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# ISLAMIC APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE AND EXTREMISM: CONTEXTUAL READING OF HADITHS ON THE MAHDI WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SRI LANKA

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## Abstract

*Like any other religious community, the apocalyptic literature in Muslim society has become a source of pessimism instead of optimism. The extremists who conducted a series of suicide attacks on religious places and hotels in Sri Lanka in 2019 justified their violent activities, referring to apocalyptic literature that prophesied the advance of Mahdi. These extremists misunderstood the hadiths on the Mahdi and intended to create instability in the world to accelerate his coming to resolve the present issues of Muslims. This research studied the relevant hadiths quoted by the extremists to kill innocent people and explored their meaning. The contextual analysis method has been employed to extract the meaning of these hadiths. This research shows that the extremists have misinterpreted these hadiths and used the Islamic apocalyptic literature out of context. The socio-political context of the usage of these hadiths further elaborates the change that has taken place in the understanding of their purpose throughout history. Therefore, this research recommends that Muslim religious and social leaders review interpretation traditions and educate young people to adopt socio-political and historical contexts to understand Islamic apocalyptic literature, mainly hadiths, to protect young people from extremism and radicalism.*

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## 1. Introduction

Apocalypse is the disclosure of something hidden in the future.[4] Thus the literature on this topic describes the signs and events that would occur at the end of the world. Generally, it appeals to those who feel the world's injustice, oppression, and disenfranchisement.[5] Apocalyptic literature is common to all religions, including Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism.[6] The source of apocalyptic literature is usually scriptures or the teachings of the founder of a religion.

Many Hindu scholars have discussed the apocalypse in Hinduism, particularly with reference to Kali Yuga (Kali Age). Aryabhata (476–550 CE), the Indian mathematician who wrote the Sanskrit treatise *Surya Siddhanta*, Swami Sri Yukteswar Giri (1855 – 1936), and many others have written about these prophecies. According to the Hindu literature, the apocalypse discusses the natural ending of the world in the fourth age, the Kali Age. It is said that Vishnu will appear again as Kalki, a white horse destined to destroy the present world and take humanity to a different, higher plane. All kings occupying the earth in the Kali Age will be wanting in tranquillity, strong in anger, indulging in sensual pleasure, lying and dishonesty, inflicting death on women, children, and cows, prone to take the paltry possessions of others, with the character that is mostly vial, rising to power and soon falling.[7]

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[4] C. C Torrey, "Apocalypse," *The Jewish Encyclopaedia,* edited by Isidore Singer (1906), 669–675.

[5] Global Security, "Apocalypse in Islam", *Global Security Org,* July 15, 2020. https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/intro/islam-apocalyptic.htm

[6] Nuru Mohammed, *Concept of Mahdi in Early Shia Authorship*. Doctoral dissertation, submitted to the Middlesex University, 2016, 3, July 15, 2020. https://www.islamic-college.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/DISSERTATION-NURU.pdf

[7] Van Hollen and Cecilia Coale, *Cancer and the Kali Yuga: Gender, Inequality, and Health in South India* (US: University of California Press, 2022), 16.

The apocalyptic literature in Jewish history began earlier than 168 BCE and flourished until I32 CE. The Maccabean struggle closed with the uprising under Hadrian. It appeared in the Hebrew Bible, particularly in Isaiah, Zephaniah, Ezekiel, and Joel, and continued to grow both in the synagogue and the Christian church.[8] The coming of a Jewish Messiah (Moshiach), a leader who descended from the Davidic line, and who will rule the people of united tribes of Israel (Isaiah 11:11-12; Jeremiah 23:8; 30:3; Hosea 3:4-5) will herald the Messianic Age of global peace. The law of the Jubilee will be reinstated. This belief, therefore, has become one of the Articles in *Shloshah-Asar Ikkarim*, The Thirteen Articles of Faith.[9] Jewish scholars have studied the detailed development of this concept in their history.[10]

However, the concept of the Messiah in Christianity is different from that in Judaism. The Messiah in Christianity is the Son of God. The Gospel, according to Mark, begins with the sentence "The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." (Mark 1:1). The Gospel, according to Matthew, identifies Jesus as the Messiah and as the Son of God: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God." (Matthew 16:16). The Christians designated the second coming of Jesus as Christ and believed that the messianic prophecies in the Old Testaments would be fulfilled in his mission and resurrection.

In Buddhism, apocalypse literature discusses the coming of Maitreya Buddha. He will appear on the earth, achieve complete enlightenment, and teach the pure Dharma. "At that period, brethren, there will arise in the world an Exalted One named Maitreya, Fully Awakened, abounding in wisdom and goodness, happy, with knowledge of the worlds, unsurpassed as a guide to mortals willing to be led, a teacher for gods and men, an Exalted One, a Buddha, even as I am now. He, by himself, will thoroughly know and see, as it

[8] John W. Bailey, "Jewish Apocalyptic Literature," *The Biblical World* 25, no. 1 (1905): 30–42.

[9] Aaron Milavec, *Salvation is from the Jews (John 4: 22): Saving Grace in Judaism and Messianic Hope in Christianity* (Liturgical Press, 2007), 122.

[10] John W. Bailey, "Jewish Apocalyptic Literature."

were face to face, this universe, with Its worlds of the spirits, Its Brahmas and Its Maras, and Its world of recluses and Brahmins, of princes and peoples, even as I now, by myself, thoroughly know and see them" (*Digha Nikaya*, 26). This passage explains the coming of another Buddha, Maitreya, who would appear and introduce different Dhamma. Although this prophecy is ambiguous, other prophecies explain the time of Maitreya Buddha in detail. "After my decease, first will occur the five disappearances. Moreover, what are the five disappearances? The disappearance of attainments (to Nirvana), the disappearance of the method (inability to practice wisdom, insight and the four purities of moral habit), the disappearance of learning (loss of men who follow the Dharma), the disappearance of the symbols (the outward forms, the robes, and practices of Buddhism), the disappearance of the relics...after 5000 years" (*The Surangama Sutra*).

Islamic sources also have many apocalyptic materials. There are some in the Qur'an, but mainly in Hadith literature. Although the Second Coming of Isa or Jesus in Islamic literature is an end-time event, it is not considered conclusive. Instead, the beginning of the end times is marked by the appearance of Mahdi and Dajjal, the Antichrist.[11] Hence, Muslims expect at least three prominent individuals to appear in the End Times: (1) The Mahdi (the rightly guided), (2) Dajjal or Antichrist, and (3) the Prophet Isa or Jesus.

From the above discussion, it is apparent that most world religions have apocalyptic literature that prophecies the coming of a just leader and the introduction of just rule in the world. However, descriptions of him and the situation in which he appears according to the different religions are not precise since they use images, symbols, mystic numbers, and forms of animals.

Due to its imprecision, religious fanatics and radicals use this apocalyptic literature to attract innocent people to their cause. Harold Camping's Y2K issue, the End of the Mayan Calendar, and Atomic Scientists' The Doomsday Clock are examples of radicals' interpretation of apocalyptic literature. *The Journal of Religions* published a special issue under the theme "Apocalypticism in the 21st

[11]Global Security, "Apocalypse in Islam", *Global Security Org*, July 15, 2020. https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/intro/islam-apocalyptic.htm.

Century" in 2019 (10) and collected views of different religions on apocalyptic literature. There is enough literature that explains the way of using this literature by radicals and religious fanatics.[12] Oxford University has published a handbook on apocalyptic literature and explained how the radicals exploit this literature in 28 chapters.[13] Our present article investigates the Muslim extremists' understanding of the advent of Mahdi and the way of exploiting Islamic apocalyptic literature to justify their violent activities in Sri Lanka.

## 2. Background of Study

As mentioned before, Muslim extremists use Islamic apocalyptic literature to motivate young people towards violence. They propagate the idea that they are living at the End of Days. They can expect their Messiah, the Mahdi, on earth at any moment and establish *Dawlah Islamiyah* (global Islamic kingdom).[14] They also believe that Jesus will return not as the Saviour or Son of God but as a lieutenant to the Mahdi to beat *Dhajjal,* the Islamic version of Antichrist. The extremist groups also try to convince young Muslims to believe that the awaited Mahdi will appear only when the world is immersed in turmoil. Thus, as they see it, the primary duty of Muslims is to create chaos in the world.[15] This shows that Islamic apocalypticism has been used as a powerful means to motivate young people towards violence and extremism.[16]

The coming of Mahdi is an essential issue used by extremists

[12] John J. Collins, "Radical Religion and the Ethical Dilemmas of Apocalyptic Millenarianism," *Radical Christian Voices and Practice: Essays in Honour of Christopher Rowland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 87–102.

[13] John J. Collins, "Radical Religion and the Ethical Dilemmas of Apocalyptic Millenarianism."

[14] Mohammad-Mahmoud Ould Mohamedou, "ISIS and the deceptive rebooting of al-Qaeda," *GCSP Policy Paper (2014)*, 1–5. July 23, 2020. https://mideast-africa.tau.ac.il/sites/humanities.tau.ac.il/files/media_server/mideast_africa/%D7%98%D7%A8%D7%95%D7%A8/Mohamedou%20ISIS%20and%20the%20Deceptive%20Rebooting%20of%20Al%20Qaeda.pdf

[15] Mustafa Ajyol, "The problem with the Islamic apocalypse," *The New York Time*s, October 03, 2016, August 05, 2020. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/04/opinion/the-problem-with-the-islamic-apocalypse.html.

[16] Ibid.

to recruit and intoxicate young Muslims. Zahran, the leader of ISIS attackers in Sri Lanka on April 21, 2019, exploited *hadiths* on Mahdi to effectively convince his followers to become zealots. He promised them Islamic supremacy on earth based on these *hadiths* and motivated them to sacrifice their lives.[17] As an example, a suicide bomber sent his last message to his wife, who also killed herself following these attacks, as follows:

> *"The time to come is going to be hard not only for my family, but also for the whole Muslim community of Sri Lanka. The reason being – and this is the command of Allah, this is how it is going to start because al-Mahdi 'alayhi as-salam will not appear just like that. For al-Mahdi 'alayhi as-salam to appear, it will be a devastating situation where the Muslim Ummah will be eagering for leadership, and everyone is suffering. Everyone is suffering oppression, tyranny, and façade. All this would be happening when al-Mahdi 'alayhi as-salam has to come when he has to appear; it will be a devastating situation, so, you know, at that particular point he will appear and inshallah he will lead the Ummah. But for that time, the one who is prepared to accept him will be the ones who are accepting him. At the same time, there will be a majority of the Muslim Ummah who will be accepting Dhajjal because he will be more attractive to them than al-Mahdi 'alayhi as-salam."*[18]

This message reflects Muslim extremists' understanding of the Mahdi and its role in radicalizing young Muslims. According to this message, the suicide bomber justified his unethical and brutal killing of innocent people with *hadiths* that prophesied the establishment of the supremacy of Islam by the awaited Mahdi. He believed that killing people and creating unprecedented chaos would accelerate the coming of the Mahdi. According to him, the Mahdi will not appear

[17] Rohan Gunaratna. "Audio recording of extremist' suspect," Criminal Investigations Department, Sri Lanka. March 15, 2020 (unpublished document).
[18] Ibid.

until mayhem reigns supreme. Having been systematically indoctrinated, the Islamic State ideologues believe that Armageddon will come in their lifetime.

Of the three prominent individuals to appear in the End Times according to the hadith literature, the advent of the Mahdi is the most popular belief in Muslim history. Since 1979, *hadiths* on the advent of the Mahdi have become more popular among Muslim youths. According to PEW research (2012), half of Muslims in nine Muslim-majority countries believe that the coming of the Mahdi is "imminent" and could happen in their lifetime.[19]

The biography of the Mahdi has been written with precise, detailed descriptions before his birth, as revealed in *hadiths*, such as, "The Mahdi is of my lineage, with a high forehead and a long, thin, curved nose. He will fill the earth with fairness and justice as it was filled with oppression and injustice, and he will rule for seven years" (Abu Dawud: 4265; Haakim: 4/557). This detailed description of the Mahdi and his arrival made some Muslim scholars suspect the authenticity of these hadiths and the coming of the Mahdi.

Scholars among Sunnis like Ibn Khaldun hardly paid attention to the *hadiths* on the Mahdi. Although other Sunni scholars accepted the coming of the Mahdi as a sign of the Last Day, almost none of them included him in the list of ten big signs of the Last Day. It shows that Sunni scholars did not consider him a vital sign of the Last Day despite accepting the prophecy on the emergence of the Mahdi.

Despite the Islamic apocalyptic literature describing the Mahdi as one of the three individuals to appear on the Last Day, early Islamic tradition, particularly the Prophet and his companions, did not give particular attention to the coming of the Mahdi. This might be a reason for Sunni scholars' lukewarm position on the advent of the Mahdi. However, the coming of the Mahdi is vital among the Shia. Shia scholars like Kulaini's al-Kafi, Tusi's Ghaybah, Numani's Ghaybah, and Saduq's Kamal al-Din have shown great interest in the

[19] Pew Research, "The world's Muslims: unity and diversity." *Pew Research Religion & Public Life Project*, 2012, June 20, 2020. https://www.pewforum.org/2012/08/09/the-worlds-muslims-unity-and-diversity-3-articles-of-faith/

advent of the Mahdi and included it as one of the five articles in their belief system.[20]

It is clear that belief in the advent of the Mahdi plays an essential role in Islamic eschatology. Since this belief can have a significant socio-political and psychological impact on Muslim society, extremist groups take full advantage of this literature.[21] This research, therefore, examines the validity of the extremists' claim that it is legitimate to create violence and chaos with the view of fulfilling the prophecy of the advent of the Mahdi.

## 3. Research Method and Focus

### 3.1. *Theoretical Foundation*

As far as this research examines the religious texts, mainly the texts of *hadiths* on Mahdi, authentication of these *hadiths* is crucial before examining their meanings. There are two methods to ensure the authenticity of a hadith: the study of its *isnad* and the study of its *matan*.[22] *Isnad* means the chain of people transmitting a hadith from the Prophet (ﷺ) to the hadith experts who recorded it in written form. The science that studies the authenticity of *isnad* is called *usul al-hadith* (the sources of hadith).[23] This study determines the quality of a hadith from the perspective of the trustworthiness of the narrator (*rawi* – pl *ruwwat*) and the number of narrators in an *isnad*. Examining the *isnad* based on the number of narrators in a transmission chain involved categorizing the narrators in accordance with their generation (*tabaqat*) and confirming their numbers. Hence, hadith experts classified people involved in *isnad* under four *tabaqat*:

[20] Nuru Mohammed, *Concept of Mahdi in Early Shia Authorship*. Doctoral dissertation, submitted to the Middlesex University, 2016, 3, July 15, 2020. https://www.islamic-college.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/DISSERTATION-NURU.pdf

[21] Barend Louwrens Prinsloo, "The etymology of "Islamic extremism": A misunderstood term?" *Cogent Social Sciences* 4, no. 1 (2018): 1-8 (Article:1463815).

[22] Tuan Mohd Sapuan, Tuan Rohaizan Baru, Ahmad Fauzi Hassan, Ahmad Zahid Bin Salleh, and Mohd Fauzi Mohd Amin, "The *matan* and *sanad* criticisms in evaluating the hadith," *Asian Social Science* 10, no. 21 (2014): 152-159

[23] Ibid.

(i) The direct companions of the Prophet (*sahabah*), (ii) the children of *sahabah* (tabi'in), (iii) grandchildren of *sahabah* (*taba' al-tabi'in*), and (iv) Imams who recorded the hadith in written form. The experts categorized a hadith based on the number of narrators in *isnad* as either *mutawatir* or *ahad*. *Mutawati*r means a hadith with more than ten different *isnad* or more than ten narrators in each *tabaqat*. Ahad means a hadith that has only one narrator in any of the *tabaqat*.

Hadith experts studied ahad hadiths from the perspective of the trustworthiness of the narrator to confirm its authenticity. After a detailed analysis of the character and biographic investigation of every individual involved in the transmission chain, the experts categorize their narration of a hadith under four levels of authenticity: *sahih* (very authentic), *hasan* (authentic), *da'if* (weak) and *munkar* (unauthentic).

Hadith experts do not feel satisfied with the use of *isnad* analysis alone to confirm the authenticity of a hadith; instead, they use content criticism (*naqd al-matan* since it helps the experts to ascertain the status of a narrator, whether he is accepted or rejected, trustworthy or otherwise, carefully safeguards the hadith or is forgetful.[24] Indeed, content criticism is one of the significant counterarguments against Western criticism of Hadith.[25]

Content criticism studies hadith texts critically by comparing the *matan* of one hadith narrator with the *matan* of other narrators, including views from the logical aspect. Hence, hadith experts would look for incongruous, contradictory mistakes before confirming the authenticity of hadiths.[26]

Referring to hadiths on the Mahdi, many hadith scholars have confirmed their authenticity from the perspective of *isnad*. For example, Shawkani (1753-1839 CE) confirmed the their authenticity in his treatise entitled *The Explanation Showing the Accounts about*

[24] Ibid.

[25] Salahudheen Kozhithod, "Khaldunian techniques of historical criticism and their place in modern debates on *naqd al-matan* (content criticism) of hadith," *İbn Haldun Çalışmaları Dergisi* 3, no. 2 (2018): 225-238.

[26] Tuan Mohd Sapuan, Tuan Rohaizan Baru, Ahmad Fauzi Hassan, Ahmad Zahid Bin Salleh, and Mohd Fauzi Mohd Amin. "The *matan* and *sanad* criticisms in evaluating the hadith."

*the Mahdi, Dhajjal, and the Messiah.*[27]

In terms of content criticism, most hadith experts confirmed their authenticity. However, these hadiths raised the possibility of them being considered as conveying the meaning of Mahdi as a general term in the Qur'an that refers to anyone who accepts *al-Haqq* (Absolute truth) and lived in accordance with the Truth.[28] Some hadith experts accept these hadiths not only as *sahih* (sound) but also *mutawatir matan.*[29] Shawkani, for example, considers them as *mutawatir*.[30] In *Fathul Bari*, Ibn Hajar (1372-1449 CE) also considered the hadiths on the Mahdi and the descent of Isa as *mutawatir* in terms of meaning.[31]

## 3.2. **Conceptual Framework**

To the extent that these hadiths are authentic, their meaning and objective should be understood from the contextual analysis. Since Muslim extremists have used these hadiths to motivate violence among young people, a critical analysis of them these is crucial.

The science of interpreting hadiths is known as *sharah al-hadith* (hadith commentary). It deals with the nature and meaning of terms used in hadiths, their cultural contexts, types of expression, and occasion of the expression. Al-Khatib al-Baghdadi mentioned that *sharah al-hadith* appeared in Quranic interpretation traditions and developed together with Islamic jurisprudence and the written biography of the Prophet Mohammad (ﷺ).[32] *Sharah al-hadith* emerged as a separate science during the tenth century with the

[27] Siddiq Khan, *Al-Iza'ah Lima Kana Wa ma Yekunu Baina Yedai al-Sa'ah* (Cairo: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 1999), 124.

[28] Ahmad Ibrahim Hassan and Mohammad Ibrahim Zain, "Tatawwur fikrath al-Mahdiyyah fi al-*sina'ah al-hadithiyyah*: dirasat fi al-'alaqah baina al-tajdid wa al-taqdis," *Journal of Islamiyat al-Ma'arifah* 1, no. 4 (1996): 17-58.

[29] Al-Siddiq Al-Ghumari, *Ibraz al-Wahm al-Maknun* (Damascus: Tariq Publication, 1929), 433–434.

[30] Siddiq Khan, *Al-Iza'ah Lima Kana Wa ma Yekunu Baina Yedai al-Sa'ah* (Cairo: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 1999), 124.

[31] Ibnu Hajar Al-Asqalani, *"Kitab al-jihad wa'l-siyar," Fathul Bari,* vol. 6 (Riyadh: Maktaba Al-Salfiyah, 2008), 570.

[32] Al-Khatib Al-Baghdadi, *Al-Jamiah Li Ahlaq al-Rawi Wa Adaab,* 2 (Turkey: Al-Resala Foundation, 1996), 288.

efforts of Al-Khattabi (d. 996 CE) in his commentary on Abi Dawood and Al-Bukhari (810-870 CE) in his *A'lam al-hadith*. Later, al-Tabari (839-923 CE) discussed issues in interpreting hadiths and proposed basic rules in his famous commentary *Tahthib al-Atar Wa tafseel Ma'ani al-Sabith An Rasulillah Min al-Akhbar.*[33] Al-Khattabi wrote a separate guidebook in hadith interpretation, *Ma'alim al-Sunan*.[34] Popular methods of *sharah al-hadith* include (i) explaining a hadith with another hadith, (ii) explaining a hadith with the opinions of the companions of the Prophet (ﷺ), (iii) explaining a hadith with the opinions of *al-tabi'in*; (iv) explaining a hadith with Arabic linguistics and literature, and finally (v) contextual ijtihad-scholastic and hermeneutic rationalization.[35]

Adil Awni (2017) discusses the required academic and professional background of those who would like to interpret hadiths today.[36] According to him, the interpreter must know Arabic linguistic studies (*'ilm al-lugha*), insight into the body of principles and investigative methodologies from the source of law (*usul al-fiqh)*, usage of hadith expertise on the quality of hadiths, Islamic Legal Maxims (*qawa'id al-fiqhiyyah*), the purposes of the Shariah (*maqasid al-shari'ah*), occasion and context of hadiths (*asbab wurūd al-hadith*) as well as the method of referring to scholastic Islamic literature (*turath*).[37] This research focuses on the significance of *maqasid al-shari'ah* and the occasion and context of hadiths in interpreting the hadiths while adopting other relevant requirements.

Hajjee, Ali Khadeer, Jasim and Falah Razzaq discuss the occasion and context of hadith (*asbab wurud al-hadith*) and its importance in understanding the meaning and its implications.[38]

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[33] Al-Dhabi, *Siyar A'alam al-Nubala,* 9th ed., vol. 5, (Beirut: Muassat al-Risalah, 1993), 273.

[34] A'alam Al-Khattabi, Al-*Haḍith,* ed. Abd Al Rahman Aali Saud, vol. 1 (Saudi: Jaami'ah Umm al-Qurah, 1988), 104-105

[35] Diya al-Din Al-Wafi, "*'Ilm sharah al-hadith," Nida al-Hind*., August 05, 2020. http://www.nidaulhind.com/2016/12/blog-post_69.html

[36]Adil Awni, *"Qawa'id al-fiqh al-hadith," Aluka al-Sharaiyyah*., August 02, 2020. https://www.alukah.net/sharia/0/113745/.

[37]Ibid.

[38] Ali Khadeer Hajjee and Falah Razzaq Jasim, "*'Ilm warud al-hadith wa atharuhu fi fiqh al-hadith,".Journal of Arabic Language and Literature* 1, no. 18 (2013):

They also have critically studied the rules and regulations for using *asbab wurud* al-*hadith* to articulate the hadith content and contributions of scholars like Balqini, Ibn Hajar, Suyuti, and others. 39

Jurbako, Abdullah Muhammad highlighted the role of *maqasid al-shari'ah* in understanding the hadiths in detail. According to them, *maqasid al-shariah* plays three major roles: (1) elaborating the purpose of a hadith as well as elucidating some terms; (2) eliminating plain contradictions that arise as a result of interference of interest, and (3) the change of Islamic ruling according to changes in time, places, traditions, and situations.[40] Nawawi indicated the importance of *maqasid al-shari'ah* in comprehending hadiths from a moderate perspective, denying the extremist or pessimistic views.[41]

Contemporary Muslim scholars like Ahmad Hassan and Ibrahim Zain (1996) indicated the importance of studying these hadiths from historical, socio-political, and economic perspectives. By virtue of the fact that a sect among Muslims has regarded Mahdi as an article of their belief system, the content of these hadiths need to be explored from the historical and political context.[42] Hence, this research adopts a 'contextualization framework' used to interpret the verses of the Qur'an.[43] To interpret these hadiths in the present living context, we need to focus on *asbab wurud al-hadith* as well as on *maqasid al-shari'ah*. This framework emphasizes history as a source of interpretation of texts. Although the hadiths speak to the

263-296.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Abdullah Muhammad Jurbako, *"Athar maqasid al-shari'ah fi fiqh al-hadith," Journal of Jamiah al-Shariqah for Shariah and Islamic Studies* 6, no. 1 (2018): 27-61.

