situation. Health sciences is a vital component of knowledge to move forward in this current COVID-19 pandemic situation. However, if we cannot translate the knowledge into layman language, we will fail to appreciate and benefit the knowledge that we have.

The International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) is indeed very committed into finding new ways of expressing knowledge, not only to Malaysians and the Muslims, but also globally. The core business of this university is to imbue knowledge and reinterpret it based on the Islamic perspective; hence the term Islamisation of knowledge was coined. At the university, we make every effort to filter knowledge from the influences of other cultures and civilisations and uphold it with the Islamic concepts, frameworks and values (Al-Attas, 1995).

To this day, the world is dominated by a knowledge that is originally from the western countries. It is nothing wrong, but it is not complete in their own sense. And therefore, to look at knowledge from a new perspective, we need to find another framework which I will call it **WISER**. **WISER** the knowledge must be **W**holesome or holistic, the knowledge must be **I**nclusive, the knowledge must be **S**ustainable, and the knowledge must also be **E**quitable, in the sense that everybody should be able to access that particular knowledge. At the same time, it is **R**esilient in ensuring that the knowledges remain relevant to this day. **WISER** is a framework that we are trying to promote and shape to replace what I call a **WEIRD** sort of framework.

The **WEIRD** framework: **W** means **W**esternised or increasingly it is a white-based knowledge coming from the Europe per se. It is also **E**conomically centred, i.e., everything must be centred around economy. If there is no economic benefit, most people will not even attend to that knowledge although the knowledge is useful. It is also **I**ndustry-led, i.e., half of the time, when we do research, we keep on asking which industry we are going to promote this and sometimes we find the industry is not interested because there is no economic interest in this, and therefore most of us will not be able to proceed because of the lack of funding and support from other parts of the industry. And the last one

is about **Reputational based**, i.e., everything is done because we want to seek reputation, be it in terms of publication, or journal writing, and be it in terms of awards of some sort. It is not the true search for knowledge, rather for fame and name that drives it. And therefore, the whole knowledge structure becomes very dehumanising, in other word, people are not able to use those knowledges. Otherwise, they are cheated of its true meaning and purpose. In the university, it is meant to promote ourselves and the "narrowly" defined knowledge that we are specialising in, so to speak.

I think this framework will not work and therefore we need to change this framework into the **WISER** framework. And indeed, in this particular conference, when you talk about discovery, innovation and integration – this allows us to shift away from the old paradigm of **WEIRD**, into the paradigm of **WISER** where we are inclusive in the search for knowledge, in particular, the indigenous population which are still practising the authentic medical knowledge that they inherited from their ancestors. It is a fact, that wisdom often resides in several communities where knowledge becomes part and parcel of their lifestyle. The knowledge may be inherited, without the full understanding of the wisdom and scientific values of the traditions, thus, the integration with the contemporary knowledge and technologies are needed to harmonise this indigenous knowledge.

Hence, it is our biggest hope that this Special Issue of IJAHS can bring a new perspective into what traditional Malay medical manuscripts have to offer to the realm of the larger world. Indeed, there will be many medical practitioners and scientists who might be against the traditional medicine, for whatever reasons. Alas, this is a common challenge experienced by many of the minorities who were trying to introduce something foreign or re-introduce something that is considered conventional back to the modern world and into the mainstream. However, this university is committed to bring the Malay manuscripts, into the mainstream so that it can be part and parcel of the knowledge within the university and among its community. This is the heritage of the Malay civilisation, and therefore it is only right that we look forward for many more discoveries, technologies and knowledge that will stem from these informative manuscripts.

In July 2020, the Health Information and Knowledge of Malay Medical Manuscripts Flagship was awarded **The Most Innovative Flagship** of the university. In other words, we have made good progress. There are many more things that we need to do and certainly for IIUM Kuantan Campus – which is the health-based campus – is a privilege because of its crucial and strategic location for the development of this Malay medicine which we truly hope the university will be recognised for. We shall look forward for more integration of indigenous knowledge and ethnoscientific approaches into contemporary frameworks for conservation and sustainable management of natural resources, and we hope, will become increasingly important in policies making, both at international as well as regional levels (Rist & Dahdouh-Guebas 2006). Research and innovations that proliferated from the Malay medical manuscripts will provide future generations with a meaningful sustainable development that goes beyond a merely ego-centric and materialist understanding of life and living beings. As described by Röling (2002), sustainable development should embrace an important resource for societal transformation beyond mere aggregation of individual preferences.

In July 2020 also, the university has been recognised worldwide as a sustainability institution of the year. This is a huge recognition indeed, and research into the Malay medical manuscripts can certainly accommodate and achieve many goals of sustainable development. For example, the Malay medical manuscripts would fit into the sustainable development goal 3 (SDG 3) about good health and well-being, whereby remedies and medicine are often local materials that are available in every household in the local communities. With the right knowledge of medicine, people have access to effective formulations to treat and manage symptoms such as toothache, fever, cough and stomach pain. These are all the goals that need to be connected to the whole community and people at large, and I am pleased to know that this project of Malay medical manuscripts has a direct relevance to what SDGs are about.

Often, people look at traditional medicine and this manuscript of ours as something which is left behind and therefore, nobody wants to pay particular interest in it, or indeed it is only for a group of people that will benefit from it. The moment you are able to link this to the 17 SDGs, you are

beginning to see that this has relevance not only to a group of people or a country, but it has an application worldwide. I think that is the message that needs to be translated and I hope this is achieved in the publication of this Special Issue IJAHS that we have now, and we can now move the way forward beyond this.

Let me once again congratulate everyone who takes part in the conference as well as those who contributed as the authors and reviewers for this Special Issue of IJAHS. It is our prayers that this project gets the blessing of Allah the Al-Mighty, will be recognised at a global level *In Sha Allah* (Arabic: God willing) as well as bring blessings to everybody in the context of *rahmatan lil-'alamin* (Arabic: mercy to all creations)

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F62XT38zlgU&t=1663s> (footnote, expanded from the original speech presented at ICOMMM viewed here)

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