[41] Nawavi Tabrani, *"Fahm al-sunnah al-nabawiyyah fi daw'I-qawa'id al-maqasid al-sharaiyyah". The Conference E-Proceeding of 3rd INHAD International Muzakarah & Mu'tamar on Hadith (IMAM 2018)*, organized by Hadith Research Institute (INHAD), KUIS. December 27, 2018), April 25, 2020. http://conference.kuis.edu.my/imam/images/eprosiding/2018/ba/3008-imam-2018.pdf.

[42] Ahmad Ibrahim Hassan and Mohammad Ibrahim Zain, *"Tatawwur fikrath al-Mahdiyyah fi al-Sina'ah al-hadithiyyah…."*.

[43] Mohammad Ismath Ramzy and Simin Ghavifekr. "Women qazi in a minority context: An overview of Sri Lankan Experience," *Societies* 9, no. 1 (2019): 13-22.

immediate community of the Prophet (ﷺ) and communicate within that particular community's socio-political, economic, and cultural contexts to make known its immediate implication, the message in the hadiths is universal and standard for all communities and all times. Therefore, an interpreter of hadiths needs to understand the Prophet's intended meaning, extract it from the nexus of his socio-political, economic, and cultural contexts and explain it to the present socio-political, economic, and cultural context.

Hence, this research studies the content of these hadiths critically adopting contextualization methodology focusing on *asbab wurud al-hadith* as well as *maqasid al-shari'ah*. Hence, the conceptual framework of this research is as follows:

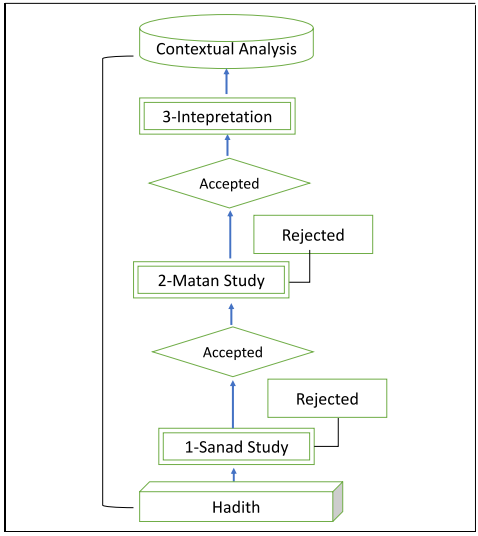


Figure 4. Conceptual framework of contextualization.

Figure 4 explains the process of understanding the hadiths on Mahdi. The study of these hadiths begins with confirming its authenticity. Sanad and Matan's perspectives determine their authenticity. The authenticity of the Mahdi hadiths has been accepted in this research as these met the conditions of *sahih* (sound). The study further proceeded to the second-level verification. Then, *naqd al-hadith* methodology was applied to these hadiths and found them

consistent with each other. Having authenticated these hadiths, we now critically examine their meanings.

As these hadiths discuss the emergence of Mahdi at the end of human history, its meanings need to be understood in the context of the times of the Prophet (ﷺ), and its implications need to be realized in the context of the future. Since the objective of contextual reading of a text is comprehending the text in the present context, the message of the hadiths on Mahdi will be extracted from the context and interpreted into the present context without any change. The extraction will be carried out in the light of maqasid al-shari'ah and asbab wurud al-hadith.

## 4. Findings and Discussion

The contextual reading of the Mahdi hadiths is found to refute the extremists' claim that these hadiths demand the creation of instability as a way of accelerating the coming of Mahdi. This finding is discussed with reference to two themes: (i) the meaning and the purpose of these hadiths and (ii) the change of purpose over time. As for the meaning and purpose of these hadiths, it will be discussed from four perspectives: weltanschauung of the Qur'an, other hadiths in a chapter, maqasid al-shari'ah, and al-Bukhari's view of the purpose of these hadiths. As for the second theme, it will be discussed in relation to political and religious considerations.

### 4.1 Meaning and Purpose of these Hadiths

A contextual reading of these hadiths shows that their purpose is to create awareness on fitan – corruptions among people. These hadiths highlight the importance of upholding religious principles and values while avoiding corruption and social misbehaviour. Since corruption and social misbehaviours would lead to fitan or destructions (The Qura'n, 17:4), the Prophet (ﷺ) may have intended to warn the people to stay away from them. This purpose of apocalypse literature, specifically the Mahdi hadiths, could be further explained from the following perspectives.

4.1.1. Purpose of hadiths on the Mahdi from the weltanschauung of the Qur'an

The purpose of the Mahdi hadiths may be further elaborated by reading them in line with the themes of the Qur'an, which may be understood as the primary reading technique of hadiths.[44] Since hadiths explain and detail the Quranic principles, their meanings do not contradict the Qur'an's themes.[45] Since creating awareness of the Truth (*Haqq*) and warning people about falsehood (*batil*) is the essence of the Quranic teachings,[46] hadiths on the Mahdi should also be coherent with this basic Quranic theme. Hence, creating awareness of religiosity (*al-tadayyun*) (manifestation of *Haqq)* and warning people against violence and corruption (*fitan*) (manifestation of batil) would be the core meaning of these hadiths.

### 4.1.2 *Purpose of the Mahdi Hadiths from Hadith Perspective*

Reading a hadith in conjunction with the themes of other hadiths in a chapter is another method of understanding the purpose of a hadith.[47] From this perspective, the purpose of hadiths on the Mahdi is realized by researchers through creating awareness of religiosity and warning against corruption. Reading such a hadith with a hadith in the apocalyptic chapter in al-Bukhari's compilation (Al-Bukhari: 3449) lucidly illustrates this purpose. Anas (ﷺ), for instance, reported, "Once the people started asking Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) questions, and they asked so many questions that he became angry and ascended the pulpit and said, "I will answer whatever questions you may ask me today." I looked right and left and saw everyone covering his face with his garment and weeping. …And then `Umar got up and said, "We accept Allah as our Lord, and Islam as (our) religion, and Muhammad as (our) Apostle; and we seek refuge with Allah from the afflictions" (Al-Bukhari: 6362). From this incident, it is understood that apocalyptic literature aims to create awareness of religiosity and to warn against corruption. The Prophet (ﷺ) explained some significant Last Day signs to the people. During the

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[44] SharafIlmu Mahmud, *"Mukhtalaf al-hadith: usuluhu wa qawa'iduhu", Journal of Dirasat* 28, no. 2 (2001): 322-337.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ahmad Ibrahim Hassan and Mohammad Ibrahim Zain, *"Tatawwur fikrath al-Mahdiyyah fi al-sina'ah al-hadithiyyah…".*

[47] Ahmed El-Mogtaba Bannga and Haj Abdullah Ismail, *"Manhajiyyat sharah al-hadith: asalah wa muasarah," Journal of al-Tajdeed* 16, no 32 (2012): 159-196.

question-and-answer session, people digressed from this purpose and asked for details of the signs that made the Prophet angry. Realizing the reason for the Prophet's annoyance, Umar (ﷺ) got the people back to the real purpose of the session. He said, "We seek refuge with Allah from the afflictions". It shows that the purpose of hadiths on apocalypses is to create awareness and warning about *fitan*: corruption, distress, chaos, suffering, and conflicts instead of knowing specific details of the Last Day or its signs. Hence, the purpose of the Mahdi hadiths should also be understood within this framework.

### 4.1.3 Purpose of The Mahadi Hadiths from the Perspective of *Maqasid al-Shariah*

*Maqasid al-Shariah* is another means of realizing the purpose of hadiths. Preserving public interest (*maslahah*) is the most critical objective of Shariah.[48] According to al-Ghazzali, "The objective of the Shariah is to promote the welfare of human beings, which lies in safeguarding their faith, life, intellect, posterity, and wealth. Whatever ensures the safeguarding of these five fundamentals serves public interest."[49] Muslim scholars generally classify *maqasid al-shari'ah* into three main categories: *daruriyyat* (essentials), *hajiyyat* (needs), and *tahsaniyyat* (embellishments).[50] The category of *daruriyyat* is a vital consideration to ensure the well-being of people in this world as well as the Hereafter, while *hajiyyat* (needs) are complementary to *daruriyyat*.[51] People will find it challenging to attain well-being without *hajiyyat*. The embellishments or *tahsaniyyat* are matters that bestow enhancement in society.[52]

The purpose of the Mahdi hadiths involves the category of

[48] M. O. Mohamed and A.R. Dzuljastri, "The performance indicators of Islamic Banking from the Maqasid framework," Paper presented at the International Islamic University Malaysia International Accounting Conference (INTAC IV), 2008.

[49] Al-Ghazzali, *Al-Mustasfa min ʿIlm al-Usūl,* vol. 1, (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Tijariyyah al-Kubra, 1937), 139-140.

[50] Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Maqasid al-Shariah Made Simple, Revised edition,* (Herdon: The International Institute of Islamic Thought-IIIT, 2008), 134.

[51] Mohammad Hashim Kamali, "*Al-Maqasid al-shari'ah*: the objectives of Islamic Law," *Islamic Studies* 38, no. 2 (1999): 193-208.

[52] Ibid

*daruriyyat*. This is because *daruriyyat* or the necessary well-being of people in a society will be achieved by five means: (i) preservation of din (religion or religiosity); (ii) preservation of *nafs* (life); (iii) preservation of *nasl* (lineage or procreation); (iv) preservation of mal (property); and (v) preservation of *'aql* (intellect).[53] Since people's religiosity is the primary purpose, the Prophet (ﷺ) has highlighted the importance of religiosity by these hadiths and warned against transgression. Hence, *maqasid al-shari'ah* perspective highlights as the purpose of the Mahdi hadiths the creation of awareness and warning against violence.

4.1.4 Al-Bukhari's view on the purpose of the Mahadi Hadiths

This research gives special consideration to the way of Imam al-Bukhari recorded the Mahadi hadiths. Al-Bukhari recorded apocalyptic hadiths in the chapter titled *Fitan-Affliction or Distress*' instead of in any other chapter. Since Imam al-Bukhari's topics are so unique indicative of his views,[54] this research intends to confirm the purpose of the hadiths on Mahdi based on his views. Imam al-Bukhari has recorded the Mahadi hadiths under the Quranic verse *"beware of an affliction that will not smite exclusively those among you who have done wrong"* (The Qur'an, 8:25). This shows that Imam al-Bukhari has recorded these hadiths to inform people that its purpose is to create awareness on *fitan*, which is about corruptions among people and warning people involved in corruption rather than giving the detail incidents of the Last Day.[55]

Ahmad Ibrahim and Ibrahim Zain also had a similar view, and they said that this intention is apparent among al-Bukhari.[56] For instance, al-Bukhari has recorded the hadith, "I will be at my Lake-Fount (Kauthar) waiting for whoever will come to me. Then, some people will be taken away from me, whereupon I will say, "My followers!" It will be said, "You do not know they turned Apostates

[53] Ibid.

[54] Hamdan and Sultan, *"Isharat al-Bukhari ila i'ilal al-ahadith min al-khilal tabweebihi fi kitabihi al-sahih," Al- Majallah al-Arabiyyah Li Dirasat al-Islamiyah Wa al-Sharaiyyha* 5, no.15 (2021): 55-95.

[55] Ahmad Ibrahim Hassan and Mohammad Ibrahim Zain, *"Tatawwur fikrath al-Mahdiyyah fi al-sina'ah al-hadithiyyah……"*

[56] Ibid.

as renegades (deserted their religion).”” (Ibn Abi Mulaika said, "Allah, we seek refuge with You from turning on our heels from the (Islamic) religion and from being put to trial") (Al-Bukhari: 7048). This hadith clearly explains the danger of being involved in *fitan*-distress, chaos, and conflict and warns people’s involvement in *fitan*.

Ahmad Ibrahim and Ibrahim Zain further elaborated that al-Bukhari creates awareness among people on two types of *fitan* in this chapter: the political conflicts within the Muslim communities and chaos in the Last Hour.[57] To elaborate on the political conflicts, al-Bukhari recorded hadiths like, “A person from among Ansar – the companion of the Prophet who received him when he migrated from Makkah to Madinah-said, “O Messenger of Allah! You appointed such and such person, and why do you not appoint me?” Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "After me, you will see others give preference to you, but you should remain patient till you meet me at the Haud (Al-Kauthar in Jannah)"” (Al-Bukhari: 4330). According to this hadith, the Prophet (ﷺ) advised one of his companions not to be involved in politics, although people found him to be a suitable leader. Therefore, although involvement in politics is necessary, the advice of the Prophet (ﷺ) to this particular person should be understood based on the person's character and context.

The second type of *fitan* is chaos and disorder at the end of the world. Al-Bukhari elaborated on this type of *fitan* in another hadith chapter, "The Day will not be established till the buttocks of the women of the tribe of Daus move while going round Dhi-al-Khalsa." Dhi-al-Khalsa was the idol of the Daus tribe, which they used to worship in the pre-Islamic period (Al-Bukhari: 7116). This hadith prophesies the return of pre-Islamic traditions to Arabia while warning people of deviation. It shows that the purpose of hadiths on the apocalypse is to create awareness on upholding religion and warning on *fitan* that would happen in politics at the end of the world.

[57] Ibid.

## 4.2 Change of Purpose in Response to Socio-political and Religious Background

The contextual analysis of hadiths on the Mahdi in this research found that the purpose of these hadiths has changed over time due to political and religious challenges in the Muslim world. These hadiths contain (i) a description of *fitan* (corruption) and (ii) reference to the coming of the Mahdi as a saviour. The first two generations of Islam, mainly *Sahabah* - the companions of the Prophet (ﷺ)- and *Tabi'in* - the children of Sahaba – focused on *fitan*. Hence, these two generations understood the purpose of these hadiths as creating awareness of *fitan*, as discussed above. However, after the eighth century CE people emphasized the second part- the coming of the Mahdi as a saviour - and understood the purpose of these hadiths as encouraging the people to wait for the Mahdi to solve injustice and disorder. The political and religious crisis in the Muslim world during the eighth century CE changed the focus from *fitan* to the political leadership of the Mahdi. This change of purpose in this research is discussed under two sub-themes: political crisis and religious reasons.

### 4.2.1 The political crisis changed the purpose of the Mahdi hadith

This research highlights the change in the purpose of these hadiths due to the political crisis during the eighth century CE. With the murder of Uthman in 656 CE, the Muslim world witnessed *fitan*-corruption in politics. This turmoil continued during the early Umayyad period (756-1031 CE).[58] Introduction of hereditary politics by Umayyad Caliph Muawiyah (رضي الله عنه) (602-680 CE), murder of Hussain ibn 'Ali (R.A.) (646-683 CE), and evolution of religious movements to take revenge for the murder of Hussain (R.A.) by political means complicated the political environment.

At this point, each group found religious emotions as a means of political advantage. Therefore, some political groups used the religious texts, mainly the hadiths, for different purposes, while

[58] Hatim Hanoi, "Financial crises in Iraq in the third century H/ ninth century CE and means of encountering," *Journal of Tikrit University for Humanities* 26, no. 7 (2019): 331–312.

others fabricated a few. This is apparent in the statement of Ibn Seerin (653-729 CE), an expert in hadiths. He said that the people accepted hadiths without questioning their source until the political murder of 'Uthman (ﷺ), the third Caliph of the Muslim world, in 656 CE. However, after his death, people started asking about hadith sources; they only accepted a hadith if the source was a person associated with mainstream Islam (*Ahl al-Sunnah*) and rejected it when the source of a hadith is a person associated with new political or religious groups (*Ahl-al-Bida'a*).[59] Ibn Seerin thus identified the beginning of hadith fabrication with *Ahl-Al-Bida'a*.[60] According to Mustapha Siba'i, hadiths were fabricated mainly against political and religious leaders, particularly to highlight their unfavourable characteristics.[61] This shows that political and religious reasons were instrumental to hadith fabrication.

Contextual analysis of the Mahdi hadiths also revealed that political motivation had changed the purpose of focusing on these hadiths from creating awareness of corruption to political leadership of the Mahdi. The political dispute between Ibn Zubair (624-692 CE), then the Caliph of Makkah (684-692 CE) and al-Mukthar al-Ùhaqafi, leader of a political group (622-687 CE) in Iraq, led the latter to change the focus of the Mahdi hadith from creating awareness on religiosity to emphasis on political leadership that would establish a just government.[62] In changing the focus in the purpose of these hadiths, al-Mukthar al- Ùhaqafi wanted to advance the claim that Mohammad Ibn al-Hanafiyyah (637-700 CE), the son of the fourth Caliph Ali (R.A.) was the awaited Mahdi with him as the latter's Minister.[63] Hence, Al-Mukhtār al-Ùhaqafi declared the

[59] Al-Nawavi, "*Al-isnad min al-din*," *Introduction to Commentary to Sahih Muslim* (Beirut: Dar al-Ihya al-Turath al-Arabi, 1392), 204-208.

[60] Umar ibn Hasan, *Al-Wad'u Fi al-Hadith*, vol 1, (Beirut: Manahil al-Irfan., 2012), 204-208.

[61] Mustapha Siba'i, *Sunnah Wa Makanatuha Fi al-Tashree'i al-Islami* (Cairo: Dar al- Salam, 2006), 79.

[62] Ahmad Ibrahim Hassan and Mohammad Ibrahim Zain, *"Tatawwur fikrath al-Mahdiyyah fi al-sina'ah al-hadithiyyuah…."*

[63] Ibid.

legitimacy of his fight against Ibn Zubair and demanded people's support arguing that it was a religious cause.[64]

This shows how the political crisis during the eighth century CE contributed to the change of purpose from creating awareness of corruption to claiming political leadership. Al-Mukhtār al-Ùhaqafi and other political groups found these hadiths to be suggestive enough in meaning to allow them to interpret them for their own interest. It was from this period onwards that the Mahdi hadiths have been misused.[65] Extremist groups like ISIS also have misused these hadiths to motivate young people towards violence.

### 4.2.2 Religious reasons changed the appreciation of the Mahdi hadiths after the eighth century AD

Apart from the political background, religious reasons also contributed to the change of purpose of these hadiths. The religious movements and groups that appeared during the eighth century CE used religious sentiments to gain people's support for their growth. For this purpose, these religious movements and groups interpreted certain hadiths, including the Mahdi hadiths, in their favour. For instance, a group of Shia Muslims played a significant role in changing the purpose of the Mahdi hadiths.[66] This group introduced mystic tendencies and divinely appointed Imams in understanding Islamic *'aqidah*.[67] As a result, they developed the Mahdi as a concept and included Mahdism as a doctrine in their belief systems.[68] This religious inspiration contributed to the change in purpose of the Mahdi hadiths from creating awareness of *fitan* to claiming political leadership as the world nears its end.

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[64] Badr Shahin *Al-Abbas* (Iran: Ansariyan Publications, 2001), 62, https://www.masjed.ir/Content/media/article/Al-Abbas_0.pdf.

[65] Ahmad Ibrahim Hassan and Mohammad Ibrahim Zain, *"Tatawwur fikrath al-Mahdiyyah fi al-sina'ah al-hadithiyyah…"*

[66] Jessica A. Coope, "Religious and cultural conversion to Islam in ninth-century Umayyad Córdoba," *Journal of World History* 4, no. 1 (Spring, 1993): 47–68.

[67] Abdol-Hosein Zarrinkoob, "Persian-Sufism in its historical perspective," *Iranian Studies* 3, no. 3–4 (1970): 139-220.

[68] Shigeru Kamada, "Mahdi and Maitreya (Miroku): Saviors in Islam and Buddhism." *Journal of the Interdisciplinary Study of Monotheistic Religions:* JISMOR 8 (2012): 59–76.

The purpose of the Mahdi hadiths thus changed over time due to political and religious reasons. The purpose of these hadiths, as understood by the first two generations, was to positively impact society by restraining them from involvement in *fitan* while upholding religious principles in their social interactions. However, the purpose of these hadiths, as understood by the generations after the eighth century CE, impacted negatively and created divisions among Muslims regarding politics and religion. It is apparent that this change fuels extremism and violence among Muslim youth.

## 5. Conclusion

This research studied the extremists' justification of violence based on the Mahadi hadiths that prophesied the advance of Mahdi at the end of time. Our study of these hadiths began with an examination of their authenticity according to established *sanad* and *matan* criteria. The meanings of these hadiths were explored using the contextual analysis method. This method helped extract the essential meanings of these hadiths and interpret them in our present context. *Asbab wurud al-hadith* as well as *maqasid al-shari'ah* were employed in focusing on the process of contextualization.

The contextual reading of these hadiths refutes the extremists' claim of legitimacy to create instability that is aimed at accelerating the coming of Mahdi. This finding has been discussed under two themes: the purpose of these hadiths and the change of this purpose over time.

The contextual analysis of these hadiths shows that their underlying purpose is the creation of awareness of corruption among Muslims. However, this purpose has been changed, shifting the emphasis from creating awareness of corruption to expectation of political leadership. This change causes psycho-social issues to arise in Muslim society.

This change happened after two centuries of Islam. Since there are no precise, detailed references to Mahdi in the Qur'an, the issue of the coming of the Mahdi was not popular among the *sahabah* and the *tabi'in*. However, it became a major point of discussion among political and religious groups after the eighth century CE.

Hence, the researchers would strongly argue that the Muslim society needs to promote the original purpose of these hadiths. This is because these hadiths may serve as potent resources to motivate the Muslim society to work for peace while avoiding corruption and misbehaviour. Since violence and corruption have no place in Islam, the Muslim religious and civil society leaders should not allow the radicals and extremists to exploit these hadiths and other Islamic apocalyptic literature to influence young people into indulgence in extremism and violent activities.

This research also argues for the need for Muslim religious leaders and political authorities to review the current approaches to the teaching of the Mahdi and other apocalyptic hadiths in Muslim educational institutions with the view of incorporating contextualization methodology to educate students to interpret texts in the context.

# THE BALIK-ISLAM PHENOMENON FILIPINO MUSLIM REVERTS – BETWEEN THE GULF COUNTRIES AND THE PHILIPPINES

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**Abstract**

*Islam arrived in the Philippines long before Christianity. However, today, at most, only 11% are Muslim in this largest Catholic country in Asia. Muslims comprise mainly of the Moros residing in the Southern parts of the country – Mindanao, Palawan, the Sulu Archipelago – and the Balik-Islam. The Balik-Islam are primarily former Christians who have converted or "returned" (Balik) to Islam. Many amongst the Balik-Islam are former expats or migrant workers who embraced Islam in the Gulf countries and have returned to the Philippines. Their understanding and practice of Islam have been greatly influenced by the stricter, more orthodox Salafi and Wahhabi versions practised by their former "arbaab" (boss or master). This paper delves into the Balik-Islam phenomenon; primarily exploring the reasons for Filipinos converting to Islam, the relationship of the Balik-Islam with the Moros, and their place in the history of the Muslims of the Philippines.*

**Keywords:** Balik-Islam, Philippines, Moros, Bangsamoro, Gulf Cooperative Council (GCC) Countries, Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW)

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## Islam in the Philippines – An Overview

Named after the Spanish king Phillip II, the Philippines is an archipelago of over 7,600 islands in the Western Pacific Ocean, north of Indonesia and south of Taiwan. With over 111 million people, the Philippines is the 13th most populous in the world. It is a predominantly Christian country, where 4 of every 5 Filipinos are Roman Catholic. It is the third-largest Roman Catholic country in the world and the largest Christian nation in Asia.[3] This is primarily a result of active and sometimes forced Christian proselytisation during the 333 years under Catholic Spain,[4] followed by another 42 years of occupation by the Americans.[5]

Nonetheless, Muslims comprise between 6% and 11% of the Philippines. According to a national census in 2015, Muslims made up 6.4% of the population,[6] whereas the government agency tasked with the welfare of Muslims, the National Commission on Muslim Filipinos, claims that there are almost 12 million Filipinos who identify themselves as Muslim.[7] Regardless of the actual number, there is no doubt that Islam has played and continues to play a major role in the history and politics of the Philippines. Many Muslims, particularly the Balik-Islam (mainly Catholics who have "reverted" to Islam), argue that had it not been for the brutal Spanish conquest followed by over three hundred years of colonisation, Islam would be the most popular faith among the Filipinos.[8]

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[3] Patricio N. Abinales and Donna J. Amoroso, *State and Society in the Philippines* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 10-12.

[4] Isaac Donoso, "The Philippines and al-Andalus Linking the Edges of the Classical Islamic World," *Philippine Studies Historical & Ethnographic Viewpoints* (2015): 247-73.

[5] Yūjirō Hayami, Agnes R. Quisumbing, and Lourdes S. Adriano, *Toward an alternative land reform paradigm: a Philippine perspective* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1990), 42-43.

[6] Dennis S. Mapa, "Philippine Statistics Authority: Religious Affiliation in the Philippines (2020 Census of Population and Housing)," *Philippine Statistics Authority* (2020), accessed September 16, 2023, https://psa.gov.ph/content/religious-affiliation-philippines-2020-census-population-and-housing.

[7] Guilling A. Mamondiong, "Muslim Settlements – statement by the New Secretary," *National Commission on Muslim Filipinos* (2022), accessed September 16, 2023, https://ncmf.gov.ph/new-secretary.

[8] Author, Personal Interviews with Filipino Balik-Islam in Bahrain, 2017-2022.

There are two kinds of Muslim communities in the Philippines – the "Moro" Muslims and the "Balik-Islam" Muslims. The Moro aren't just "Born Muslims" but may also be considered generational Muslims with family trees extending as far back as the 10th Century CE.. The Moros primarily live in parts of Mindanao, the Palawan archipelago, and the chain of Islands to the southwest known as the Sulu archipelago – Basilan, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi. These areas are known as the Lands of the Moros or "Bangsamoro." Some Moro have moved north to Luzon and the capital, Manila and to Visayas.[9] Balik-Islam means "to return to Islam." Although the concept of returning to Islam may be applied globally to all those who "return" to the faith upon which all humanity is created (*Din al Fitrah*), it carries a dual meaning in the context of the Philippines. It refers both to returning to the faith of all humanity (*Din al Fitrah*) as well to returning to the faith of their ancestors, who were Muslim prior to the coming of the Christian colonisers. Balik-Islam mainly live in the north, the capital, Manila, other parts of Luzon and the diaspora.[10]

## History of Islam in the Philippines

Muslims arrived in the Philippine archipelago long before the Christian Missionaries. Islam primarily came to this region from the oceans and seas. This movement was gradual and subtle. Cesar Majul Adib described the coming of Islam to Southeast Asia as an organic process, one that involves and includes all theories of how Islam penetrated these Islands and nations. Adib further argued that the coming of Islam to the Philippines cannot and should not be separated from the coming of Islam to the entire region (the *Nusantara*).[11] He posits that this was a singular region, and it was only later that it was divided into various present-day political entities and countries by colonialists. Khairuddin Aljunied contends

[9] Ajid Thohir, "A Historical Overview and Initiating Historiography of Islam in the Philippines," *International Journal of Nusantara Islam* 3, no. 2 (2015): 1-18.

[10] Nassef Manabilang Adiong, "Relationship between Balik-Islam (Muslim Reverts) and Full-Fledged Muslims Under the Auspices of Islamic Teachings in Philippine Setting," April 3, 2008, SSRN 1693213.

[11] J. Nolasco, "Islam and Philippine Society: The Writings of Cesar Adib Majul," *Asian Studies* 46 (2010): 1-2.

that the coming of Islam was both incidental and intentional.[12]

The earliest encounter between Muslims and the people of the *Nusantara* could be traced back to as early as the 8th century, although no conversions were reported. Adib stated that regions of modern-day Philippines were part of the Arab Chinese trade route at the end of the ninth and early tenth centuries extending north that included Borneo, passed through the Sulu Islands and the Palawan archipelago, included Luzon, Formosa, and continued all the way west to the southern part of Japan where Chinese products were available. Waves of Muslims traders comissioned ports along the coastal regions of the peninsula. Through these traders and merchants, Islam gained momentum in the region. Islam spread in a very ordinary, organic way. Muslim traders, not just from the Arab world but also from India and China (the famous Chinese Admiral Zheng He, for example) visited these Islands mainly for economic reasons. They would trade, settle down at ports, marry into the local community, ensure that *halal* food was available – doing the most ordinary activities that any people would do. Islam did not spread in this region through proselytization, but rather through Muslim traders establishing decent living and conditions for Muslims to thrive; establishing Islam "incidentally."[13]

During the 13th century and the beginning of the 14th century, there is evidence of Muslim missionaries (*du'at*) arriving in the southern Islands, particularly Sulu. This marks the beginning of the "intentional" spread of Islam throughout the region.[10] By the mid-fifteenth century, a Sultanate in Sulu was established under Sharif Hashim Abu Bakr, whose father was a *Sharif* (descendant of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ)) from Hadhramawt (Yemen) and whose mother was a princess from Johor (Malaysia). Abu Bakr successfully brought large numbers of locals to Islam and united them under his sultanate. Adib suggested that Abu Bakr's prophetic and royal lineage, as well as political prowess, helped create the powerful Sulu Sultanate.[14]

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[12] Khairudin Aljunied, *Islam in Malaysia: An Entwined History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 28-39.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Cesar Adib Majul, "The role of Islam in the history of the Filipino people,"

Similarly, in Mindanao, another Arab-Malay Sharif, Muhammed Kabungsuwan, established a sultanate in Maguindanao circa 1516. The rise of this sultanate is comparable to that of Sulu and, along with the creation of a sultanate in neighbouring Buayan, resulted in the Islamization of the islands of Mindanao. Apart from the influence of these rulers, Islam also grew rapidly in Mindanao and Sulu through trade with Malacca, Java, and Borneo and from missionary (*da'wah*) efforts of the Arabs, Chinese, Indians and Persians.[15]

In 1511, after the Portuguese ransacked the Sultanate of Malacca, the Sultanate of Brunei became known as the regional hub of commerce, naval might, and Islam. Between the 15th and 17th centuries, the influence and control of the Sultan of Brunei extended from Borneo in the north to Sulu in the south. When the Spanish Conquistadors arrived in 1565, even Maynilad, the modern-day capital of the Philippines, Manila, was under Muslim rule as a vassal-state of the Brunei Sultanate.[16]

From 1565 onwards, the Spanish Conquistadors waged numerous battles with the Muslims of the Philippines. These battles pitted the Christianized natives, the *Indios*, against the Muslim *Moros,* a religious divide that still exists today. The last Muslim ruler of Maynilad, Rajah Solaiman, resisted the Spanish Conquistador Miguel Lopez de Legazpi in the 1570s. The Spanish defeated the Sultanate of Brunei in 1578 and for the next two hundred years, the more numerous Spanish forces pushed Muslim settlements further and further south to the Sulu Islands and the southernmost province of Mindanao.[17]

By 1571, when the Spaniards officially took control of the Philippines, the war with the weakened Ummayad Caliphate in southwestern Europe (*Al-Andalus*) had been ongoing for over a hundred years. Iberian Christians had referred to Muslims as *"Moros"* for centuries. *"Moros"* came from the Roman name for Mauritania – *"Maurus."* This name – along with its anglicised form,

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*Dansalan Research Center* (1989): 308-15.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

"Moors" – was a derogatory term for Muslims in Western Europe. Isaac Donoso argues that the Spaniards brought their hatred against Muslims from the Iberian to the Philippine Peninsula The *Maurus Africanus* transformed into the *Maurus Asiae*.[18]

Donoso further writes that this prejudice and hate of Muslims is showcased in medieval dramas called *Moros y Cristianos*, celebrated in Spain and the Philippines. The *Bida* (hero, typically a Christian Crusader or Conquistador) versus *contrabida* (villain, mostly African, Arab, or Turkish) is a signature trope in Spanish/Mexican *telenovelas* and Filipino *teleseryes* (soap operas). *Moros y Cristianos*, also known as *Moro-Moro* or *Komedya*, are formulaic and stylised plays. These performances, repeated annually at town *fiestas* honouring various Catholic saints in Spain and the Philippines, typically show Muslim Moros engaged in battle with Christians. The plays mostly end with the Moros converting to Christianity and everyone living happily ever after. The *Moros y Cristianos* performances were a highly effective technique of imposing Christianity throughout the Spanish colonies and culturally normalising hatred of Muslims. This bias against Islam continues to play a huge part in the relations between the Christians, the born-Muslims (Moros), and the reverts (Balik-Islam) in the Philippines today.[19]

With the exception of a two-year stint of British occupation of Maynilad from 1762, Spain ruled most of the Philippines from 1565 to 1898. For the Muslims in the south, this period of 333 years was one of continued resistance to Spanish Imperialism. The Philippines, along with Cuba, Guam, and Puerto Rico, were ceded to the Americans at the end of the Spanish-American War. Both Christians and Muslims of the Philippines resisted American occupation, and the Philippine-American War broke out in 1899 and lasted for three years. In 1902, the US Congress passed the Philippine Bill that recognised Christian, Muslim, and Pagan Filipinos as distinct from one another.[20]

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[18] Isaac Donoso, "The Hispanic Moros y Cristianos and the Philippine Komedya," *Philippine Humanities Review* 11-12 (2009-2010): 87-120.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Hannbal Bara, "The History of Islam in the Philippines," accessed January 2021,

By 1903, it was obvious that the US continued to have the same biases and double standards that their Spanish predecessors practised. However, unlike the Spaniards, the Americans went one step further regarding land ownership. Under the Treaty of Paris in 1898, the US became the sovereign possessor of all lands in the Philippine archipelago. To expedite the unification of the archipelago, the US-Philippine Commission passed several laws that made it easy for Christian Filipinos from the north to grab ancestral Muslim lands in the south easily. The Land Registration Act of 1902 introduced a system that overlooked the traditional customary Muslim laws of land stewardship (*adat*), whereby the Moros believed that they were not "owners", but "trustees" or "stewards" (*khalifa*) of the land. As such, most Moros refused to register their ancestral lands. In 1903, the Public Land Act made these traditionally Moro-owned lands that were not "registered" become public property automatically. The Moros did not recognise nor participate in these land reclassifications. The newly reclassified public properties were then sold to Americans and Christian Filipinos. Large multinational corporations like B.F. Goodrich, Goodyear, Del Monte, and others also took advantage of the ample fertile cheap lands in Mindanao and the south and bought tens of thousands of hectares of previously Muslim-owned lands. Many northerners moved to the south looking for jobs in these multinationals and a promise of a better life. Furthermore, as part of the US Government's "homestead system," large tracts of previously Moro-owned lands were given away for free to Christian Northerners from Luzon and Visayas to resettle Filipinos from the more populous north to the less populated south.[21]

Under the Bates Agreement of 1899, the Sultan of Sulu and the Moro leadership were coerced to accept American rule in exchange for protecting their lands, religion and customs and the promise of eventual autonomy. The Bates Agreement was short-lived. In 1904, after suppressing the uprising in the north, the US unilaterally

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https://ncca.gov.ph/about-ncca-3/subcommissions/subcommission-on-cultural-communities-and-traditional-arts-sccta/central-cultural-communities/the-history-of-the-muslim-in-the-philippines/

[21] Peter Gordon Gowing, "Mandate in Moroland: The American Government of Muslim Filipinos, 1899-1920." *Syracuse University* (1968), 8.

abrogated the Agreement, as it no longer served their interests. This left the Moros vulnerable, and made it easy for the Christian Filipinos to eventually govern them.[22]

In 1916, the US Congress passed the "Philippine Autonomy Act", also known as the Jones Act. This started the process for full independence of the Philippines. Over the next thirty years, the US systematically replaced their own American officials with mainly Christian Filipinos, effectively handing over the rule of the entire country to the Christians exclusively. Spain's "Moro problem" had been enhanced and amplified by the US, and then inherited by the independent Republic of the Philippines in 1946.[23]

Most Philippine Presidents have continued the American colonial policy of encouraging migration from the Christian North to the Muslim South. Large numbers of Christians migrated south, particularly during the presidencies of Manuel Quezon, Ramon Magsaysay, and Ferdinand Marcos. Consequently, by the 1970s, the indigenous Muslims had become a small minority in Mindanao. Northern settlers and large multinational corporations now owned the most fertile lands in Mindanao. The indigenous Muslim population was forced to live on a fraction of the land they originally owned.[24]

In 1903, Muslim Moros made up over three-quarters of the population of Mindanao and owned most of the land. By 1990s, the Moros comprised a fifth of the population and legally possessed less than 17% of the land – most of which was in the remote and infertile mountainous areas. Four out of every five Moro were landless.[25]

## The Bangsamoro

The word *"Bangsamoro"* is a relatively new political term that is a combination of two words. *Bangsa* from Old Malay means race or people. Moreover, *Moro* was originally a derogatory term for Muslims used by the Spanish Colonialists but was later adopted as a

[22] Yūjirō Hayami, Agnes R. Quisumbing, and Lourdes S. Adriano, "Toward an alternative land reform paradigm: a Philippine perspective" *Ateneo de Manila University Press* (1990), 42-43.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.

name of pride by the native Muslims of the Philippines.[26] For more than 400 years, the Moro–Muslims of the Sulu, parts of Mindanao, Palawan, Basilan, Tawi-Tawi and other southern islands of the Philippines have been at war. They have resisted the Spanish Colonization of their ancestral homes, the American Occupation, and the predominantly Christian governments of the independent Philippines.[27]

The *Moro* are one race to most outsiders, hence the political word Bangsamoro. However, the indigenous Muslims of the southern Philippines are made up of several distinct tribes and ethnicities that are culturally linked to other peoples of Southeast Asia. The Moros are ethnically related to people in Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, and the Patani of southern Thailand. Anthropologically, they may be divided into eleven distinct groups or ethnicities. These groups are the Iranun, the Jama Mapun, the Kalagan, the Subanon people, the Maguindanao, the Maranao, the Molbog, the Sama (including the Badjao, Balanguingui, and various Tawi-Tawi Sama groups), the Sangil, the Tausug and the Yakan. Each ethnic group traditionally lived in geographically distinct regions. However, over time, considerable inter-migration and incursion of foreigners have forced these ethnic groups to share lands. Although each ethnic group has its own language or dialect and unique culture in terms of dress, food, and customs, there has been a mixing of cultures and dialects over the centuries.[28]

In March 1968, according to a lone survivor, 28 Moro army recruits were killed by the Marcos administration on Corregidor Island. This incident became known as the infamous Jabidah Massacre and was the tipping point for the Moros. It spurred the creation of the Bangsamoro Liberation Organization by a regional

[26] Miriam Coronel Ferrer, "The Moro Liberation Movement: From Secession to Autonomy," in *Region, Nation and Homeland*, ed. ISEAS Publishing (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2020), 13-56.

[27] Hannbal Bara, "The History of Islam in the Philippines," accessed January 2021, https://ncca.gov.ph/about-ncca-3/subcommissions/subcommission-on-cultural-communities-and-traditional-arts-sccta/central-cultural-communities/the-history-of-the-muslim-in-the-philippines/.

[28] The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Moro," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, December 3, 2023, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Moro.

Congressman, Haroun al-Rashid Lucman. In response to Muslim anger in Mindanao, the Governor of Cotabato, Udtog Matalam, established the Muslim Independence Movement (MIM) that called for the creation of an independent Muslim state. In 1972, partly in reaction to the Muslim secessionist movements, Marcos placed the Philippines under martial law. The short-lived MIM gave way to the formation of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) led by Nur Misuari in late 1972.[29] The MNLF roused amongst the Moro centuries-old resistance to foreign occupation – first from the Spanish, then the Americans, and now from the Christian Philippine Government.

From the mid-1970s to 2019, various agreements between the MNLF, its offshoot, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), and the different presidencies of the Philippines resulted in the creation of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). This was rebranded in 2019 by Rodrigo Duterte as the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).[30] The Bangsamoro is currently the only Muslim-majority autonomous region legally recognised in the Philippines.[31] Like Muslims in Palestine, Kashmir and several other parts of the world, the Muslims of the Philippines have lost so much over the years and are still struggling to establish their freedom and independence from colonialists and their proxy neo-colonial regimes.

The indigenous Muslims of the southern Philippines have endured for hundreds of years, eventually embracing the derogatory term *Moros* as a symbol of pride. These Muslims, the *Moro*, have struggled and, through many setbacks, gained a solidarity that sets them apart from the newly converted Muslims in the north and other parts of the Philippines – the Balik-Islam. Amina Rasul-Bernardo, President of the Philippine Center for Islam and Democracy and one

[29] Miriam Coronel Ferrer, "The Moro Liberation Movement: From Secession to Autonomy," in *Region, Nation and Homeland*, ed. ISEAS Publishing (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2020), 13-56.

[30] A.L. Strachan, "Conflict Analysis of Muslim Mindanao," *Birmingham, UK: GSDRC, University of Birmingham* (2015), 2-19.

[31] Zachary Abuza and Luke Lischin, "The Challenges Facing the Philippines' Bangsamoro Autonomous Region at One Year," *United States Institute of Peace* (2020).

of the known leaders of the *Moro*, is reported to have said regarding Balik-Islam, *"We are Moros; the converts are Muslims."*[32]

## The Balik-Islam

*"The rationale behind the phenomenon could be explained in the term "balik" or "return" or "to return." It implies that those who embrace Islam are actually just returning to the faith, given that historically, the early settlers in the Philippine Islands were generally or already Muslims before the period of colonialism. There is a much deeper explanation beyond history, however. The notion of "balik" or "return" is viewed to have ontological and epistemological dimensions as well. It means that man's original nature or fitrah is in accord with Islam. Hence, when a person embraces Islam, he is just actually returning to his nature, and thus, s/he has to struggle to return to such nature. In fact, some would say that conversion is not the proper term to describe said phenomenon. Reversion is more appropriate."*[33]

Julkipli Wadi, former Dean of the Institute of Islamic Studies, University of the Philippines, described the Balik-Islam in this way during a Friday sermon (*khutbah*). Most Balik-Islam see themselves in this manner. They identify themselves as a distinct group from the Moros, whom they sometimes describe as "born Muslim" or "cultural Muslims." Balik-Islam consider themselves first and foremost as part of the *Ummah* – the global Muslim community, and their reversion to Islam is viewed in this universal context. This key distinction sets them apart from their fellow co-religionists, the Moros, who are acutely bound to their history and struggles against imperialism.[34]

The Balik-Islam movement began in the 1970s when President Marcos imposed martial law. There was an emerging need for skilled labour in many parts of the world, particularly the Gulf Cooperation

[32] Vivienne SM. Angeles, "Moros in the media and beyond: representations of Philippine Muslims," *Contemporary Islam* 4, no. 1 (2010): 51.

[33] Julkipli Wadi, "Balik Islam and the Idea of Return," Friday Sermon, June 1, 2014, https://www.mindanews.com/mindaviews/2014/06/crucible-balik-islam-and-the-idea-of-return/, accessed September 25, 2023.

[34] Marybeth T. Acac, "Balik-Islam in the Philippines: Reversion, Symbolic Negotiation, and Becoming the Other." *PhD diss., Temple University* (2020), 48-50.

Council countries (GCC) that experienced an oil boom after the oil embargo of 1973-74. Marcos' Presidential Decree 442 formally established recruitment and placement programs for Filipinos to work abroad. Although originally designed as a short-term solution to increase foreign exchange, the policy was so successful that it became a mainstay of the Philippines' foreign and labour policies.[35] Rebranded in the 1990s, the Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW) brought an estimated USD 35 billion in direct foreign remittance to the Philippines in 2018. According to the World Bank, this makes the Philippines the fourth-highest recipient of inward remittances after India (USD 83 billion), China (USD 68 billion) and Mexico (USD 36 billion).[36] The Philippine Statistics Authority reported that there were almost 1.83 million OFWs in 2021.[37] The most popular country for OFWs is Saudi Arabia, with almost a quarter of all OFWs working in the oil-rich kingdom. Other GCC countries like the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar, and Bahrain host over 400,000 Filipino migrant workers.[38] Many OFWs in the GCC have embraced Islam over the past four decades. Along with those back in the Philippines who revert to Islam through the efforts and influence of returning OFWs, the number of Balik-Islam in the Philippines ranges from as little as 200,000 to as many as 2 million.[39]

Filipino anthropologist Luis Lacar finds many Catholic Filipinos turning to Islam *"both intriguing and paradoxical."* Moreover, he makes a valid point: Why would Catholic Christian Filipinos from the northern parts of the Philippines adopt the religion of the less sophisticated, less educated, and economically challenged Moros – their traditional and historical nemeses?[40] Marybeth Acac

[35] Migration Data, "Remittances," accessed September 24, 2023, https://www.migrationdataportal.org/themes/remittances/.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Philippine Statistics Authority, *2021 Overseas Filipino Workers (Final Results)*, December 2, 2022, https://psa.gov.ph/statistics/survey/labor-and-employment/survey- overseas-filipinos.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Marybeth T. Acac, "Balik-Islam in the Philippines: Reversion, Symbolic Negotiation, and Becoming the Other" *PhD diss., Temple University* (2020), 5.
[40] Luis Q. Lacar, "Balik -Islam: Christian converts to Islam in the Philippines, c. 1970-98," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 12, no. 1 (2001): 39.

suggests that this paradoxical situation may be explained by looking at circumstances unique to Balik-Islam. The historical presence of Islam, and the idea that had it not been for the Christian missionary efforts and forced conversions over the centuries, most of the Philippines would have been Muslim are important factors. Nevertheless, Acac insists that there is more to it than that. She argues that Catholic Filipinos living and working amongst the GCC Muslims, who are different from the typical Moro, is a more important factor. She classifies their journey to Islam and their reversion to Islam as a "symbolic negotiation" that includes three major elements – diaspora (migration), discord (disorientation), and *da'wah* (proselytisation).[41]

Over the last four decades, millions of Catholic Filipinos have worked in Muslim-majority countries and continue to do so. These, ranked in order of number of OFWs, include Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait, Malaysia, Oman, and Bahrain. Most Filipinos participating in this "Philippine Labor Brokerage" are from the North, Calabarazon region (southeast of Metro Manila), Manila, and Central Luzon.[42] They are selected and trained by the Government and are reputed to be hardworking, intelligent, and highly skilled. This is reflected in the overseas jobs they hold. In the GCC countries, Filipino men are mostly hired as skilled factory workers, vocational contract labour (plumbers, electricians, auto mechanics, etc.), and middle management (banking, service industries, retail, and manufacturing). Filipina women work in the service industry (nursing, beauty parlours and hair salons, and restaurants), retail (typically salespeople and store managers) and as skilled domestic help (mostly as nannies). Apart from skill, most OFWs speak fluent English, making it another reason why they are preferred for these prime positions compared to the migrant labourers from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. To some extent,

[41] Marybeth T. Acac, "Balik-Islam in the Philippines: Reversion, Symbolic Negotiation, and Becoming the Other" *PhD diss., Temple University* (2020), 86-91.
[42] Philippine Statistics Authority, *2021 Overseas Filipino Workers (Final Results)*, December 2, 2022, https://psa.gov.ph/statistics/survey/labor-and-employment/survey-overseas-filipinos.

race, skin colour and physical attractiveness (particularly for female OFWs) are factors in the hiring process.[43]

Most OFWs transform during their tenure abroad. At a personal level, the new experiences, particularly interacting with many diverse people (not just employers but other employees from different parts of the world), profoundly affect OFWs' worldview. They are exposed to new cultures, languages, food, and dress. Generally, higher income means an improvement in the standard of living both in the host country and for their families back home. More than any other factor, this forces many OFWs to maintain their overseas contracts for as long as possible. Many spend most of their vocational years living away from their families. This ethos of sacrifice by OFWs, made popular by the Philippine Government as *"Bagong Bayani",* meaning "modern-day hero", impacts the individual and the family. On the one hand, becoming homesick and, on the other, not adjusting to living back home due to a lifetime of differing experiences. Many OFWs who spend a long time abroad find it difficult to adjust to life in the Philippines. However, not just the OFWs, their families back home get accustomed to living independently with a better lifestyle due to high monthly remittances from abroad.[44]

In the case of female OFWs, living as migrant workers abroad has additional complications. Many Filipinas are in their early twenties when they arrive in the host countries – typically single and either hired in the service industry or work as domestic help. In most GCC countries, pre-marital relations are frowned upon or outright forbidden. This creates social challenges that they would never experience in their home country. Some marry in their host countries and not always to fellow Filipinos. Others marry at a much older age than they would otherwise. In some cases, they prefer to remain single. In addition, many female OFWs end up working as nannies – taking care of other women's children – this "surrogate" motherhood creates relationships with their host families, particularly the

[43] Author's personal observation and experience living in the GCC.

[44] Marybeth T. Acac, "Balik-Islam in the Philippines: Reversion, Symbolic Negotiation, and Becoming the Other" *PhD diss., Temple University* (2020), 114.

children, that significantly impacts their perception of family and community.[45]

Vivienne Angeles posits that Saudi Arabia's restrictions on the religious practice of non-Muslims create challenging circumstances for Catholic OFWs. Most Filipinos may not be highly religious, but attending Church every week is embedded in their culture. For many of them, not being able to attend mass every week creates another complication of living in the diaspora. Some Catholic OFWs find ways to practice their faith covertly but face the risk of being penalised and deported. Religious restrictions in the GCC have changed and are changing rapidly. Countries like the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar, and Bahrain have churches and temples. [46] Saudi Arabia is fast changing as well. Angeles' observations are valid but are in the process of getting outdated.[47]

Migrating to another part of the world and living in the diaspora changes how OFWs perceive the world around them. Many may experience being uncomfortable living among different people to outright "cultural shock." Most OFWs are Catholic. Furthermore, even if they are not religious or very practising, their identity is "Catholicism." Their self-perception, first and foremost, is being Catholic. Catholic ideas like suffering and sacrifice, especially given their experience living abroad as "*Bagong Bayani*" (modern-day heroes), are internalised and seen as a means of connecting with the Divine. These are coupled with other Catholic concepts like faith and hope. Having faith in Christ as the saviour and hope for eternal salvation. These various Catholic precepts form the identity of most OFWs.[30] In the case of Balik-Islam, many describe going through a phase of "deconversion" – a time or moment in their journey where their Catholic worldview is substantially shaken. A time or even stage of conversion that forces them to challenge everything about their belief system. In essence, their "world is turned upside down."

[45] Author's personal observation and experience living in the GCC.

[46] Vivienne SM. Angeles, "The Middle East and the Philippines: Transnational Linkages, Labor Migration and the Remaking of Philippine Islam," *Comparative Islamic Studies* 7, nos. 1-2 (2012): 157-81.

[47] Author's personal observation and experience living in the GCC.

Lewis Rambo calls this a "crisis." A crisis of faith.[48] A feeling of disenchantment, disorientation, or discord. A feeling which may arguably be even termed as a form of cognitive dissonance.

While many Balik-Islam experience varying degrees of discord, active or passive *da'wah* in their host countries does play a large part in their eventual acceptance of Islam. In relation to the local Moros or nearby Muslim-majority nations of Brunei, Indonesia and Malaysia, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries are viewed by Filipinos as authentically Islamic countries. They are viewed as the centre or origin of Islam. Add to that fluency of Arabic (even if it is a dialect far from the Qur'an) and the stereotypical *khaleeji* (GCC countries) way of dressing – men in white "*thowbs"* and women in black *abayas* – to most Filipinos, this is the "real" Islam.[49]

For non-Muslim migrant workers to the *Khaleej* (GCC), the typical *khaleeji* "*sheikh*" or "*arbaab*" (master or boss) or "madam" in their mannerisms, culturally defined dress, language, segregation of gender, and food are all authentically Muslim. For example, in Bahrain, 10% of the OFWs who accept Islam state that it was the Islamic behaviour of their "*arbaab*" or their "madam" that brought them to Islam.[50] Late renowned Professor Ismail al Faruqi referred to this as indirect or passive *da'wah*. Observing or manifesting a virtuous lifestyle becomes a powerful motivation for others to seek Islam.[51] Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) is reported to have said, *"You cannot be a true believer unless you love for your brother what you love for yourself."*[52] This golden rule of Islam is frequently cited as the root cause explaining why many non-Muslims have been drawn to Islam.

Active *da'wah,* where Muslims reach out to non-Muslims and educate and invite them to Islam, is a major factor in many Filipino workers becoming Muslim in the GCC. In 2021, almost a thousand

[48] Lewis Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion: A Study in Human Nature* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 44-55.

[49] Author's personal experience and observations dealing with Filipinos in the GCC.

[50] Author, internal unpublished document, *Discover Islam Society Bahrain Annual Report 2021*.

[51] Isma'il al-Faruqi, "On the nature of Islamic Da'wah," *International Review of Mission* 65, no. 260 (1976): 391-409.

[52] Imam Nawawi, "Forty Ahadith, Hadith 13." from *Sahih Bukhari* and *Sahih Muslim*.

OFWs took their *shahadah* (became Muslim) in Bahrain. This is approximately 2% of the Filipino expat population on the Island kingdom. Over the last seven years alone, almost 17% of OFWs in Bahrain have switched their religion from Catholicism to Islam. Most of this was through proselytisation efforts of local *Da'wah* organisations. Compared to other Gulf countries, Bahrain has the smallest Filipino expat population. The number of Filipino reverts, Balik-Islam, in the rest of the *Khaleej* (Gulf) countries is far more than in Bahrain. Between 20,000 and 30,000 OFWs in the GCC are estimated to become Muslim yearly.[53]

Many Balik-Islam in the GCC become *du'aat* (active Islamic "missionaries") themselves. Ease of communication and use of social media has greatly enhanced the work of *da'wah* over the last several years. The global COVID-19 pandemic has been a massive disruptor and has accelerated the growth of video conferencing and remote working. OFWs are in daily contact with their families back in the Philippines. Many who become Muslim are sharing their faith with their loved ones back home. The number of Balik-Islam is growing faster than ever before. [34]

The most often cited reason for accepting Islam amongst Filipinos is *"Tawheed"* (the strict monotheistic concept of the Oneness of God, Allah, in Islam). Tawheed is the central tenet of Islam. It is the most fundamental concept upon which all other aspects of Islam are built and without which one is not a Muslim. The simplicity of the faith follows this. For many reverts, Catholicism did not make "sense" – the idea of three gods and all three being one, of being born in sin, and for god to send his son to die for the sins of the world – all this sounds too convoluted and unnecessarily complex for them.[54] It was accepted as a matter of faith, as part of the culture that they grew up in and was never to be questioned. In this context, Karin Van Niewerk identifies three precepts of Islam that distinguish it from Christianity: 1. The Oneness of Allah (*Tawheed*); 2. That Islam is the natural religion for all humanity (*Din al-Fitrah*); and 3. That all are born sinless, born Muslim. Niewerk further states that because the process of reverting to Islam is simple and only requires

[53] Author, unpublished internal document, *Discover Islam Society Bahrain 2021*.
[54] Author, unpublished interviews of Filipino Converts 2022.

reciting the *shahadah – "I testify there is no God but Allah, and I testify that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah"* – both inviting people to and accepting Islam are straightforward processes.[55]

According to many sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists, and academicians, converting from one faith to another is undoubtedly a complex process, but one that science may be able to explain. To many secular academics, the notion of "*hidaya*" (guidance) coming from Allah is not an empirically explainable phenomenon. In the case of many Filipino reverts to Islam, the Balik-Islam, this is very much a reality. A recent anecdotal example of a conversion story illustrates this concept beautifully.

Dexter, an OFW, works as a waiter in a fast-food restaurant in Bahrain. He was approached almost two years ago by a fellow OFW who invited Dexter to Islam. Dexter took his *shahadah* in March 2020. In early January 2022, Dexter had the opportunity to perform *Umrah* (a lesser pilgrimage) in Makkah, Saudi Arabia. Dexter was part of a larger group that a Bahraini Da'wah organisation sponsored to perform this Islamic ritual. Dexter had been trying to convince his ailing 90-year-old father to become Muslim for over a year. His father, who lived in Isabella, North Luzon, had resisted to the point of not listening to anything Dexter said about Islam. While in the *Haram*, next to the *Ka'bah* in Makkah, Dexter's Islamic teacher encouraged him to fervently pray and ask Allah to give *hidaya* to his father. Dexter complied and begged for Allah's help. Dexter's father agreed to listen two days later, took the shahadah, and became a Muslim. Dexter's father died five days later and was buried as a Muslim in the Philippines.[56]

On the same *Umrah* journey, Hafsa, a Filipina who converted to Islam in 2019, heard about Dexter's father's conversion. While in Madinah, Saudi Arabia, she reached out to her parents in Pastrana, Leyte, via video call using Facebook Messenger. After listening to her and listening to a Filipino *da'ee* (someone who invites others to Islam) who was with Hafsa, both her parents took the *shahadah*.

[55] Karin Van Nieuwkerk, "'Conversion' to Islam and the Construction of a Pious Self," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion*, ed. Lewis R. Rambo and Charles E. Farhadian (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 669.

[56] Author, Personal Interview with Da'ee Umpad, January 24, 2022.

Hafsa's cousin, who lives in the same household with Hafsa's parents, also became Muslim the same day.[57]

These are not just a few incidental stories. These are the reversion narratives of many Balik-Islam. The spiritual aspect of their journey is a major factor in their not only becoming Muslim but becoming practising Muslims who, in turn, want to reach out to their families and friends back home and share their "enlightenment" with them. To discount the spiritual side of Balik-Islam reversion narratives is to miss out on a major factor that may even have social and political implications in the Philippines today. However, not all those who accept Islam do so out of personal conviction. Roughly 5-10% of conversions are related to marriage. Many female OFWs working in the GCC have relationships with locals or other expats. Some of these relationships end in marriage. Islam technically permits Muslim men to marry women from the "People of the Book" (Jews and Christians). However, the groom will frequently insist that the bride become Muslim. Most *Da'wah* institutions in the GCC officiate such "*shahadahs*" and facilitate court-issued "*Shahadah* Certificates", proving that someone has switched their faith to Islam.[58] Some OFWs become Muslims in exchange for a better job, higher pay or other material incentive. These cases are very few and far between due to two reasons. Filipinos are culturally invested in their Catholic way of life. For many, being Catholic is their identity; switching faith is not trivial. For many Muslims, particularly the Balik-Islam, *da'wah* is not trivial either. According to al-Faruqi, *da'wah* is not about compelling or persuading someone to become Muslim. *Da'wah*, as taught in the Qur'an and exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), is about inviting people to Allah, reasoning with them in a sound and wise manner and giving them the freedom to choose or refuse (Qur'an 16:125).[59] Islamic *da'wah* differs from the typical evangelical missionary work, and materially incentivising *da'wah* is generally frowned upon and discouraged.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Author, Unpublished Internal Reports, Discover Islam Society Bahrain, 2017-2021.

[59] Ismail R. al-Faruqi, *Islam: Religion, Practice, Culture & World Order* (Herndon, VA: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2012), 81-82.

## The Balik-Islam and the Moros

The conversion narratives of many Balik-Islam are comparable to the conversion narratives of Filipinos who left Catholicism in favour of Evangelical or Pentecostal Protestant sects and consider themselves "Born-Again" Christians. Returning to the original idea that Balik-Islam means converting back to one's true nature (*Din al-Fitrah*), it is conceivable to view Balik-Islam as "Born-Again Muslims." Moreover, this is how many Balik-Islam see themselves. They are "Born-Again Muslims" compared to the Moro, simply "Born-Muslims." Moreover, within this play on words lies the difference between the two Muslim Filipino communities' worldviews.[60]

Acac asked several Balik-Islam in Manila about their view of the Moro. *"When asked about the difference between the two types of Filipino Muslims, most Balik-Islam were quick to reply that there is essentially no difference; they are all Muslim brothers and sisters. However, during my experiences, this standard response of comradery was almost always qualified by a momentary, sometimes seemingly unconscious divulgence of the tension between the two groups."*[61] Acac may have stumbled onto an interesting "collective subconscious" that may have to do with the collective experience of having accepted Islam in the "land of Islam" and at the hands of those who are the "original authentic Muslims."

Labor-class Muslim expats in the GCC, particularly from Asia and Africa, generally have a sense of respect bordering on adulation for their Arab "*arbaab*" (masters). Part of this may be explained pragmatically "that these are your employers, and they have within their power your financial well-being as well as your position and legal status in their country." But there is more to it. Most low-income labourers are treated quite poorly in the *Khaleej*. Low pay, menial jobs, disrespect, and injustice are not uncommon. Many expats live in "labour camps" where living conditions are way below the average standard of the locals. Labour laws generally favour employers. One would question why anybody wants to work in these

[60] Marybeth T. Acac, "Balik-Islam in the Philippines: Reversion, Symbolic Negotiation, and Becoming the Other" PhD diss., Temple University (2020), 48-50.
[61] Ibid.

countries. The answer is simply because most home countries' economic and living conditions are even worse. However, apart from the dismal labour conditions, there is also a healthy dose of racism, xenophobia and classism in the GCC. Filipinos are below Westerners (whites) and Arabs (Gulf Arabs first, then others from Arab-speaking nations) but held in higher regard than those from the Indian subcontinent. Sub-Saharan Africans are held in the least regard. This hierarchy, based on colour, language, ethnicity, and national origin, is an open secret across the Gulf countries. The net effect of all this is a high degree of adulation of the local Arabs by the labour-class expats.

Most Muslims in Asia, Africa and many other parts of the world come from communities where one does not question one's religious leaders. The *imam* (leader), *moulvi*, *mawlana*, *sheikh*, *mufti*, and *ustadh* (various terms for Islamic scholars) are always right. Muslims have been trained for generations to be *muqallid* (blind followers). Moreover, if the religious leader is fluent in Arabic, dresses like an Arab sheikh and is from the *Khaleej*, then it would border on sacrilege to question him. In this regard, Catholics are closer to the above-described *muqallid* Muslims than their fellow co-religionist Protestants! It is easier for Filipino Catholics to convert to a version of Islam with strict, well-defined rules, unquestioning obedience to the religious authority, and no room for innovation (*bida*). Acac does not mention this in her "symbolic negotiation", but it fits her hypothesis very well. For OFWs in the GCC, converting to a strict, puritanical version of Islam makes sense.

Acac sheds more light on this facet of the Balik-Islam. *"When asked their opinion of Born Muslims, several Balik-Islam shared their slight contempt for Born Muslims, describing them, for example, as 'lazy to practice their religion' and 'ignorant of the true faith.'"*[62] When they go back to the Philippines many Balik-Islam are not only keen to share their new-found faith with their friends and family, but they see themselves as "better" and "more original" Muslims than the Moros. Moreover, this is most evident in their dress – many Balik-Islam dress like their former Arab masters – white *thowbs* (male full-length robes) and *igaal* (headdress) for the men,

[62] Ibid., 49.

black *abayas* (female full-length robes), and quite often a full face-covering veil for the women. On the other hand, the Moros have a more traditional dress that resembles other tribes of the *Nusantara* – clothing like *Songkok, Malong* and *Patadyong*.[63]

## Conclusion

The Balik-Islam phenomenon in the Philippines is less than fifty years old but has had a major impact on Islam's long and troubled history in the region. The Balik-Islam are reverting to what they consider a purer, less adulterated "original" version of Islam. They may have adopted this version of Islam from their *"arbaab"* in the Gulf countries. Given their Catholic origin, their reverence for religious authority is understandable. It certainly has eased their entry into Islam. Upon accepting Islam, their pre-Islamic perspective on the Moro people as being backward, poor, and uneducated may have been compounded by a sense of religious and moral superiority over the Moro. A more puritanical version of Islam in the Philippines coupled with centuries of injustice for the Moro is a tinderbox waiting to explode!

Despite their differences, the Moro and the Balik-Islam must unite and understand one another. The Moro can augment the Balik-Islam with their rich history, patience in the face of unimaginable losses, and a pluralistic, tolerant view of Islam. The Balik-Islam may help the Moro revive their understanding and practice of Islam. Together, the Muslims of the Philippines have a place in both their country and the *Ummah*. In the Philippines, Muslims need to reach out to Christians – Catholics and Protestants, Hindus, Buddhists and people of all convictions not only to invite them to Islam but also to work together for the common good as was the practice of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). In relation to the larger community of Muslims worldwide, the Ummah, a united Muslim of the Philippines, can be a real-life example of how people from different and inimical backgrounds can come together as one.

[63] Mina Roces, "Gender, Nation and the Politics of Dress in Twentieth-Century Philippines," *Gender & History* 17, no. 2 (2005): 354-77.

# EXPLORING THE ETHICAL DIMENSIONS OF *FIQH*: THE ROLE OF THE SOUL IN ACHIEVING *MAQĀṢID AL-SHARĪʿAH*

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**Abstract**

*This study delves into the ethical intricacies within Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh), with a particular focus on the integral role of the soul in realising the higher objectives of Islamic law, known as maqāṣid al-sharīʿah. Drawing from classical Islamic jurisprudence and ethical philosophy, the research explores how fiqh goes beyond legal compliance to emphasise the cultivation of moral excellence, with the soul (nafs) serving as a fundamental element in this ethical pursuit. Through alignment with divine purpose, individuals contribute to justice, compassion, and societal well-being. The study offers a concise exploration of fiqh's ethical dimensions, highlighting the profound significance of the soul in the pursuit of maqāṣid al-sharīʿah, which encompass the preservation of religion, life, intellect, progeny, and property. By shedding light on the ethical dimensions of fiqh and the centrality of the soul in Islamic ethical thought, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the moral foundations of Islamic law and jurisprudence, enriching contemporary discourses on ethics and jurisprudence within the Islamic tradition.*

**Keywords:** *Fiqh*, ethical dimensions, soul (*nafs*), *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*, Islamic law.

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## 1. Introduction

The quest for ethical conduct occupies a paramount position in the intricate tapestry of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*). Rooted deeply in Islamic law principles, the pursuit of righteousness extends beyond mere legalistic compliance to encompass the holistic development of the human soul. At the heart of this ethical journey lies the concept of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*, which delineates the higher objectives of Islamic law. However, to attain these lofty aims, one must delve into the human psyche's inner dimensions, recognising the soul's pivotal role. Through this research, one can gain a deeper understanding of the critical role of the soul's development in pursuing *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*. This understanding can help create a more comprehensive approach to Islamic law that considers both the legal and ethical dimensions of *fiqh*, leading to a more balanced and holistic understanding of Islamic jurisprudence.

Some critics argue that traditional *fiqh* literature tends to prioritise individual needs over communal welfare, often focusing on personal rituals and individualistic practices.[3] In contrast, *Sharīʿah* principles are designed to serve both the community and individuals, seeking to safeguard the collective well-being while upholding individual rights. This reflects the perspective that while *fiqh* often addresses specific legal rulings applicable to individuals, *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* emphasises broader objectives that include communal welfare and ethical considerations.[4]

The primary goal of Islamic law is to govern the affairs of the Muslim community, ensuring its protection and advancement, thereby fostering its overall prosperity and unity[5]. Thus, in the light of these debates, a balanced approach would involve integrating

[3] Ahmed Gad Makhlouf, "The doctrinal development of contemporary Islamic law: Fiqh Academies as an institutional framework", *Oxford Journal of Law and Religion* 10, no 3, (October 2021): 464–486, https://doi.org/10.1093/ ojlr/rwac005

[4] Jasser Auda, *Maqasid Al-Shariah as Philosophy of Islamic Law: A Systems Approach* (Herndon, VA: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2008), https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvkc67tg.

[5] Sulaiman Lebbe Rifai, "Maqāsid al-Sharīʿah: Origins and definitions of the general philosophy of Islamic Law," *SSRN Electronic Journal* Feb (2021): 1–18, https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3786041.

traditional *fiqh* principles with *sharīʿah* principles, prioritising both individual needs and communal welfare to ensure the overall prosperity and unity of the Muslim community.

The *maqāṣid al-shari'ah* comprises tools that can tackle societal issues. It is believed that these tools can offer solutions to contemporary economic, political, and cultural challenges by aligning the moral vision of Islam with modernity. Compared to *fiqh*-based strategies, *maqāṣidī* models offer a more nuanced approach that extends beyond strict adherence to scriptural and legal interpretations.[6] This broader perspective avoids solely focusing on individual actions and addresses the evolving dynamics of social life.

To illustrate the practical application of *maqāṣidī* thinking, consider the field of medical ethics. Eminent scholars such as Profs. Gamal Eldin Attia, Tariq Ramadan, Omar Hasan Kasule, and others have crafted *maqāṣidi* frameworks for medical ethics[7], expanding upon Imam Abū Ishāq Al-Shāṭibī's *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* theory.[8] These frameworks offer innovative approaches to ethical deliberation, beyond traditional *fiqh*-based strategies. For instance, there are three notable approaches in the realm of medical ethics: field-based redefinition, conceptual extension, and text-based postulation. Each approach provides a specific method of ethical deliberation, addressing complex scenarios such as the moral responsibilities of clinicians and families in end-of-life care decisions. However, while these frameworks offer valuable insights, there remains a need for further development to ensure their practical applicability and effectiveness in addressing contemporary biomedical challenge.[9]

By integrating *maqāṣidī* thinking into fields such as medical ethics etc., scholars aim to enrich ethical discourse and provide holistic solutions that uphold both individual rights and communal

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[6] Auda, *Maqasid Al-Shariah*.

[7] Aasim I. Padela, "Maqāṣidī models for an 'Islamic' medical ethics: Problem-solving or confusing at the bedside?" *American Journal of Islam and Society* 39, no. 1–2 (2022): 72–114, https://doi.org/10.35632/ajis.v39i1-2.3069.

[8] Abu Ishaq al-Shatibi, *Al-Muwafaqat fi usul al-shari'ah* (The Reconciliation of the Fundamentals of Islamic Law), ed., Muhammad Abu al-Ajfan and Shakir Muhammad Makhluf (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifah, 1997).

[9] Ibid.

welfare, in alignment with the overarching principles of Islamic law. This comprehensive approach to the texts of the *Sharīʿah* has resulted in a renewed focus on the communal perspective, as the aim of the *Sharīʿah* is to maintain social function and order. Contemporary scholarship in the field of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* has significantly changed this approach and shifted towards the realm of the community, proposing new goals that focus on society's well-being. For example, the concept of *hifz al-'aql* illustrates this vital shift, demonstrating how the social dimension of *Islamic Sharīʿah* has re-emerged alongside the rebirth of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* in the twentieth century.[10]

Islamic jurisprudence, or *fiqh*, has been the subject of extensive scholarly discourse due to its significance in Islamic law. While there has been considerable research on *fiqh* and its ethical foundations, there remains a notable gap in understanding the nuanced role of the soul in pursuing *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*, which refers to the objectives of Islamic law. Existing research often emphasises legal rulings and procedural aspects but frequently overlooks the profound ethical dimensions rooted in the spiritual realm. Addressing this gap, the work on the concept of the soul enriches the discourse on *maqāṣid* by integrating spiritual and ethical considerations, thus offering a more holistic understanding of Islamic ethics and its application to contemporary issues. This approach underscores the interconnectedness between individual moral development and the broader objectives of the *Sharīʿah*, enhancing the ethical framework within Islamic jurisprudence.

After examining the practical applications of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*, it is imperative to delve into the theoretical underpinnings of Islamic ethics. While the integration of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* into fields such as bioethics, law and civilisation have provided valuable insights into contemporary ethical challenges, it is equally important to understand the philosophical framework that underpins Islamic ethical thought. At the heart of Islamic ethics lies a

[10] Shihan et al., "The examination of the social dimension of Shari'ah from the viewpoint of *Maqasid al-Shariah*: A case study of the preservation of intellect," *International Journal of Social Science and Human Research* 6, no. 2 (2023): 1038–1046, https://doi.org/10.47191/ijsshr/v6-i2-36.

profound understanding of the human soul (*nafs*) and its role in guiding moral conduct and decision-making. Throughout Islamic history, scholars have explored the intricate relationship between the soul, ethics, and the broader objectives of Islamic law. This exploration not only sheds light on the spiritual dimensions of ethical discourse but also provides valuable insights into addressing contemporary moral dilemmas. Therefore, this research not only examines the ethical implications of *fiqh* but also aims to explore the soul's significance in achieving *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah's* objectives. By delving into the relationship between the spiritual essence of the human soul and the broader objectives outlined by Islamic law, the study seeks to understand how the ethical development of the soul influences adherence to the principles of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*. Through this exploration, the research endeavours to shed light on the intricate relationship between Islamic ethics, spirituality, and legal principles, contributing to a deeper understanding of ethical conduct within the Islamic tradition.[11]

Exploring the ethical dimensions of *fiqh* and the role of the soul in achieving *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* is of paramount significance as it offers profound insights into Islamic jurisprudence and spirituality. By delving into *fiqh*'s ethical framework, scholars gain a deeper understanding of how Islamic law shapes individual conduct and communal welfare. Additionally, examining the soul's role in realising *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* elucidates the spiritual dimension of ethical decision-making within the Islamic tradition, highlighting the interconnectedness between individual moral development and the broader objectives of the *Shari'ah*. This exploration contributes to a holistic comprehension of Islamic ethics and jurisprudence, informing ethical discourse and guiding practical applications within Muslim communities.[12]

## 2. Research Questions

This article explores *fiqh*'s ethical dimensions, elucidating the soul's indispensable role in realising *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*. The author

[11] Auda, *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah*.
[12] Shihan et al., "The examination of the social dimension".

examines the study according to two research questions, which are as follows:

A. How do different interpretations of the concept of the soul within Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) influence the understanding and prioritisation of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*, particularly in contemporary ethical dilemmas?
B. What are the ethical implications of prioritising the spiritual development of the soul in the context of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*, and how do these implications shape ethical decision-making frameworks within Islamic jurisprudence?

## 3. Objectives

This article examines *fiqh*'s ethical dimensions and the soul's vital role in achieving *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*. It has two objectives:

A. To investigate the concept of the soul in Islamic jurisprudence and how it influences ethical priorities. It also analyses how different interpretations of the soul within *fiqh* affect approaches to resolving ethical dilemmas in Islamic societies.
B. To explore the significance and role of spiritual development in the context of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* and its ethical implications. It also analyses how prioritising spiritual development affects decision-making frameworks within Islamic jurisprudence.

## 4. Method

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with meta-analysis and descriptive statistical literature studies based on the critical focus of the study journal publications that discuss the theme[13] "ethical dimensions of *fiqh* and role of the soul in achieving *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*. Meta-analysis integrates previous research related to a particular topic to evaluate the results of existing studies. The research process used a qualitative method known as the constructive

[13] Saifurrahman Firdausi, "Ethical dimensions of fiqh and role of the soul in achieving *maqasid al-shari'ah*," *Journal of Islamic Studies and Humanities* 4, no. 1 (2023): 20-31. https://doi.org/10.22452/afkar.vol24no2.4.

method. This method involves collecting and constructing data from a comprehensive review of scholarly articles and books into a more understandable and meaningful theme.[14]

## 5. Understanding *Fiqh* and *Maqāṣid al-Sharīʿah*

Islamic jurisprudence, known as *fiqh*, is an extensive legal framework rooted in primary sources such as the Qur'an, the Sunnah, and the consensus of Islamic scholars. This system governs various aspects of a Muslim's life, including acts of worship, personal behaviour, family matters, and social interactions. By deriving principles from these foundational texts, *fiqh* aims to provide comprehensive guidance on living in accordance with Islamic values and laws.[15]

Embedded within *fiqh* is the concept of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* (purposes of Islamic law). These *Maqāṣid* are guiding principles to preserve and promote essential human values such as faith, life, intellect, progeny, and property. Additionally, they endeavour to uphold justice, mercy, and equity, thereby ensuring the welfare and flourishing of society.[16] *Maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* delves deep into the underlying objectives and purposes of Islamic jurisprudence, offering a comprehensive framework to comprehend the goals and aims of Islamic law. At its pinnacle, *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* revolves around protection, safeguarding the interests and well-being of individuals and communities. Categorised into three main areas – *daruriyyat*, addressing the necessities of human life; *hajjiyyat*, fulfilling complementary needs; and *tahsiniyyat*, promoting aesthetic and excellence-related pursuits – these objectives delineate the essence

[14] Mohammad Eisa Ruhullah and Taufiq Ushama, "Islamic epistemology in the Bangladesh Government system (1996–2022): An analysis of political ideologies," *Jurnal Bina Praja* 15, no. 3 (2023): 479–493, https://doi.org/10.21787/jbp.15.2023.479-493.

[15] Sohaira Zahra, "What is fiqh? Role, applications and principles," *Muslim and Quran*, 2023, https://blog.muslimandquran.com/what-is-fiqh-role-applications-principles/.

[16] Ibrahim H. Usman, "Macroeconomic determinants of home financing in Malaysia: A comparative analysis of conventional and Islamic banks," *Universiti Utara Malaysia* (2014), https://etd.uum.edu.my/4644/1/s814580.pdf.

and aspirations of Islamic law for human excellence.[17] This holistic framework not only enriches our understanding of Islamic jurisprudence but also serves as a compass for ethical decision-making, grounded in principles of justice and human well-being.

For example, the formation of *fiqh al-siyāsah*, which incorporates both legal and political aspects. Understanding the evolution of *fiqh al-siyāsah* within the framework of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* enriches comprehension of Islamic jurisprudence and its ethical underpinnings, providing valuable insights into how legal and political domains intersect to safeguard the welfare and prosperity of individuals and communities. The term *al-fiqh*, linguistically denoting comprehension (*al-fahm*), and terminologically referring to the understanding of practical *Shari'ah* laws derived from meticulous evidential proofs (*dalil*), emerges from the process of *ijtihad*.[18] Moreover, the incorporation of *al-siyāsah*, signifying governance, expands the purview of *fiqh* beyond legal matters to encompass matters of political governance and societal administration. This fusion of legal and political dimensions resonates with the broader objectives of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*, which strive to advance principles of justice, mercy, and equity within society.[19]

Another example, delving deeper into the application of ethical dimensions, is the utilisation of *fiqh* and *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* in the realm of medical ethics. In medical practice, Islamic ethical principles play a crucial role in guiding decisions regarding patient care, treatment, and end-of-life issues. For instance, the preservation of life (*hifz al-nafs*) is an integral component of *maqasid al-shari'ah*, emphasising the sanctity of human life. This principle guides medical professionals in prioritising patient well-being and making ethically sound decisions. Understanding *fiqh* and *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*, as stated by Padela, enables practitioners to navigate complex ethical

[17] Tariq Ramadan, *Islam, the West, and the Challenges of Modernity* (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 2009).

[18] S. Bahri, "The construction of Indonesian political fiqh: *Maqasid Al-Shariah* perspective and Ahmad Ar-Raisuni's thoughts," *Justicia Islamica* 17, no. 1 (2020), 35. https://doi.org/10.21154/justicia.v16i1.1671.

[19] S. Bahri, "The construction of Indonesian political fiqh."

dilemmas in healthcare while upholding Islamic ethical values and principles. Medical professionals rely on these principles to ensure that their decisions align with the overarching objectives of Islamic law, such as preserving life, promoting justice, and fostering mercy. By integrating *fiqh* and *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* into medical ethics, practitioners can provide holistic care that respects patients' rights and upholds ethical standards grounded in Islamic tradition.[20] This approach not only enhances patient care but also reinforces the ethical framework within which medical practice operates. This approach not only enhances patient care but also reinforces the ethical framework within which medical practice operates.

A notable work on the ethical dimensions of *Maqāṣid* is Jasser Auda's "*Maqāṣid al-Sharīʿah* as Philosophy of Islamic Law: A Systems Approach," which explores how these principles are integrated into Islamic jurisprudence to ensure justice and human well-being. This comprehensive approach enriches our understanding of Islamic law and serves as a compass for ethical decision-making grounded in principles of justice and mercy.[21]

Tariq Ramadan highlights the importance of integrating spiritual and ethical dimensions within the broader framework of *maqāṣid*, emphasising the need for a holistic approach to Islamic ethics and governance.[22] Berghout's significant contribution lies in adding the broader objectives of *maqāṣid al-istikhlaf* (preservation of vicegerency) and *maqāṣid al-kawn* (purposes of creation), innovatively expanding the traditional framework of *maqāṣid* to address comprehensive and contemporary human and environmental concerns.[23] These additions relate to the concept of the soul and ethics by emphasising the holistic development of individuals, integrating spiritual and ethical dimensions within the broader framework of Islamic governance and civilisation. In another work, Berghout emphasises the importance of ethical governance in

[20] Padela, "Maqāṣidī models for an 'Islamic' medical ethics."

[21] Auda, *Maqasid Al-Shariah.*

[22] Tariq Ramadan, *Radical Reform: Islamic Ethics and Liberation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[23] Abdel Aziz Berghout, *Al-Manhaj al-nabawi wa'l-taghyeer al-hadari* (The Prophetic Methodology and Civilisational Change) (Kuwait: Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, 2007), 46-47.

building civilisation, highlighting that one of the criteria for *ummah wasatiyah* (the middle nation) is *i'tidal* (moderation) and *samahah* (tolerance). He discusses the integration of ethical considerations within the *maqāṣid* framework, particularly emphasising that these elements fall within the broader objectives of *fifz al-nafs* (preservation of life) and *hifz al-ʿaql* (preservation of intellect), stressing their importance in fostering a just and dignified society.[24] This underscores the interconnectedness of individual moral development and the broader objectives of the *Sharīʿah*, enriching contemporary discourses on ethics and jurisprudence within the Islamic tradition.

## 6. The Ethical Imperative of *Fiqh*

While *fiqh* delineates the legal injunctions governing human behaviour, the ethical imperative infuses these laws with moral significance. Ethical conduct transcends the mere observance of rules; it entails embodying virtuous qualities and internalising noble values. In Islamic custom, the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) exemplified the highest ethical standards, emphasising compassion, honesty, humility, and integrity.[25] Hence, ethical considerations permeate every facet of *fiqh*, guiding individuals toward righteous conduct and moral excellence.

Imam Al-Ghazali, in his seminal work *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* (Revival of the Religious Sciences), emphasised the ultimate purpose of *fiqh* as bringing individuals closer to God through ethical and spiritual refinement. He highlighted the importance of purifying the soul (*tazkiyah al-nafs*) and aligning one's actions with divine intentions.[26] Al-Ghazali's focus on the spiritual and ethical development of individuals indirectly supports the preservation of

[24] Abdelaziz Berghout, *al-Shuhud al-hadari li-l-ummah al-wasat fi 'asr al-awlama* (The Civilisational Witnessing of the Middle Nation in the Era of Globalisation) (Kuwait: Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, 2007), 63-64 ff. https://archive.org/details/YacineB00361BibliothqueApcHamma/page/n67/mode/2up?view=theater.

[25] Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj, *Sahih Muslim*, Book 43, Hadith 6223.

[26] Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* (The Revival of the Religious Sciences) (Cairo: Dar al-Taqwa, 1993).

fundamental values such as religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property.

These values, while not explicitly labelled as *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* by Al-Ghazali, align with the higher ethical goals that *fiqh* aims to achieve. Al-Shatibi later formalised these objectives in his work *Al-Muwafaqat*, emphasising that legal rulings should aim to protect and promote these essential values, thus ensuring that *fiqh* aligns with the broader moral and spiritual objectives of Islam.[27]

Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, in his seminal work *Iʿlām al-muwaqqiʿīn ʿan rabb al-ʿalamīn*, emphasises that the purpose of the *Sharīʿah* is not only to enforce legal norms but also to cultivate ethical and moral virtues within the individual and society. He asserts that the primary objectives of the *Sharīʿah* include the promotion of justice, mercy, and wisdom, aligning legal rulings with higher moral goals. This approach reflects a holistic understanding of Islamic jurisprudence, where the final aim is to harmonise legal rulings with the overarching ethical and spiritual principles of Islam.[28]

Furthermore, Jasser Auda highlights the importance of a *maqāṣid*-based approach in modern contexts. He argues that the higher objectives of the *Sharīʿah* serve as a system of values contributing to the sound application of Islamic law, emphasising justice, mercy, wisdom, and the common good. Auda suggests differentiating between scriptural texts as means to higher ends and those as ends in themselves, proposing that this understanding allows for greater flexibility and relevance in contemporary settings.[29]

Hasan Chamsi-Pasha in "Islamic perspectives on the principles of biomedical ethics" used the rapid spread of Islam as evidence that autonomy is compatible with Islam, as it protects individual freedom. He argued that the Qur'anic concepts of divine lordship (*rubūbīyah*) and human vicegerency (*khilāfa*) also support autonomy as being "Islam-friendly". According to Hasan, the Qur'an states that the

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[27] al-Shatibi, *Al-Muwafaqat.*

[28] Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Iʿlām al-muwaqqiʿīn ʿan rabb al-ʿalamīn* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Kulliyyat al-Azhariyya, 1968) 1, 31-32.

[29] Jasser Auda, "A maqāṣid-based approach for new independent legal reasoning (*ijtihad*)," in *Islamic Perspectives on the Principles of Biomedical Ethics*, edited by M. Ghaly (World Scientific Publishing, 2016), 69-86.

human spirit is divine and that as God's vicegerent on earth, man shares in God's essential attribute of freedom. Therefore, he possesses delegated freedom. Furthermore, Hasan maintained that since divine revelation ended with the death of the Prophet of Islam and the legal system is left to be determined by people in the light of their reasoning, individual autonomy is not foreign to the Islamic tradition.[30]

Bedoui and Mansour introduce a novel approach that links organisational performance to the ethical vision of Islam, based on *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*. The approach involves a pentagon-shaped performance scheme structure via five pillars: wealth, posterity, intellect, faith, and human self. This scheme enables organisations to ethically contribute to promoting human welfare, preventing corruption, and enhancing social and economic stability rather than solely focusing on maximising financial returns. The paper also presents a quantitative measure of ethical performance, which surprisingly shows that firms or organisations prioritising financial gains at the expense of other pillars perform poorly. Further, the paper presents practical examples of quantitatively measuring ethical aspects of the design at an aggregate rank.[31]

Imran Ahsan Khan Nyazee enhances the discussion by alluding to values that might be preserved and protected in different jurisdictions among Muslim jurists and Western law. He points out that the purposes by recent community and society, either in the name of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* or justice (with references to the Western), would come together and intersect on issues such as equality, security, civilisation, and independence. Regardless of how they differentiate, it should be borne in mind that the engagement of those values might be changeable from time to time, from one person to another, from one regime to another, or from one circumstance to another.[32]

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[30] Hassan Chamsi-Pasha, "Response to Raissouni's paper," in *Islamic Perspectives on the Principles of Biomedical Ethics*, edited by Mohammed Ghaly, (World Scientific Publishing, 2016), 233-234. https://doi.org/10.1142/p9781786341007.

[31] H. E. Bedoui and W. Mansour, "Performance and maqasid al-shari'ah's pentagon-shaped ethical measurement," *Science and Engineering Ethics* 21, no. 3 (2015): 555-576.

[32] Imran Ahsan Khan Nyazee, *Islamic Jurisprudence: Usul al-Fiqh* (Petaling Jaya,

In conclusion, the ethical dimension of *fiqh* is fundamentally connected to the concept of the soul (*nafs*) in Islamic thought. The ethical and spiritual journey within *fiqh* involves continually striving against the lower self's desires, aiming to elevate the soul towards its higher, virtuous state. This interaction between ethical behaviour and spiritual growth highlights the comprehensive nature of Islamic jurisprudence, where legal rulings are not just about adherence but also about cultivating moral excellence and spiritual development in accordance with the higher objectives of the *Sharīʿah*.

## 7. The Role of the Soul in Achieving *Maqāṣid al-Sharīʿah*

Achieving *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* requires integrating ethical principles with legal rulings. The development of the soul fosters ethical decision-making that goes beyond mere legal compliance to embody virtues like compassion, honesty, and integrity. Islamic legal theory emphasises that ethical conduct is not merely about following rules but embodying virtuous qualities.[33] The ethical imperative infuses legal injunctions with moral significance, guiding individuals towards righteous conduct. This perspective is supported by the Qur'an, which states, "He has succeeded who purifies it, and he has failed who corrupts it."[34]

Ibn Sina provides a comprehensive framework for the soul's development towards achieving human perfection. According to Ibn Sina, the soul progresses through several stages to reach the state of the Active Intellect, characterised by a process of knowledge acquisition. The soul's journey begins with sensory perceptions through the five senses, which produce images that feed into the imagination. These images can be good or bad, and the quality of imagination influences the way of thinking. This process involves not just rationality but also the ethical and moral conduct (*adab*) that

Selangor: The Other Press, 2003), Malaysian edition.

[33] Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Maqasid al-Shariah: The Objectives of Islamic Law* (London: Islamic Texts Society, 2008), 105-110; Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 147-158; Wael B. Hallaq, *The Origins and Evolution of Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 219-225.

[34] *The Qur'an* 91:9-10.

affects actions. Proper nurturing of the soul through knowledge and ethical behaviour leads to higher phases of the intellect, ultimately bringing the soul closer to God.[35]

The concept of the soul, or *nafs* in Islamic terminology, plays a crucial role in the ethical dimension of *fiqh*. In Islamic psychology, the soul is not an abstract entity but a dynamic force that influences human behaviour and spiritual development.[36] Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas emphasises the purification of the soul (*tazkiyah al-nafs*) as essential for achieving true knowledge and ethical conduct. He argues that education and ethical training should aim to develop the soul's virtues, leading to intellectual and spiritual refinement. According to al-Attas, the soul's ethical and intellectual development is crucial for realising the holistic objectives of Islamic law, including justice, wisdom, and societal harmony.[37]

The concept of *tazkiyah al-nafs*, which means the purification of the soul, is fundamental in this ethical journey. However, in the context of this article, *tazkiyah* does not refer to Sufi or mystical practices, but rather to the purification of our intentions and actions to align with Islamic ethical standards. *Tazkiyah* involves cleansing the soul of immoral qualities and nurturing virtues such as sincerity, patience, and humility.[38] Without this inner purification, adherence to the *Sharīʿah* may become superficial, lacking the moral and spiritual essence necessary for achieving *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*.[39] The

[35] Ibn Sina, *The Metaphysics of Healing*, trans. Michael E. Marmura (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2005), 85-90.

[36] Malik Badri, *Islamic Psychology: Human Behavior and Experience from an Islamic Perspective* (London: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2013).

[37] Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1999).

[38] Faysal Burhan, "*Al-tazkiyah* (inner-self purification) – the gate to prosperity," *Center for Islamic Studies*, 2002, https://islamic-study.org/al-tazkiyah-inner-self-purification/.

[39] Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Madarij al-salikin bayna manazil iyyaka na'budu wa-iyyaka nasta'in*, tahqiq Muhammad Hamid al-Fiqi (Cairo: Maktabat Dar al-Turath, 1980); Al-Ghazālī. *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn*; Mulla Sadra Shirazi, *al-Hikmat al-muta'aliyah fi al-asfar al-arba'ah*, tahqiq Muhammad Khwansari (Tehran: Mu'assasah-yi Mutali'at va Tahqiqat-i Farhangi, 1981); Mohammad Hashim Kamali, "Maqasid al-Shariah: the objectives of Islamic Law," *Islam*, 2022,

ethical journey within *fiqh* entails a continual struggle against the lower self's impulses, aiming to elevate the soul towards virtuous manifestations, thereby fulfilling the higher objectives of Islamic law. As Norman suggests, this process is integral to achieving both intellectual and spiritual capacities in modern Islamic education.[40]

The Qur'an underscores the importance of purifying the soul as means to achieve righteousness and divine approval. Verses such as "And do not mix the truth with falsehood or conceal the truth while you know [it]" (Qur'an 2:42) provide ethical guidance that aligns with *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*, promoting values like justice, compassion, and intellectual pursuit.

Contemporary psychological theories, such as Kohlberg's stages of moral development, emphasise the progression from basic obedience to advanced ethical reasoning. This parallels the Islamic concept of developing the soul through stages of moral and intellectual growth. Modern psychospiritual frameworks highlight the importance of integrating psychological well-being with spiritual growth, aligning with Islamic teachings on *tazkiyah al-nafs*. Research shows that spiritual practices enhance ethical behaviour and mental health, supporting the holistic objectives of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*.[41]

The application of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* in medical ethics demonstrates how ethical frameworks based on the soul's purification can address complex moral dilemmas. For example, the principle of preserving life (*hifz al-nafs*) guides medical professionals in prioritising patient well-being while making ethically sound decisions. Scholars like Jasser Auda and Tariq Ramadan have expanded on the traditional *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* theory to develop frameworks that integrate ethical considerations into modern contexts. These frameworks emphasise the need for a holistic approach that includes the soul's spiritual and ethical development[42].

Islamic psychospirituality combines spiritual and

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https://islam101.net/index.php/shariah/141-maqasidalshariah.

[40] Nurul Ain Norman, "Ibn Sina's Theory".

[41] Lawrence Kohlberg, *The Philosophy of Moral Development: Moral Stages and the Idea of Justice* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981).

[42] Jasser Auda, *Maqasid Al-Shariah as Philosophy*; Tariq Ramadan, *Radical Reform.*

psychological components based on Islamic principles, emphasising the purification of the soul for well-being and happiness. This approach aligns with *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*'s goal of promoting the greater good of humanity. Research by M. A. Abd Razak et al. (2023) on Islamic psychospiritual theory highlights the significant role of psycho-spirituality in developing *insaniah*, leading to the preservation of al-*kulliyat al-khams* (the core of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*).[43]

Ethics is fundamental to achieving *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* as it ensures that actions align with higher moral objectives. Ethical behaviour rooted in the purification of the soul leads to a just and compassionate society. Ethical frameworks that incorporate the soul's purification guide individuals and institutions in making decisions that uphold justice, equity, and societal well-being. This holistic approach is essential for addressing modern challenges while staying true to Islamic principles.

The development of the soul plays a pivotal role in achieving *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* by fostering ethical virtues and intellectual excellence. Ibn Sina's theory of the soul, al-Attas's perspectives, Qur'anic guidance, and contemporary psychological insights collectively underscore the necessity of ethical and spiritual refinement. This holistic approach ensures that individuals and communities align their actions with divine objectives, promoting justice, compassion, and societal well-being. Through this integration, the soul not only adheres to legal injunctions but also embodies the higher ethical and moral principles that underpin Islamic jurisprudence. While the role of the soul emphasises the theoretical foundation and principles necessary for achieving *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah,* soulful transformation focuses on the practical and transformative processes required to actualise these principles in individuals and society which will be discussed below.

[43] M. A Abd Razak, S. A. Rahman, M. I. Ismail, and A. R. Zainal, "Islamic psychospiritual theory according to the perspective of Maqasid al-Sharia," *Islamiyyat* 45, no. 1 (2023): 69-79.

## 8. Realising *Maqāṣid al-Sharīʿah* through Soulful Transformation

Building on the discussion of the soul's crucial role in achieving *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*, the concept of soulful transformation is essential. Realising *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* through soulful transformation embodies a fundamental principle deeply entrenched in Islamic ethics and jurisprudence. This approach emphasises the holistic nature of Islamic law, which not only seeks to regulate external actions but also aims to nurture the inner spiritual state of individuals. By aligning one's soul with the higher objectives of Islamic law—such as justice, compassion, and wisdom—believers can achieve a profound transformation that transcends mere legal compliance. The soulful transformation can lead to the realisation of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*, fostering a more ethical, harmonious, and spiritually enriched Muslim community.

Islamic psychology illuminates the intricate dynamics of the soul, distinguishing between its primal inclinations and its tranquil, submissive state. Al-Ghazali, in his *Iḥyāʾ* expounds upon this, elucidating the perpetual struggle against base desires and the pursuit of spiritual serenity. He delves into the purification of the soul (*tazkiyah al-nafs*) as a transformative process essential for spiritual growth and moral excellence,[44] which lies at the heart of Islamic psycho-spirituality. This issue is extensively discussed by al-Ghazali in his works such as "*Madarij al-Salikin*" (The Pathways of the Seekers). Ibn Qayyim emphasises the necessity of inner refinement for achieving spiritual elevation and ethical excellence[45].

Furthermore, the objectives of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* converge with the ethos of soulful transformation, aiming to foster societal welfare and individual well-being. Ibn Ashur's monumental work "*Maqasid al-Shari'ah al-Islamiyyah*" delves into these objectives, emphasising justice, mercy, and the preservation of human dignity as central tenets of Islamic law. He elucidates how the pursuit of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* necessitates soulful transformation as means to achieve these noble objectives.[46]

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[44] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn*.

[45] I. Q. al-Jawziyya, *Madarij al-Salikin (The Paths of the Seekers): A Parallel English-Arabic*, trans., O. Anjum (Brill, 2020).

[46] M. T. Ibn 'Ashur, *Maqasid al-Shari'ah al-Islamiyyah*, ed., M.T. al-Misawi (Kuala

The synergy between Islamic psycho-spirituality and *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* underscores their complementary roles in shaping a just and harmonious society. Scholars like Nasr, although primarily focused on the spiritual aspects in "Islamic Spirituality: Foundations," highlight concepts of soulful transformation that can be related to the realisation of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* by demonstrating how spiritual refinement fosters the attainment of higher objectives, ultimately promoting the greater good of humanity[47]. Similarly, while Kamali's "Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence" does not directly address the soul and ethics, his thorough discussion of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* provides a framework that can be connected to these aspects, underscoring the importance of integrating ethical dimensions with legal principles to achieve comprehensive justice and societal welfare.[48] Additionally, Al-Faruqi's *Al-Tawḥīd*: *Its Implications for Thought and Life* emphasises the holistic nature of Islamic thought, advocating for a balance between spiritual development and legal obligations to create a cohesive society.[49]

The integration of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* with contemporary ethical frameworks demonstrates the enduring relevance and adaptability of Islamic jurisprudence to modern challenges. Contemporary studies, such as those by Mergaliyev et al., illustrate how *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* can be applied to assess and enhance the ethical performance of Islamic financial institutions. By proposing a multidimensional framework that links business performance to the ethical vision of Islam, these studies emphasise the importance of ensuring that firms contribute to human welfare, social stability, and economic justice, rather than solely focusing on financial returns. This approach highlights five pillars: wealth, posterity, intellect, faith, and the human self, each contributing to a holistic and ethically sound business model.[50]

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Lumpur: al-Basa'ir, 1998).

[47] S. H. Nasr, *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations* (London: Routledge, 1987).

[48] M. H. Kamali, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1991).

[49] I. R. Al-Faruqi, *Al-Tawḥīd: Its Implications for Thought and Life* (Herndon: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1992.) Accessed May 2, 2024. https://archive.org/details/altawhiditsimpli0000alfa.

[50] A. Mergaliyev et al., "Higher ethical objective (maqasid al-shari'ah) augmented

Similarly, Mohadi and Tarshany explore the application of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* to the ethical challenges posed by artificial intelligence (AI). They argue that the rapid advancements in AI technology necessitate a re-evaluation of ethical standards, particularly concerning issues of privacy and manipulation. Their study suggests that application of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* to AI development can help address these concerns by prioritising fundamental human values such as fairness and the protection of privacy. This perspective advocates for a comprehensive Islamic ethics-based approach, ensuring that technological advancements align with the ethical principles of Islam, thereby contributing positively to the global discourse on AI ethics.[51]

Nurul Ain Norman's work on Ibn Sina's theory of the soul highlights how his logical-metaphysical framework can be applied to modern Islamic education, integrating Islamic monotheistic principles with Aristotle's classifications. She describes the soul's progression from sensory perception to imagination, rational thinking, and intuition, culminating in the Active Intellect. This progression supports educational curricula that enhance intellectual and spiritual capacities. Norman's taxonomy, inspired by Ibn Sina, addresses contemporary educational needs while retaining religious and ethical values. Norman also developed the Children Soul Development Model (CSD) to instil ethical and intellectual virtues in early childhood education, aligning with Islamic principles to address modern educational challenges.[52] This approach aligns with *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* by promoting the preservation of intellect (*'aql*) and

framework for Islamic banks: assessing ethical performance and exploring its determinants," *Journal of Business Ethics* 170 (2021): 797–834. Accessed May 2, 2024. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10551-019-04331-4.

[51] M. Mohadi and Y. Tarshany, "Maqasid Al-Shari'ah and the ethics of Artificial Intelligence," *Journal of Contemporary Maqasid Studies* 2, no. 2 (2023). https://doi.org/10.

[52] Nurul Ain Norman, "Ibn Sina's theory of the soul: A taxonomy of Islamic education," *ICR Journal* 12, no. 2 (2021): 275-289; Nurul Ain Norman, Ahmad Zuhdi Ismail, and Zaharah Hussin, "Evaluation of the Children Soul Development Model (CSD) based on Ibnu Sina Theory of Soul," *ATTARBAWIY: Malaysian Online Journal of Education* 3, no. 1 (2019): 20-33.; Nurul Ain Norman, "Implementing the CSD Model in early childhood education," *O-JiE: Online Journal of Islamic Education* 4, no. 2 (2021): 88-102.

fostering moral and ethical development in accordance with Islamic teachings.

In essence, the pursuit of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* through soulful transformation represents a holistic approach to individual and societal flourishing. This approach calls for deep introspection and a commitment to ethical refinement, guided by Islamic principles and spiritual insights as expounded upon by renowned scholars throughout Islamic history. By aligning personal and communal actions with the higher objectives of the *Sharīʿah*, individuals and institutions can achieve a profound transformation that upholds justice, fosters ethical integrity, and contributes to the overall well-being of society. This integrated approach highlights the timeless nature of Islamic ethical principles and their capacity to adapt to and address contemporary issues, ensuring that progress and innovation are balanced with moral integrity and the greater good of humanity.

## 9. Analytical Findings

### 9.1. Interpretations of the Soul in *Fiqh*

Table 1.0: Comparative Analysis of Traditionalist and Modernist Perspectives on the Soul in Islamic Jurisprudence

| Aspect | Traditionalist Views | Modernist Perspectives |
|---|---|---|
| Nature of the Soul | Inherently inclined towards virtue and righteousness. | Emphasises psychological and emotional dimensions. |
| | Divine origin and potential for good. | Susceptible to growth and corruption based on external influences. |
| Purpose of the Soul | Attaining spiritual perfection and closeness to God. | Balancing worldly duties and spiritual obligations. |
| | Preservation of faith and spiritual growth. | Prioritising social justice, intellectual development, and life. |
| Ethical Dilemmas | Emphasis on religious rituals and moral principles. | Considers psychological and social well-being. |

| Aspect | Traditionalist Views | Modernist Perspectives |
|---|---|---|
| | Preservation of life and adherence to divine commands. | Balancing life-preserving measures with quality of life. |
| Balancing Objectives | Prioritising personal piety and moral integrity. | Promoting social equity, human rights, and environmental sustainability. |
| | Focus on individual ethical conduct and religious adherence. | Balancing individual and collective objectives. |
| Dynamic Interpretive Tradition | Continuous reinterpretation in the light of contemporary challenges. | Ensuring relevance and responsiveness to new ethical dilemmas |
| | Evolving interpretive tradition. | Ongoing dialogue between classical principles and modern realities. |

The analysis of various interpretations of the concept of the soul within Islamic jurisprudence reveals diverse perspectives on its nature, function, and significance. Through a meta-analysis of primary and secondary sources, it is evident that interpretations range from traditionalist views emphasising the soul's role in spiritual development to modernist perspectives focusing on its psychological dimensions. Descriptive statistical analysis based on Table 1.0 indicates a prevalence of traditionalist interpretations among classical scholars, while contemporary scholars exhibit a more nuanced understanding that incorporates psychological and sociological aspects. This nuanced understanding further explores the nature and purpose of the soul, ethical dilemmas, balancing objectives and dynamic interpretive description:

a) Nature of the Soul: Traditionalist views often consider the soul as inherently inclined towards virtue and righteousness. This perspective emphasises the soul's divine origin and its inherent potential for good, aligning ethical priorities with spiritual purity and moral rectitude. Modernist perspectives may highlight the soul's psychological and emotional dimensions, viewing it as susceptible to both growth and corruption based on external influences and internal choices. This approach integrates

contemporary psychological insights, affecting how ethical objectives are formulated to support mental and emotional well-being.

b) Purpose of the Soul: In traditionalist interpretations, the soul's primary purpose is seen as attaining spiritual perfection and achieving closeness to God. This view prioritises objectives like the preservation of faith (*hifẓ al-dīn*) and the promotion of spiritual growth, ensuring that ethical decisions enhance one's spiritual journey. Modernist interpretations might stress the soul's role in fulfilling both worldly duties and spiritual obligations. This dual focus leads to a broader prioritisation of objectives, including social justice, intellectual development, and the preservation of life, reflecting a more integrated approach to human welfare.

c) Ethical Dilemmas: Traditional interpretations often guide responses to ethical dilemmas by emphasising adherence to religious rituals and moral principles that safeguard the soul's purity. For instance, in medical ethics, decisions might prioritise preserving life and adhering to divine commands. Contemporary interpretations may navigate ethical dilemmas by considering the soul's psychological and social well-being. In issues like end-of-life care, this could mean balancing life-preserving measures with the quality of life and the dignity of the dying process.

d) Balancing Objectives: Traditionalist approaches might prioritise objectives that ensure personal piety and moral integrity, sometimes at the expense of broader social or material interests. This often results in a focus on individual ethical conduct and religious adherence. Modernist approaches seek to balance individual and collective objectives, promoting social equity, human rights, and environmental sustainability. This balance ensures that ethical decisions contribute to both personal development and societal welfare, aligning with a holistic view of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*.

e) Dynamic Interpretive Tradition: The dynamic nature of Islamic jurisprudence allows for continuous reinterpretation of the soul's role in the light of contemporary challenges. This evolving interpretive tradition ensures that *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* remains

relevant and responsive to new ethical dilemmas, such as those posed by technological advancements and social changes. This adaptability fosters an ongoing dialogue between classical principles and modern realities, ensuring that ethical frameworks remain robust and applicable across different contexts and times.

### 9.2. Influence on *Maqāṣid al-Sharīʿah*

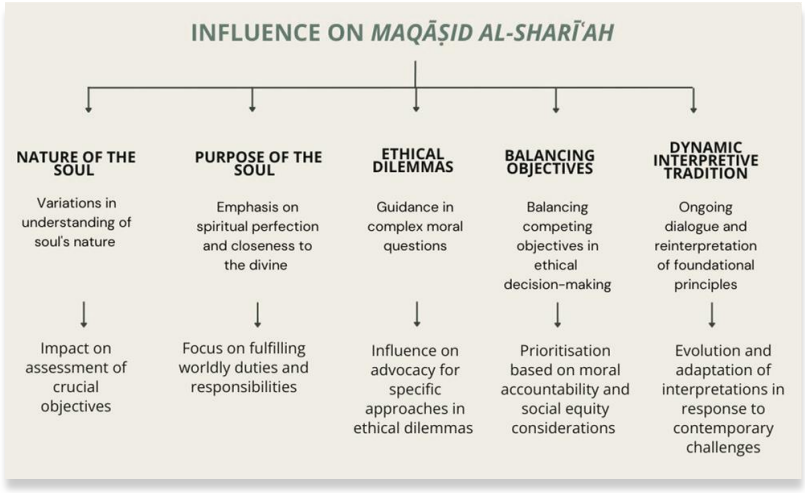


Figure 1.0: Interplay of Interpretations: Influence of the Soul on *Maqāṣid al-Sharīʿah*

Based on a meta-analysis of Figure 1.0, it is revealed that different interpretations of the soul significantly influence the understanding and prioritisation of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*, especially in contemporary ethical dilemmas. These interpretations influence ethical reasoning and decision-making by providing varying perspectives on the human soul's nature, purpose, and significance. Here are how these interpretations impact the understanding and prioritisation of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*:

a) **Nature of the Soul:** Different interpretations of the soul within *fiqh* may vary in their understanding of its nature. For instance, some interpretations may view the soul as inherently inclined towards virtue and righteousness, while others may emphasise its susceptibility to corruption and deviation. This understanding

affects how scholars prioritise *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah's* objectives, shaping their assessment of which objectives are most crucial for safeguarding the soul's well-being.

b) **Purpose of the Soul:** Interpretations of the soul also influence perceptions of its purpose and ultimate destination. Some interpretations emphasise the soul's journey towards spiritual perfection and closeness to the divine, prioritising objectives such as preserving faith and promoting spiritual growth. Others may focus more on the soul's role in fulfilling worldly duties and responsibilities, prioritising objectives related to social justice, preservation of life, and the protection of intellect.
c) **Ethical Dilemmas:** In contemporary ethical dilemmas, varying interpretations of the soul within *fiqh* guide scholars and practitioners in navigating complex moral questions. For example, in issues related to medical ethics, such as end-of-life care or organ donation, interpretations that prioritise preserving life may advocate for more aggressive medical interventions, while interpretations emphasising the spiritual development of the soul may prioritise the quality of life and the dignity of the dying process.
d) **Balancing Objectives:** The interplay between interpretations of the soul and *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* equires scholars to balance competing objectives in ethical decision-making. For instance, in cases involving the pursuit of justice, interpretations emphasising the soul's moral accountability may prioritise objectives related to social equity and protecting individual rights, even if it means sacrificing specific material interests.
e) **Dynamic Interpretive Tradition:** Islamic jurisprudence is characterised by a dynamic interpretive tradition, allowing for ongoing dialogue and reinterpretation of foundational principles in the light of contemporary challenges. Therefore, different interpretations of the soul within *fiqh* continue to evolve and adapt, shaping new perspectives on the prioritisation of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* in response to changing ethical dilemmas.

In essence, different interpretations of the concept of the soul within Islamic jurisprudence profoundly influence the understanding and

prioritisation of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*, guiding ethical reasoning and decision-making in response to contemporary challenges Muslim communities worldwide face.

## 9.3. Ethical Implications

Table 2.0: Comparison of Ethical Implications in Traditionalist and Modernist Frameworks within Islamic Jurisprudence.

| | Ethical Implications | Traditionalist Framework | Modernist Framework |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Emphasis on Moral Virtue | High | Moderate |
| 2 | Focus on Inner Transformation | High | Moderate |
| 3 | Integration of Ethics and Law | High | Moderate |
| 4 | Commitment to Social Justice | Moderate | High |
| 5 | Promotion of Compassion and Mercy | Moderate | High |
| 6 | Balancing Material and Spiritual Needs | Moderate | High |

Based on Table 2.0, the descriptive statistical analysis provides a comparative overview of how traditionalist and modernist frameworks within Islamic jurisprudence emphasise various ethical implications related to prioritising the spiritual development of the soul within the context of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*. These differences are reflected in their approaches to emphasise on moral virtue, inner transformation, integration of ethics and law, commitment to social justice, promotion of compassion and mercy, or balancing material and spiritual needs within Islamic jurisprudence.

1. **Emphasis on Moral Virtue:** Prioritising spiritual development underscores the importance of cultivating moral virtues such as compassion, integrity, and humility. Traditionalist frameworks often consider the soul as inherently inclined towards virtue and righteousness, emphasising personal piety and moral rectitude. Ethical decision-making in this context is guided by divine command theory, aligning actions with religious duties and spiritual purity. Conversely, modernist frameworks incorporate a nuanced understanding of the soul, integrating psychological and sociological aspects. This perspective acknowledges the soul's susceptibility to both growth and corruption based on internal and external influences, leading to ethical imperatives that extend

beyond religious obligations to include psychological and emotional well-being. This perspective aligns with findings from the paper "Ethical dimension of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* and its implication to human capital development", which explores how the *Sharīʿah* objectives refine conduct, inspire morality, and shape human capital development.[53]

2. **Focus on Inner Transformation:** Spiritual development prioritisation highlights the significance of inner transformation and character refinement. Ethical decision-making frameworks within Islamic jurisprudence emphasize the importance of intentions (*niyah*) and the purification of the heart (*tazkiyah*), guiding individuals to act sincerely and with integrity in their interactions with others. Traditionalist interpretations often prioritise religious rituals and moral principles that safeguard the soul's purity, such as favouring aggressive treatments in medical ethics to preserve life. Modernist interpretations navigate ethical dilemmas by considering the soul's psychological and social well-being, balancing life-preserving measures with considerations of quality of life and dignity in the dying process. Ethical decisions in this context also consider broader social implications, promoting actions that enhance communal well-being and social justice. For instance, the development of an Islamic Psychospiritual Scale for drug addicts, as discussed by Che Zarrina Saʾari et al. illustrates how inner transformation and spiritual well-being are addressed in modern contexts, integrating psychological and spiritual aspects to guide individuals towards recovery and holistic wellness.[54]
3. **Integration of Ethics and Law:** Prioritising spiritual development encourages the integration of ethical principles with legal rulings. Islamic jurisprudence recognises that ethical conduct cannot be reduced to mere adherence to legal prescriptions; instead, it demands a holistic strategy that considers the broader ethical

[53] M. A. Nasir, "Ethical dimension of maqāṣid al-sharīʿah and its implication to human capital development." *International Journal of Islamic Studies and Humanities* 4, no. 1 (2021): 20-31. Accessed May 5, 2024. http://journal2.uad.ac.id/index.php/ijish/index.

[54] Che Zarrina Saʾari et al., "The development of Islamic Psychospiritual Scale for drug addicts," *Afkar* 22, no. 2 (2020): 279-312. Universiti Malaya. https://doi.org/10.22452/afkar.vol24no2.4.

implications of one's actions on individuals and society. This integration is evident in the dynamic interpretive tradition of Islamic jurisprudence, which allows for continuous reinterpretation of the soul's role in the light of contemporary challenges. Traditionalist frameworks maintain a steady adherence to classical interpretations, ensuring ethical decisions remain rooted in long-standing religious principles. Modernist frameworks embrace an evolving interpretive tradition, ensuring that *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* remains relevant and responsive to new ethical dilemmas. For instance, the article "Maqāṣidī Models for an 'Islamic' Medical Ethics", Padela critically analyses how leading thinkers expand upon traditional *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* theory to develop frameworks for medical ethics, illustrating the integration of ethics and law within Islamic jurisprudence.[55]

4. **Commitment to Social Justice:** Spiritual development prioritisation fosters a commitment to social justice and equity. Ethical decision-making frameworks within Islamic jurisprudence advocate for the fair treatment of all individuals, regardless of their social status or background, and emphasise the importance of addressing systemic injustices that undermine human dignity and well-being. In this regard, traditionalist approaches often prioritise objectives that ensure personal piety and moral integrity, sometimes at the expense of broader social or material interests. Modernist approaches seek to balance individual and collective objectives, promoting social equity, human rights, and environmental sustainability. Ethical decision-making here involves a holistic view, ensuring that actions contribute to both personal spiritual development and societal welfare. The "*Maqāṣid al-Sharīʿah* Guidance for Islamic Capital Market Malaysia" by Securities Commission Malaysia exemplifies how prioritising spiritual development fosters a commitment to social justice and equity. It emphasises addressing social equity and promoting ethical conduct in Islamic Capital Market activities. This aligns with *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*'s ethical principles, advocating for fair treatment regardless of social status.[56] For further insight into the

[55] Padela, *Islamic Bioethics.*

[56] Securities Commission Malaysia, *Maqāṣid al-Sharīʿah Guidance for Islamic*

integration of spirituality and morality within Islamic economic education and training, consider exploring the work of M. J. Tavakoli, in Chapter 5: The Role of Spirituality and Morality in the Islamic Model of Economic Education and Training' found in the *Handbook of Ethics of Islamic Economics and Finance*.[57]

5. **Promotion of Compassion and Mercy:** Prioritising spiritual development promotes values of compassion and mercy towards others. Ethical decision-making within Islamic jurisprudence is guided by the principle of *rahmah* (mercy), encouraging individuals to extend kindness and empathy to those in need and to strive for the well-being of the broader community. This approach, aligning with both traditionalist and modernist interpretations that emphasise ethical imperatives through the lens of divine command theory and contemporary psychological insights, finds support in studies like Bahri, which delve into the intersection of ethical soul development and *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* attainment.[58]
6. **Balancing Material and Spiritual Needs:** Prioritising spiritual development entails balancing material and spiritual needs in ethical decision-making. Islamic jurisprudence recognises the importance of attending to both the material welfare and the spiritual growth of individuals and communities, guiding individuals to pursue worldly objectives that align with higher spiritual ideals. In traditionalist interpretations, the soul's primary purpose is to attain spiritual perfection and closeness to God, prioritising objectives such as the preservation of faith (*hifẓ al-dīn*) and the promotion of spiritual growth. Modernist interpretations stress a dual purpose for the soul: fulfilling both worldly duties and spiritual obligations. This leads to a broader prioritisation of ethical objectives, including social justice, intellectual development, and

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*Capital Market Malaysia*. 2023. Accessed May 13, 2024. https://www.sc.com.my/api/documentms/download.ashx?id=3e10c1d3-823e-4dc3-b7ae-c3652104d2cf.

[57] M. J. Tavakoli, "The role of spirituality and morality in the Islamic model of economic education and training," In *Handbook of Ethics of Islamic Economics and Finance*, ed., A. Mirakhor et al., 91-114 (Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2020). https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110593419-005.

[58] A. Bahri, *Exploring Islamic Economics* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Research Publishing, 2022).

> the preservation of life, ensuring a balance between spiritual development and worldly responsibilities as discussed in S. I. Tag el-Din's "Sustainable human development ethics: A Quranic perspective" from the book *Handbook of Ethics of Islamic Economics and Finance*.[59]

Both traditionalist and modernist approaches reflect a commitment to aligning ethical decisions with the overarching goals of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*, ensuring that spiritual and worldly objectives are harmoniously pursued. Studies illustrate how these principles can address modern challenges by emphasising holistic development. The ethical journey within Islamic jurisprudence involves the purification and elevation of the soul, aligning one's internal state with the *Sharīʿah*'s higher objectives. By nurturing the soul and fostering spiritual transformation, individuals and institutions can achieve profound ethical alignment, transcending mere legal compliance and leading to a more just, harmonious, and spiritually enriched society. This approach highlights the timeless nature of Islamic ethical principles and their adaptability to contemporary issues, ensuring that progress and innovation are balanced with moral integrity and the greater good of humanity. Further studies are warranted to explore the practical applications of these findings in developing ethical frameworks and policies within Islamic jurisprudence.

## 10. Conclusion

Islamic jurisprudence intricately integrates ethical dimensions, guiding individuals toward spiritual fulfilment and moral excellence. Central to this endeavour is *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*, which signifies a transformative journey of the soul, requiring the transcendence of the lower self's limitations and the embrace of higher virtues. By internalising ethical principles and embodying noble values, individuals actively contribute to fostering justice, compassion, and human flourishing in society. Thus, within *fiqh*, the ethical

[59] S. Tag el-Din, "Sustainable human development ethics: A Quranic perspective," In *Handbook of Ethics of Islamic Economics and Finance*, ed., A. Mirakhor et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2020), 115-131. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110593419-006.

imperative serves as both a legal mandate and a moral compass, directing humanity towards the divine ideal.

The nuanced understanding of the soul's nature and purpose, as discussed in both traditionalist and modernist frameworks, highlights the dynamic and adaptable nature of Islamic jurisprudence. Traditionalist views focus on the soul's inherent inclination towards virtue and spiritual perfection, while modernist perspectives incorporate psychological and sociological dimensions, reflecting a broader approach to human welfare.

This alignment between ethical guidance and legal mandate is further explored in Bahri's research, which delves into the intersection of ethical soul development and *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* attainment. Bahri's study sheds light on embedded ethical imperatives within Islamic jurisprudence and examines concepts such as *maşlahah* and *mafsadah*, offering insights into discerning benefit and harm according to al-Ghazali's perspective.

The integration of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* into various fields, such as medical ethics and economic development, demonstrates its applicability in addressing contemporary ethical dilemmas. Scholars like Jasser Auda and Tariq Ramadan have expanded traditional *maqāṣid* theory to include frameworks that integrate ethical considerations into modern contexts, promoting holistic and ethically sound decision-making.

In summary, *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* is a crucial component of Islamic law that provides a deeper understanding of the objectives and purposes of Islamic rules. It offers a comprehensive framework that can help interpret and apply Islamic law effectively to achieve desired outcomes while ensuring that the spirit of the law is maintained. Importantly, this analysis does not aim to differentiate between traditional and modern interpretations to identify the weaknesses of the former or the superiority of the latter. Instead, it seeks to explore how the *Maqāṣid* aligns with contemporary demands and plays a pivotal role in addressing modern challenges.

This evolving approach, exemplified in Jasser Auda's recent work, utilises *tafsir maqāṣidi* to derive contemporary solutions using the Qur'anic framework. Here, the soul, as per Islamic belief, serves as the ethical and spiritual cornerstone, facilitating the connection

between Qur'anic principles and modern realities. By nurturing the soul, individuals can ensure their interpretations and applications of the Qur'an are aligned with divine objectives, promoting justice, compassion, and holistic well-being in the modern world. Through this spiritual and ethical lens, encompassing considerations of the soul, *tafsir maqāṣidi* provides a dynamic and adaptable approach, ensuring that Islamic jurisprudence remains relevant and responsive to the changing contexts of our times.

The prioritisation of the soul's spiritual development fosters a commitment to social justice, compassion, and the balance of material and spiritual needs. This ethical imperative within *fiqh* ensures that actions align with higher moral objectives, contributing to a more just, harmonious, and spiritually enriched society.

In essence, the study underscores that achieving *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* through soulful transformation represents a holistic approach to individual and societal flourishing. By nurturing the soul and fostering ethical and spiritual refinement, individuals and institutions can achieve profound transformation, upholding justice, fostering ethical integrity, and contributing to the overall well-being of society. This integrated approach highlights the timeless nature of Islamic ethical principles and their capacity to adapt to and address contemporary issues, ensuring that progress and innovation are balanced with moral integrity and the greater good of humanity.

# THE CONFUSED WHALE OF THE CHINA SEA: WATER SYMBOLISM IN THE WORKS OF HAMZAH FANSURI

*Amir H. Zekrgoo*[1]

**Abstract**

*Perhaps the most valuable contribution of Hamzah Fansuri to the elevation of intellectual and spiritual traditions of Islam was his tireless efforts to create a harmonious atmosphere between the stern followers of religious law (shari'ah) and the Sufi ways of self-purification (ṭariqah). The renowned 16th century Malay mystic used simple language to communicate his thoughts to average audience. In order to add clarity to his arguments he often resorted to symbols and metaphors that made his discussions more appealing. This essay begins with a brief introductory remark about the importance of water in religious traditions, followed by a passage on Sufi symbolism in Hamzah's writings. Among the wide range of symbolic expressions adopted by Hamzah, water-related-metaphors occupy the highest place – both from the viewpoint of their frequent appearance, and in terms of profoundness of their suggestive meanings. Hence, the main body of the paper focuses on water symbolism in Hamzah's treatises and poems, which is presented under seven headings namely: Waters of Life, Ocean of Unity, Currents of Creation, Waves of Manifestation, Bubbles of Identity, The Confused Whale, and The Brilliant Fish.*

**Keywords:** Sufism, symbolism, Hamzah Fansuri, *syair,* water, ocean, sea, wave, bubble, *Sharāb al-'Āshiqīn, Asrār al-'Ārifīn, al-Muntahī*

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## Water in Religious Beliefs and Rituals

Water is the most prolific symbol in world's major religions. According to the Bible, there was darkness and water before God created the world (Genesis, 1:2). Hindus believe that at the beginning there was all darkness with no distinguishing sign, and everything existed as water (Rigveda, 10:129); also, a number of deities in Hindu mythology manifest in various forms of water- river, rain and sea.[2] Islamic cosmology connects the creation of all forms of life to water (Quran 21:30).

Water has been used as cleansing agent – both for the body and the soul. A study of world religions from the ancient times to the present reveals the importance of water as a medium for spiritual purification.[3,4] Purification in this sense signifies transformation from one state to another.[5] Religious rituals often involve water. In Chinese traditions, preparation for ceremonial purificatory rites involves water. The Hindu ritual bathing in the holy waters of the Ganges is believed to cleanse the bather from the stain of sins. Christian Baptism is a symbol of rebirth in a purified state. Ablution with clean water is an obligatory rite for Muslims to perform daily prayers and for many other Islamic rituals.[6]

## Hamzah and the Sufi Tradition

Sufism, or Islamic mysticism, is a fluid concept that is deeply rooted in intuition, devotion and divine love. Discussions related to Sufi path are often multi-layered and symbolic. The Arabic and Persian terms for Sufism is '*irfān* or *taṣawwuf*, which denote – vaguely

[2] See Amir H. Zekrgoo, *Symbolism in Oriental Arts: Vol.4: Water Deities & Mythical Sea Creatures*, (MATN Publishing, Iran Academy of Art, Tehran, 2016), 15-46.

[3] 'He caused water to descend on you from heaven, to clean you therewith, to remove from you the stain of Satan, to strengthen your heart, and to plant your feet firmly there with' (Quran, 8:11).

[4] See Amir H. Zekrgoo, "Waters of Purification," in *Water: The First Element*, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur: Balai Seni Lukis Negara, 2003), 14-16.

[5] See Amir H. Zekrgoo, "Waters of Transformation," in *Water: The First Element*, National Art Gallery, (Kuala Lumpur: Balai Seni Lukis Negara, 2003), 22-24.

[6] See Amir H. Zekrgoo, "Waters of Purification," in *Water: The First Element*, National Art Gallery, (Kuala Lumpur: Balai Seni Lukis Negara, 2003), 14-16.

speaking – to Islam's mystical tradition. Symbols and metaphors are important components of Sufi literature. Sufis aim at attaining God-realization – an experiential knowledge of divinity – through contemplation, meditation and invocation (*dhikr*). This experience is esoteric in nature, and therefore requires a terminology that is distinct from that which is normally adopted in exact sciences and rational discourses. In fact, any expression of metaphysical nature ought to be symbolic.

Hamzah Fansuri, the renowned 16th century Islamic scholar and mystic of the Malay world, was a follower and commentator of Sufi tradition. Born in Fansur (also known as Barus) on the west bank of Sumatra, he lost his parents at a very young age. Hamzah lived a life of wandering and detachment, traveled extensively and visited various places in the Middle East, Malay Peninsula, and Java. His period of residence in *Shahr-i-Naw* (or *Shahr-i-Nāv*) in Ayutthaya Kingdom of Siam, left a life-changing impression on Hamzah's worldview so much so that he referred to the city as the place of his rebirth – where 'he acquired his existence' (*Sharabu'l-'Āshiqīn:* 5).

Hamzah's writings exhibit his knowledge of, and familiarity with, Persian language and literature, which he learned during his stay in *Shahr-i-Nāv* (شهر ناو),[7] where a big Persian community had settled.[8] He was the first writer who applied Malay language to express his ideas in a persuasive and systematic manner. His writings, which greatly influenced Muslim scholars and Sufis in South East Asian region, include three treatises, namely *Sharabu'l-'Āshiqīn,*[9] *Asrāru'l-'Ārifīn*[10] and *Al-Muntahī,*[11] which are now

[7] *Shahr-i-Naw* (شهر نو) and *Shahr-i-Nāv* (شهر ناو) are both Persian names. *Shahr-i-Naw* means 'New City' and *Shahr-i-Nāv* means 'Port City' – city of the ships (Nāv = ship). The author believes that perhaps *Shahr-i-Nāv* is a more accurate recording of the city's name.

[8] For a detailed account, see Amir H. Zekrgoo & Leyla H. Tajer (2023), *Tracing Persian Sufi Literature in Ḥamzah Fanṣūrī's Writings,* (Kuala Lumpur: The Other Press, 2023), 23-60.

[9] *Sharābu'l-'Āshiqīn* (The Drink of Lovers) mainly revolves around *Sharī'ah* (Religious Law), *Ṭarīqah* (The Path) and Ḥaqīqah (The Truth), and the states of thanksgiving and love.

[10] *Asrāru'l-'Ārifīn* (The Secrets of the Mystics) is devoted to elaboration of God's

available in romanized Malay, as well as English and Persian translations.[12] Hamzah also has a collection of poems that complements the three treatises. In fact, a number of his poem that are compiled in *The Poems of Hamzah Fansuri* appear in his treatises.[13]

In all his works one senses a tireless effort to build a bridge between religious law (*shariah*) and the spiritual journey of the seeker (*ṭariqah*). "Self-realization" is at the core of Hamzah's teachings. His repeated quotations of the famous hadith *"Whoever knows himself knows his Lord,"*[14] shows how fundamental he viewed the issue of self-realization.

Hamzah often resorted to symbols and metaphors that also make his discussions more appealing.[15] Among the wide range of symbolic expressions adopted by him, water-related-metaphors occupy the highest place – both from the viewpoint of their frequent appearance, and in terms of profoundness of their suggestive meanings. This is because water's formless nature provides endless possibilities of manifestation. Hamzah used these manifestations to convey a variety of complex religious, philosophical, and mystical meanings, in a manner that is easy-to-comprehend. What follows is a classification and elaboration of water symbolism in Hamzah's writings.

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Names, i.e. the divine attributes mentioned in the Quran. It also includes wise sayings addressed to seekers of the divine path, Discussions on 'the stations of spiritual love' is also part of this book.

[11] *Al-Muntahī* (The Adept) is the shortest among the three treatises. It stresses upon the relation of self-realization to the realization of the Almighty.

[12] For the Romanized Malay transliteration and English translation see Syed Muhammad Naguib al-Attas, *The Mysticism of Ḥamzah Fanṣūrī* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1970). For original Jawi text and Persian translation, see. Amir H. Zekrgoo & Leyla H. Tajer, *Three Treatises: Asrār al-'Ārifīn, Sharāb al-'Āshiqīn, Al-Muntahī, By Hamza Fansuri (16th Century Malay Mystic)* (Tehran: Miras-e Maktoob, 2018).

[13] G. W. Drewes and L. F. Brakel, *The Poems of Hamzah Fansuri* (Dordrecht-Holland/Cinnaminson-USA: Foris Publication, 1986)

[14] من عرف نفسه فقد عرف ربه

[15] I am presently working on a comprehensive book on symbols and metaphors in Hamzah Fansuri's writings.

## "Unity of Being" and Waters of Eternity

Hamzah was a believer in, and promoter of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* (Unity of Being) – a fundamental belief in Sufi metaphysics. *Waḥdat means* 'oneness' and *wujūd* denotes 'being', which together can be translated as 'oneness of being' or 'unity of being.' The doctrine represents a worldview in which 'Being' is regarded an exclusively divine quality. That is to say, all of us in our essence (being) are in union with God, while our individualities are bubble-like manifestations of the Everlasting One. God is also referred to as '*Wājīb al-Wujūd'* (necessary being), while everything else on the plane of existence is regarded as *Mumkin al-Wujūd* (possible being).[16]

In order to elaborate on this Unity, Hamzah uses metaphoric imagery. He talks about 'the union between waves and the ocean,' or 'the colour of a clear glass container and the colour of the liquid within.'[17] The divine entity which is One, is metaphorically referred to as the 'Eternal Ocean.' While Hamzah followed the lead of Ibn 'Arabi in the doctrine of the 'Unity of Being', his understanding of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* was mostly formed on the base of Persian sources. Symbols used by Fakhr al-Din 'Irāqi (1213-1289), 'Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī (1414-1492), Bayazid Bastāmī (804-874) and Abu Ḥāmid Ghazālī (1058-1111) had great impacts on Hamzah.[18] He adopted the concept of formlessness of water that can manifest in infinite shapes as a metaphoric expression to discuss the doctrine of 'Unity of Being.'

*Immerse yourself my dear,*
*In the Ocean with no peer.*
*The garment of union you must wear,*

[16] *'Wājīb al-Wujūd'* is that which is necessary for everything to exist, and whose non-existence is impossible. *Mumkin al-Wujūd* refers to all beings who are not self-sufficient in their being, and depend on some other force or being to exist. Their existence therefore is within the realm of 'possible,' not 'necessary'. The concept of *'Wājīb al-Wujūd'* is central to Ibn Sina's philosophy. See George F. Hourani (1972), "Ibn Sina on the Necessary and Possible Existence," in *Philosophical Forum* 4: 74-86.

[17] See Zekrgoo & Tajer (2023), 50-51.

[18] Ibid., 66.

*Pearls are distractions – beware!* [19]
*Seek the Ocean of the Everlasting One,*
*With one sip of water you'll never be done!*
*Search for the meaning of water everywhere,*
*Know that the Beloved isn't absent there!* [20]

Symbolic expressions such as 'water of life', 'primordial ocean,' 'shoreless sea,' are used to refer to divine essence. For one to have a taste of this spiritual experience (Unity of Being) it is essential to go beyond the surface of his/her individuality and touch the realm of selflessness as in the Ocean of Eternity.

*Let the lofty Ocean sweep your 'self' away,*
*Don't be fooled with life's superficial display.*
*Have no fear to say: 'I am the Supreme Reality'*[21]
*It's a sign that the wave has passed into the Sea!* [22]

*O people with attentive hearts – beware!*
*Remember the Water of Life everywhere.*
*For, whosoever knows the Eternal Sea –*
*Never dies – they live for eternity!* [23]

While the world is created like an ocean as a single unit, at the level of intellectualization and understanding it appears as if it is composed of uncountable components – waves!

*The Essence and the attributes are together – the same!*
*The two are united; divided only by name!*

[19] English translation by Amir H. Zekrgoo. See Malay version in Drewes and Brakel, XXX.10, 136.
[20] Ibid. See Malay version in Drewes and Brakel, XXI.13, 108.
[21] Reference to Manṣūr Al-Ḥallāj (858-922 CE) who, in a state of spiritual ecstasy shouted Ana al-Ḥaqq (I am the Truth) repeatedly, for which he was accused of heresy and was hanged by the neck. See "Al-Halladj," by Louis Massignon, Louis Gardet (1986), in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. Vol. 3, 101.
[22] English translation by Amir H. Zekrgoo. See Malay version in Drewes and Brakel, XXVIII.11, 128.
[23] Ibid. See Malay version in Drewes and Brakel, V.1, 54

*When the storm bursts, the waves become reality,*
*'Be, and it becomes' is the decree of actuality.*[24]

*An unceasing storm is out there,*
*Raging constantly everywhere.*
*Let yourself be immersed entirely,*
*And you'll be rewarded enormously.*[25]

*Seek only the Eternal Sea,*
*Give up the world that's transitory.*
*Tie your rope to the anchor tightly,*
*And cast it into the Sea of Purity.* [26]

In the following couplet the poet presents the most basic Islamic principle, the 'one-ness of God' (monotheism) in the context of water. It is a poetic reutterance of the Quranic verses *from Surah al-Ikhlāṣ*.

*The Eternal Sea is called 'The One,'*
*'The very Perfect, the Everlasting One!'*
*'He wasn't born nor gave birth to anyone,'*
*'Co-equal with Him there is no one.'*[27, 28]

*The water of life is a great reality –*
*that manifests in the two worlds clearly.*
*It encompasses everything in all ages,*
*Hence it has no time and no locality*[29]

*Hamzah Fansuri is of high ancestry,*
*From 'the water of life' he is not empty!*
*The waves are by nature transitory,*
*They go home to the Everlasting Sea*[30]

[24] Ibid. See Malay version in Drewes and Brakel, XXIX.3, 130.
[25] Ibid. See Malay version in Drewes and Brakel, XXXII.4, 140.
[26] Ibid. See Malay version in Drewes and Brakel, XXX.14, 136.
[27] Quran 112:1-4.
[28] English translation by Amir H. Zekrgoo. See Malay version in Drewes and Brakel, V.2, 54.
[29] Ibid. See Malay version in Drewes and Brakel, V.3, 54.
[30] Ibid. See Malay version in Drewes and Brakel, V.15, 56.

**Bottomless Ocean**

"Know this: Our Lord is like a bottomless ocean" (*Asrār al-'Ārifīn,* 36). To elaborate on the idea of 'unreachable essence of God,' Hamzah quotes a hadith: *'Glory be to You, we cannot comprehend You in a way that You truly are!'* That is to say the Divine essence is beyond reach.[31]

> *The Grand Ocean is primordial,*
> *It's the original source of all.*
> *Its attributes are together 'seven',*
> *A symbol of unity [in the exalted Heaven].*[32]

Our inner world and the world that surrounds us is likened to a dark and turbulent ocean, while the holy Prophet is presented as divine light that illuminates the ocean of existence. When the divine light shines, winds seize to blow and waves rest. (*Asrār al-'Ārifīn* 4:1) It is only at this stage that the Ocean can be seen as a single undivided whole, rather than an entity hidden behind endless distractions – ripples, waves, and storms!

> *There's no beginning for the 'Ocean within',*
> *Nameless and hidden are currents therein.*
> *The seal of Unity is still unbroken,*
> *And so is 'The Holy One', by the same token.*[33]

> *The Primordial Ocean was calm and silent,*
> *With the burst of storm, it became turbulent!*
> *All of the people are Adam's sons,*
> *Where is the proud race, where the lesser ones?*[34]

The voyage of life over the sea of existence will be rough and turbulent when the travelers are engaged with the transitory and

[31] Zekrgoo & Tajer (2018), 61.
[32] English translation by Amir H. Zekrgoo. See Malay version in Drewes and Brakel, XXVIII.1, 126.
[33] Ibid. See Malay version in Drewes and Brakel, XXIX.1, 128.
[34] Ibid. See Malay version in Drewes and Brakel, XXIX.4, 130.

diverse conditions. Hamzah's advice is to avoid entanglement with occupational hazards and focus instead on the spirit of unity.

*Whatever you earn O son in your occupation,*
*In the eyes of the Gnostics is too little to mention!*
*You must embark on the vehicle of unity,*
*In order to sail smooth on the Rockless Sea.*[35]

*The observed is Him, and so is the observer!*
*The waves are Him, and so is the water.*
*The fish is Him, and so is the smell,*
*How could one store this in a tiny shell!?*[36]

The same concept is expressed using metaphors of 'mother and child' and 'stone and jewel.'

*O child of a noble Queen, listen to me!*
*Waves and water are the same essentially.*
*The stone that carries a jewel within,*
*Presents the image of you and the Queen!*[37]

The above passage also pictures the cycle of life that reminds us of the famous Quranic passage "*We belong to God and to Him we shall return*" (Quran, 2:156).

## Cycle of Creation

In Hamzah's metaphoric language, waves are expressions of a higher creative power. While waves depend on the ocean for their very existence, the ocean needs waves for the purpose of expression and manifestation. Tiny melodic ripples, massive roaring waves, and enormous destructive tsunamis are but tangible signs that hint to the existence of a formless entity that will otherwise remain unnoticed!

*Waves are the manifest, the Sea the Unseen,*

[35] Ibid. See Malay version in Drewes and Brakel, XXV.12, 119.
[36] Ibid. See Malay version in Drewes and Brakel, XXVIII.5, 126.
[37] Ibid. See Malay version in Drewes and Brakel, XXII.5, 108.

*Yet both are the same, no difference in between!*
*In wind and rain, in a storm that's spun,*
*In motion and stillness, the essence is One.*[38]

*Unfathomable is the Divine Ocean,*
*Its waves formed the world of creation.*
*At the beginning there was no day and night alteration,*
*The world will finally sink in the same Ocean*[39]

To support his argument Hamzah quoted the following Persian couplet by Fakhr al-Din Iraqi.

*When a new ripple appears on the primordial Sea,*
*They call it a wave, but it's truly the Sea!* [40]

'The Ocean is the Knower; the waves represent that which is known' (*Asrār:* 39). Divine knowledge is figuratively expressed as 'The Ocean of Eternity – comprehensive, encompassing, and absolute! The realm of "the known" on the other hand, is the entire plane of creation that constantly appears and disappears in a cyclic movement.

*That which is called ocean is in reality only water! When the water moves and heaves, it's called waves. When it evaporates and the vapor particles rise up and gather in the sky, they are called clouds. When the clouds take the shape of water again, and descend from the sky in the form of drops, they are called rain. When drops of rain unite and flow on the surface of the earth, they are called rivers. When the rivers return to the ocean, they become ocean. The 'waves' are likened to that which is known, yet they are not distinct from the Ocean [the Knower]!* [41]

[38] Ibid. See Malay version in Drewes and Brakel, XXVIII.6, 126.
[39] Ibid. See Malay version in Drewes and Brakel, XXI.1, 134.
[40] Fakhr al-Din Iraqi, *Lama'āt*, (Lam'ah 3); translation to English by Amir H. Zekrgoo, quoted in *Asrār al-'Ārifīn*, 36. See Zekrgoo & Tajer (2018), 62.
[41] Free translation of *Asrār al-'Ārifīn, 39*; for Persian translation see Zekrgoo &

When the cycle is complete, then all forms are stripped off their individuality, going back to their formless source.

**Waves of Manifestation**

As discussed earlier, the Eternal Ocean is a metaphor for Gods essence – veiled and hidden, intangible and incomprehensible. Waves that appear on the surface of the Ocean, on the other hand, symbolize divine attributes – endless variety of manifestations through whom people connect and relate to the Source. The divine attributes or names (*asmā'*) are of two main qualities: *jalāl* (majesty) and *jamāl* (beauty). The *jalāl* attributes introduce God's authoritative and rigorous face, while the *jamāl* attributes are representative of His benevolent and merciful side.

Hamzah extends the Quranic terms *laṭīf* (kind, gentle) and *qahhār* (dominant, subduer) to waves of water. He further introduces two types of actions in life that could invoke God's grace (gentle waves):

a) Earning livelihood through honest means that is prescribed by the scripture as 'permissible' (*ḥalāl*), and
b) Dedicating oneself to the obligatory (*farḍ*) and the recommended (*sunnah*).

If one does not submit to the above, the authoritative *face of the Creator (Qahhār)* appears in the form of subduing waves that carry the wrong-doer to Hellfire.

> *Smooth is the course of the 'gentle waves',*
> *Avoid the severe 'subduing waves'*
> *Earn your living through 'permissible means',*
> *So that the Endless Sea be pleased.*[42]

> *Be dedicated to the 'obligatory' and the 'recommended,'*
> *Do as the Peerless Ocean has commanded.*

Tajer (2018), 65-66.

[42] English translation by Amir H. Zekrgoo. See Malay version in Drewes and Brakel, XXIX.17, 132.

*O Father! the meaning of 'gentle waves' is this,*
*So, don't neglect performing these duties.*[43]

*But if the 'waves of majesty' prevail, O father!*
*Then your destination will surely be the fire.*
*In Hell you shall reside for eternity,*
*Due to the deeds that displeased the Sea.* [44]

While appeasing the Endless Sea is a success, becoming one with it still remains a goal. For this to occur, the heart must be devoid of all desires.

*Clear your heart, make it all empty –*
*for the clear flow of the Sublime Sea!*
*When the winds rest, and the waves are gone,*
*You'll return to the Sea of the Everlasting One*[45]

Ripples represent the insignificant individuality that floats on the surface of the Ocean. They act both as manifestation of the Ocean, and distractions that hides its depth! Enlightened individuals shine like luminous waves on the pitch-black seabed in a dark night. They are guided and illuminated by the Prophet's teachings that is metaphorically presented as 'the torch of Muhammad.'

*Sharp is the slope of Truth's height,*
*Be careful when you're walking at night.*
*To the torch of Muhammad hold on tight,*
*Lest you get crushed by the waves of might.*[46]

**Bubbles of Identity**

Hamzah compares himself to a tiny bubble that despite being hollow and insignificant, shares the essence of a grand Ocean.

[43] Ibid. See Malay version in Drewes and Brakel, XXIX.18, 132.
[44] Ibid. See Malay version in Drewes and Brakel, XXIX.20, 132.
[45] Ibid. See Malay version in Drewes and Brakel, XXIX.13, 132.
[46] Ibid. See Malay version in Drewes and Brakel, XXIX.16, 132.

*Though Hamzah Fansuri has a trivial entity,*
*He is close to the Noble Essence, in Reality!*
*His gross stature is [empty] like a bubble,*
*That's in constant union with the Sea of the Subtle.* [47]

Removal of the barrier between a bubble-like individual and the grand ocean, according to Sufi teachings, begins with realizing one's 'existential poverty' (*faqr*). The spiritual journey takes the wayfarer to a higher state that may be called 'spiritual selflessness' (*fanā*). *Faqr* and *fanā* pave the way for the ultimate experience of becoming one, or dissolving in, the Primordial Sea. To elaborate on this, Hamzah quotes the following couplet by Persian Sufi Abu Sa'īd Abū'l Khayr (967-1049) claiming that it has been composed by Uways al-Qaranī.

*He who follows the path of "annihilation" and the tradition of "poverty,"*
*Is unconcerned with exploring "knowledge," "religion," or "certainty."*
*When the self was removed – what remained was only God!*
*This is the meaning of "poverty in its perfection is God".* [48]

As a result of this union, the seeker's impermanent existence is transformed to that of divine permanency (*bāqī*).

*Let your being be your eyes,*
*Let your eyes be your life,*
*Let your life disappear –*
*Into the radiant Sea, my dear!*[49]

To become one with the source, Hamzah claims, is merely a figure of speech and not a reality; this is because there has never been a separation! The important thing for a seeker is to realize that

[47] *Asrār al-'Ārifīn*, 4:15, Translation to English by Amir H. Zekrgoo
[48] *Asrār al-'Ārifīn*, 50; Translation to English by Amir H. Zekrgoo
[49] English translation by Amir H. Zekrgoo. See Malay version in Drewes and Brakel, XXIX.10, 130.

individual names and forms that distinct us are but illusional identities.[50]

Hamzah expresses the same idea using different metaphors. In the following couplets, he replaces 'bubble,' that appears lofty from outside but is hollow from within) with 'bare-ness' and 'poverty'.

*Hamzah is a naked person,*
*Like Isma'il, with a sacrificial burden!*
*He is not an Arab, nor is he a Persian —*
*With the Enduring One he is in constant union.*[51]

*When Hamzah Fansuri vanishes in the storm,*
*And drowns in deep waters [without form],*
*Winds stand still, and waves disappear,*
*He shall then become the ruler of the two worlds.*[52]

In the first two hemistiches of the above couplet, Hamzah uses 'vanishing in the storm' and drowning in the waters' as metaphors for the states of *faqr* and *fanā*,*i.e.* existential poverty and spiritual selflessness. The third and fourth hemistiches describe the state of union with the Sea, that is when the turbulent *winds of concern* and *waves of uncertainty* stand still. This is when the distinction between the individual self and the Eternal Self dissolves and, as a result, Hamzah – who is already stripped off his individual self – become the One – 'ruler of the two worlds'!

**The Confused Whale!**

*Gajahmina* (literally "fish-elephant"), is a mythological sea-creature in Balinese religious tradition, which is sometimes identified as the

[50] *Asrār al-'Ārifīn* 61. See al-Attas, 412; for the Persian version see Zekrgoo & Tajer (2018), 88

[51] Ḥamzah Fanṣūrī, *Sha'ir Dagang*, Cod. Or. 3374, Library, University of Leiden, 20. Translated to English by Amir H. Zekrgoo. See Malay version in Drewes and Brakel, XXII.13, 110. For Persian translation see Zekrgoo & Tajer (2018), 25

[52] Ḥamzah Fanṣūrī, *Sha'ir Dagang*, Cod. Or. 3374, p. 20. Translated to English by Amir H. Zekrgoo. (I did not find the Malay transliteration in Al-Attas.) For Persian translation see Zekrgoo & Tajer (2018), p. 26

Hindu sea-monster Makara. In Indonesia, *Gajahmina* also refers to the largest water mammal, the whale.

Hamzah tells the story of a strange whale (*Gajahmina*) that lives in the deep waters of the China Sea. The entire tale is a symbolic representation of man's quest to attain union with God – to become *wāṣil*.[53]

The whale of Hamzah's tale is a metaphor for a spiritual seeker that's confused! The Sea, on the other hand, is a metaphor for that which is sought – the infinite divine realm! Strangely, the confused 'seeker' does not realize that the subject of its pursuit is the same waters within which it has always lived! Restless and lost, it hopes to find water in distant dry lands!

*How strange that the mammoth of the sea,*
*Whose permanent abode is the China Sea,*
*Would look for water in Mount Sinai,*
*A worthless effort, pointless try!* [54]

In another stanza, Hamzah blames himself for not having the insight to realize the presence of the Beloved, hence identifying himself with the confused whale!

*Hamzah Fansuri, so thoughtless have you been –*
*to see the Beloved as veiled – that can't be seen!*
*Constantly walking along the wrong road,*
*And expecting 'union' in the desired abode!* [55]

Then he goes on explaining the magnitude of the Sea – the abode of the Beloved. It is deep and shoreless, so vast that it contains the entire population of the universe.

*The China Sea – enormous and bottomless,*
*Contains the population of the entire universe.*

[53] The term *wāṣil* in Sufi literature refers to a wayfarer who enjoys the company of the Beloved.
[54] English translation by Amir H. Zekrgoo. See Malay version in Drewes and Brakel, XXXII.1, 140.
[55] Ibid. See Malay version in Drewes and Brakel, XXVIII.15, 98.

*The Jinn, the angels, and the whole of humanity,*
*Are all submerged in the Eternal Sea* [56]

Yet the stupid whale does not realize all this! It cannot see that which is too apparent, merely because the Sea is its natural habitat!

*The whale is swimming round and round,*
*Searching for water it wanders around!*
*While the Ocean is clearly visible,*
*To both the pious, and the sinful people!*[57]

*While the whale is in constant union --*
*With the infinity of the shoreless Ocean,*
*It wildly roams around, foolishly --*
*Idly searching for what it can't see!*[58]

The poet suddenly brings in his own life experience and spiritual quest into the picture. He identifies himself with a whale whose abode is also the China Sea. This whale however, is no longer confused; it does not search for water of eternity in Mount Sinai! Instead, he calmly lives in the Sea, knowing that he is already settled in the desired destination.

*Hamzah of Shahr-i Nāv, though is of low descent,*
*With Mount Sinai he is not content!*
*Permanently, in the China Sea he resides,*
*Playing with the whale along the tides.*[59]

The concept of searching for God within, rather than without, is a familiar theme in Islamic mysticism and Persian Sufi poetry.

*God had accompanied a heartless soul every day,*
*He couldn't see and called 'O God' from faraway!* [60]

[56] Ibid. See Malay version in Drewes and Brakel, XXXII.2,140.
[57] Ibid. See Malay version in Drewes and Brakel, XXXII.8, 140.
[58] Ibid. See Malay version in Drewes and Brakel, XXXII.12, 142.
[59] Ibid. See Malay version in Drewes and Brakel, XXXI.13, 140.

It also resonates with the doctrine of 'Unity of Being.' Hamzah, by using the China Sea as a metaphor, adds a Southeast Asian touch to his poems that would appeal more effectively to his audience.

The story of the whale is an allegory of man's loss of insight and confused identity. The cornerstone of spiritual growth is believed to be 'self-realization', without which, according to an often-quoted *hadith* by Hamzah, God-realization is not possible. The following couplets express the same.

*Unfortunately, you've forgotten entirely –*
*about the formless nature of the Sea.*
*It's a sign that you are deaf and blind, –*
*confused and veiled you cannot sail the Sea!* [61]

*Know yourself O father, and you'll certainly see!*
*That you yourself are the fathomless Sea.*
*Between waves and the sea there's no division,*
*So, hold on tight to this profound vision*[62]

**The Brilliant Fish**

In addition to the 'whale' of the above-mentioned tale, Hamzah speaks of a fish whom he admires by calling it 'brilliant' or 'accomplished' (*fāḍīl*). Unlike *the confused whale*, this fish is well-aware of the blessing that is being in constant union with the Ocean of Eternity.

*There's a unique fish called 'brilliant!'*
*Its union with the water is constant.*
*With a love that's pure and flawless,*
*It lives in the Ocean that's shoreless.* [63]

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[60] Hafeẓ Shirazi, *Ghazal* 143, English translation by Amir H. Zekrgoo.
[61] English translation by Amir H. Zekrgoo. See Malay version in Drewes and Brakel, XXIX.5, 130.
[62] Ibid. See Malay version in Drewes and Brakel, XXIX.8, 130.
[63] Ibid. See Malay version in Drewes and Brakel, XXXI.1, 136.

*Exalted is this fish's station,*
*'Light of the Merciful' is its nation.*
*Has human appearance in creation,*
*It sports constantly in the Endless Ocean.*[64]

The above couplets are obvious hints by Hamzah to his audience, to identify themselves with the 'brilliant fish' – the seeker that is guided by the 'Light of the Merciful!' This seeker combines the agility of a lover and the wisdom of a learned scholar in his journey in search of the essence of life.

*In action, like an intoxicated lover!*
*With the intelligence of a religious scholar!*
*It sincerely embarks on the search for water,*
*In the Sea that's called the Creator!* [65]

*This fish is an evident sign [of the Creator],*
*Because it lives permanently in the water.*
*Even though it smells strong and fishy,*
*It's in constant union, through the waves of the Sea.* [66]

Embarking on a spiritual expedition is a multifaceted undertaking. In addition to discipline, determination and passion, having a knowledgeable guide is an absolute necessity. This is beautifully expressed in the following lines.

*Some stupid shoals of fish out there,*
*Are searching inside rocks for water!*
*Guilty of not looking for a master,*
*They lose 'the way to die' – the here-after!* [67]

In the Malay version of the above poem the Arabic term "*mūtū*" (die) is used. "The way to die" is a short expression referring to popular

[64] Ibid. See Malay version in Drewes and Brakel, XXXI.2, 136.
[65] Ibid. See Malay version in Drewes and Brakel, XXXI.8, 138.
[66] Ibid. See Malay version in Drewes and Brakel, XXXI.9, 138.
[67] Ibid. See Malay version in Drewes and Brakel, XXXI.10, 138.

*hadith* in Sufi tradition that reads: "die before you die" (موتوا قبل ان تمتوا).

*The path to death is a glorious passage,*
*That the royal fish holds its knowledge.*
*Far away don't wander, thoughtless do not be!*
*You are already in union with the Pure Sea*[68]

## Conclusion

Among the four elements of life, water has a distinct place. The realm of pre-creation is often depicted in religious scriptures as an endless stretch of a vast body of water – a metaphoric primordial ocean! The stories of creation of all major religions involve water. Water-related metaphors stand out among the great variety of symbolic expressions used by Hamzah. This is both in terms of their frequency of occurrence and the profundity of their suggestive connotations. Hamzah conveyed a range of intricate religious, philosophical, and mystical themes using water-symbolism. In his writings, he metaphorically refers to God as a Sea – an Ocean, which he describes using expressions such as 'bottomless', 'endless', 'rock-less' 'unfathomable', 'primordial', 'eternal', 'everlasting', 'divine', 'sublime', 'pure', 'unseen', 'subtle' and 'radiant.'

The Endless Ocean conceals its immense presence by sending off waves. Waves represent the manifested layers of creation. They have dual functions. On the one hand they hide the Ocean from the unexperienced eyes. To those equipped with the vision of wisdom, on the other hand, waves are but clear signs of the Ocean's very existence!

And then there are individual bubbles that float over the surface of the Sea. Each bubble represents a soul whose very existence depends on the Sea, while their identity is shaped by its surrounding conditions. Bubbles are tiny manifestations of the sea, inflated by a hollow individuality. In order for an insignificant bubble to become aware of its exalted essence (water), it must strip itself from its individuality. This is done in two phases: 1) realization of its

[68] Ibid. See Malay version in Drewes and Brakel, XXXI.11, 138.

existential poverty (*faqr*); and 2) extermination of its illusional identity (*fanā'*). The seeker will then attain the state of union with the Beloved (*wāṣil*). It is at this stage that the bubble is identified as the Sea!

The doctrine of 'Unity of Being' that Hamzah subscribes to, promotes the idea that 'being' is an exclusively divine quality, and that each one of us (bubbles) are in our core the Sea (God). However, not everybody is intelligent enough to see this Unity! Those who are not guided by a wise master will end up getting lost in their journey – like '*the Confused Whale of the China Sea'* who looked for water in the far and dry lands! But there are also enlightened seekers, like '*the Brilliant Fish*', who reach a state of contentment, knowing that they have always been residing in their desired abode – the Eternal Sea.

# FROM OBSERVERS TO PARTICIPANTS: SINO-MUSLIM INTELLECTUAL'S ENGAGEMENT WITH THE ISLAMIC WORLD IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

*Bao Hsiu-Ping*[1]

**Abstract**

*This paper aims to shed light on the evolving perception of the Sino-Muslim intellectuals on Pan-Islamism as they engaged with the Islamic world. Scholarly literature examining the relationship between Sino-Muslim intellectuals and the Islamic world often discusses the role of Chinese Azharites in the 1930s. However, the engagement of Sino-Muslim intellectuals with the Islamic world prior to the emergence of Chinese Azharites is rarely explored. This paper aims to address this gap by examining the process of Sino-Muslim intellectuals' engagement with the Islamic world in the early twentieth century, using magazines, books and travelogues published by Sino-Muslim intellectuals and official archives as primary sources. It argues that their level of engagement with the Islamic world depends on their acceptance of Pan-Islamism, an idea that emerged in the late nineteenth century advocating for the political unity of the Islamic world. Notably, the engagement of Sino-Muslim intellectuals with the Islamic world was not always as harmonious. Prior to the end of World War I, most Sino-Muslim intellectuals were sceptical of the idea of Pan-Islamism, which hindered the relationship between Sino-Muslim communities and governments. Nevertheless, after World War I, thanks to the efforts of certain Sino-Muslim intellectuals, they not only embraced this idea but also actively participated in various issues in the Islamic world.*

**Keywords:** Sino-Muslim intellectuals, Pan-Islamism, Sultan Abdul Hamid II, the Islamic world, Chinese Azharites

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## Introduction

In recent years, numerous scholarly works have explored the transnational history between the Sino-Muslim intellectuals and the Islamic world[2] in the early twentieth century. Zvi Ben-Dor Benite was among the first to highlight this forgotten history.[3] By providing a historical background, Benite argues that the connection of Sino-Muslim intellectuals to the Middle East in the first half of the twentieth century was a form of recuperation following 'the devastation of China's Muslim communities in the nineteenth century.'[4] Since Benite's work, several articles and PhD dissertations have diligently reviewed the role of the Sino-Muslim intellectuals in the Islamic world from various perspectives.[5] In particular, significant emphasis has been placed on the Chinese

[2] The term "Islamic world" refers to the community of people, countries, and regions where Islam is a significant or dominant religion. Please refer to Reinhard Schulze (translated by Azizeh Azodi), *A Modern History of the Islamic World* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002), 1

[3] Zvi Ben-Dor Benite,"Nine years in Egypt: Al Azhar University and the Arabization of Chinese Islam," *Hagar Studies in Culture, Polity and Identities* 8, no.1 (2008): 1-21. Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, "Taking Abduh to China: Chinese-Egyptian Intellectual Contact in the Early Twentieth Century," In: James Gelvin and Nile Green (eds.), *Global Muslims in the Age of Steel and Print* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 248-267.

[4] Benite, "Taking Abduh to China," 252.

[5] Mao Yufeng, "A Muslim vision for the Chinese Nation Chinese Pilgrimage Missions to Mecca during World War II," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 70, no.2 (2011): 373-395; John Chen, "Re-orientation the Chinese Azharites between Umma and Third world, 1938-55," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 34, no.1 (2014): 24-51; John Chen, "Islam's Loneliest Cosmopolitan: Badr Al-Din Hai Weiliang, the Lucknow-Cairo Connection, and Circumscription of Islamic Transnationalism," *ReOrient* 3, no.2 (2018): 120-139; John Chen. *Islamic Modernism in China: Chinese Muslim Elites, Guomindang Nation-Building, and the Limits of the Global Umma, 1990-1960*, PhD Dissertation (2018), Columbia University; Zeyneb Hale Eroglu Sager, *Islam in Translation: Muslim Reform and Transnational Networks in Modern China, 1908-1957*. PhD Dissertation (2016), Harvard University; Janice H Jeong, "A Song of the Red Sea: Communities and Networks of Chinese Muslims in the Hijaz." *Dirasat*, no.12 King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies (2016): 1-30; Janice H Jeong, *Between Shanghai and Mecca: Diaspora and Diplomacy of Chinese Muslims in the Twentieth Century*. PhD Dissertation (2019), Duke University.

Azharites, who were the Sino-Muslim students studying at Al-Azhar University during the 1930s and 1940s. Although the number of Sino-Muslim students at Al-Azhar was small, scholarly works have underscored their historical significance. Benite asserts that Chinese Azharites established a connection to the Islamic world as the Sino-Muslim community in China was never considered part of an extension of the Islamic world.[6] Similarly, John Chen argues that the Chinese Azharites's mission to establish a connection to Egypt provided an opportunity to reorient China, Islam and Chinese Islam on a more auspicious path.'[7]

It can be said that Benite and Chen's perception of Chinese Azharites may have been influenced by the Chinese Azharites themselves. Hai Weiliang (1911–2006), a renowned Azharite who later became a diplomat, published a book in Arabic entitled *Relations between the Arabs and China* (*al-alaqat bayna al-arab wa al-sin*) in 1950. He evaluated the role of Chinese Azharites:

> "Muslims in China were a forgotten community in the past and the present. They have been isolated from the Islamic world and deprived of access to knowledge about Islam. As a result, they sought of elevating their presence in the Islamic world and devised a plan for communication. An opportunity arose in 1931, when the Islamic association in China decided to send some of their children to Egypt with the aim of acquiring Islamic, Arabic culture and religion. They arrived in different years and enrolled at Al-Azhar al-Sharif, marking the beginning of a new era of relations between Chinese Muslims and their brothers…"[8]

Hai's evaluation of the Chinese Azharites aligns with the aforementioned scholarly works, but he overemphasised the degree to which the Sino-Muslims were isolated from the Islamic world. In

[6] Benite,"Nine years in Egypt," 4-5.

[7] John, "Re-orientation the Chinese Azharites between Umma and Third world, 1938-55," 25.

[8] Hai Badar al-Din (Hai Weiliang), *Al-'Alāqāt Bayn Al-'Arab wa Al-Ṣīn* (*Relations between the Arabs and China*) (Al-Qāhira: Maktabat al-Nahḍah al-Miṣrīyah, 1950).

reality, the connection between Sino-Muslim intellectuals and the Islamic world was never interrupted. For example, a small number of Sino-Muslims had travelled to Mecca and other Muslim cities and had written travelogues prior to the mission of the Chinese Azharites in Egypt in the 1930s. Thus, this paper aims to elucidate this dynamic by analysing the engagement of the Sino-Muslim intellectuals with the Islamic world in the early twentieth century.

The paper suggests that the engagement of Sino-Muslim intellectuals with the Islamic world depended on their degree of acceptance of Pan-Islamism, an idea that emerged in the late nineteenth century and advocates for the political unity of the Islamic world. However, it is interesting to note that the engagement of Sino-Muslim intellectuals with the Islamic world is not always amicable. During the 1900s, the idea of Pan-Islamism was largely unfamiliar to most Sino-Muslim intellectuals. Merely observers of the Islamic world, they did not consider themselves part of it. However, after the World War I, an increasing number of Sino-Muslims accepted the idea of Pan-Islamism and actively discussed various related topics. What caused such a change? By examining magazines, books and travelogues published by the Sino-Muslim intellectuals and official archives as primary sources, this paper aims to shed light on the evolving perception of the Sino-Muslim intellectuals of Pan-Islamism as they engaged with the Islamic world.

The remainder of this paper is divided into five sections. The first provides a brief history and features of Pan-Islamism, which contextualises the engagement of the Sino-Muslim intellectuals with the Islamic world. The second analyses the factors behind the lack of enthusiasm among Sino-Muslim intellectuals towards the Pan-Islamism before the end of World War I. The third explores the engagement of Sino-Muslim intellectuals with Pan-Islamism before Chinese Azharites. The fourth reviewed the role of Chinese Azharites and challenges. Finally, the analysis is summarised and conclusions are drawn.

## The Historical Background of Pan-Islamism

The engagement of Sino-Muslim intellectuals with the Islamic world in the early twenty century could be placed in the context of the rise

of Pan-Islamism. The origin of Pan-Islamism can be traced back to the deteriorating relationship between the Ottoman Empire and Europe in the late nineteenth century. Prior to that, the Ottoman Empire sought integration into the Concert of Europe rather than engaging with Muslim communities outside its territories.[9] However, the Bulgarian revolt in 1876 inevitably altered the course of Ottoman–European relations, leading to a worsening situation. During the revolt, militia groups loyal to the Ottoman Empire massacred thousands of Bulgarian Christians, which sparked widespread criticism across Europe.[10] Following the Bulgarian revolt, Russia declared war on the Ottoman Empire in April 1877, with the stated aim of protecting the Slavic people of the Balkans. In less than a year, the Russian army approached Istanbul, eventually leading to the Ottoman Empire signing a ceasefire.[11]

After the ceasefire, other European countries became concerned about Russian ambitions in the Balkans. As a result, the Congress of Berlin was held in 1878, which granted independence to Balkan Christians. While this congress aimed to maintain the balance of power in Europe, it led to significant territorial losses for the Ottoman Empire's territories in the Balkans and triggered substantial demographic changes. Specifically, hundreds of thousands of Muslim refugees from the Balkans sought refuge in Istanbul and Anatolia, increasing the Muslim population within the Ottoman Empire to 80%.[12] To prevent further disintegration of the empire, Sultan Abdul Hamid II (1842–1918) revitalised the Caliphate and positioned himself as the foremost leader of the Islamic world.[13]

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[9] Cemil Aydin, *The Idea of the Muslim World: A Global Intellectual History* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2017), 54; Sükrü Hanioğlu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 82.

[10] William Gladstone, *Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East* (London: John Murray, 1876); Milena Methodieva, *Between Empire and Nation: Muslim Reform in the Balkans* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2021), 20.

[11] Methodieva, *Between Empire and Nation: Muslim Reform in the Balkans*, 23.

[12] Aydin, *The Idea of the Muslim World*, 61.

[13] Kemal Karpat, "The Transformation of the Ottoman State, 1789-1908," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 3, no.3 (1972): 243-281; Hanioğlu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire*, 130.

Sultan Abdul Hamid II's action drew strong criticism from Western elites. Gabriel Charmes (1850–1886), a renowned French journalist, is credited with popularising the term of "Pan-Islamism" in 1883. He contended that Sultan Abdul Hamid II, influenced by religious fanaticism, utilised the title of 'caliph' to rally Muslims against Europe.[14] In addition, Western elites not only associated Sultan Abdul Hamid II with Pan-Islamism, but also viewed any Muslim political figures, intellectuals or social groups who opposed the West as being part of Pan-Islamism. The Earl of Cromer (1814-1917), the British Consul-General of Egypt, evaluated Pan-Islamism as 'recognition of slavery, laws regulating the relations of the sexes which clash with modern ideas.'[15] As Cromer indicated, the image of Pan-Islamism was highly negative and his opinion was not exceptional among the Western elites of the time. Most Western elites also believed that Pan-Islamism represented fanaticism, aggressiveness and irrationality among the majority of Muslims.[16]

In general, most Western elites held the negative view on Sultan Abdul Hamid II and Muslim intellectuals who were against the West. However, Muslim intellectuals worldwide rejected these accusations from the West. In fact, they criticised Western imperial ambitions and racism in the Islamic world.[17] Between the 1880s and 1900, approximately 70% of the Muslim population was either directly or indirectly colonised by European powers.[18] As such, Muslim intellectuals in various regions experienced European imperial racism and responded by advocating for the political unity of the Islamic world.

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[14] Gabriel Charmes, *L'avenir de la Turquie le Panislamisme* (Paris: Mon Autre Librairie, 1883).

[15] Samuel Zwemer, *Islam: A Challenge to Faith* (New York: Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, 1907), 238.

[16] Wilfred S Blunt, *The Future of Islam* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co. Paternoster Square, 1882); Chirol Valetine, *Pan-Islamism* (London: Central Asian Society, 1906); Ernest Renan, Sally Ragep (trans.), "Islam and Science," McGill University, 2001, <https://www.mcgill.ca/islamicstudies/files/islamicstudies/renan_islamism_cversion.pdf> (accessed 5 April 2022).

[17] Mushir H Kidwai, *Pan-Islamism* (London: Lusac & Co, 1908); Pankaj Mishra, *From the Ruins of Empire: The Revolt Against the West and the Remaking of Asia* (London: Allen Lane, 2012).

[18] Aydin, *The Idea of the Muslim World*, 66.

The outbreak of World War I seemingly provided an opportunity for Muslims worldwide. In late October 1914, the Ottoman Empire declared Jihad, supported by Germany, and called on Muslims under British, French, and Russian colonial rule to rebel against their dominations.[19]The Ottoman's Jihad strategy mainly had a psychological effect on Britain and France, failing to yield substantial results. Consequently, the majority of Muslim communities under British and French colonial rule did not engage in large-scale rebellions.[20]

After World War I, the Ottoman Empire awaited its fate of dismemberment. In April 1920, Britain and France confirmed their spheres of influence in the Arab East (*Mashriq*) through the "mandate system" of the League of Nations. Britain was in charge of Palestine, Jordan, and Iraq, while France controlled Syria and Lebanon.[21] While the Ottoman Empire lost its territories in the Arab East, it also faced invasions by Armenians and Greeks in Anatolia, the only remaining part of the Empire. Against this backdrop, Mustafa Kemal (1881–1938), an Ottoman officer, led Muslims in an effort to save the Ottoman Empire from the brink of extinction.

Kemal is known as the founder of modern Turkey, the mastermind who abolished the Caliphate, and the architect of Kemalism; however, little is known about the connection between Kemal and Pan-Islamism.[22] In fact, Kemal had very close ties with Muslims worldwide during the Turkish War of Independence from 1919 to 1922. He adopted Pan-Islamism as a strategy to seek support from Muslims worldwide in the face of the Allied Powers plans and Greece invasion.[23] Kemal's approach proved effective, gaining

[19] Ryan Gingeras, *Fall of the Sultanate: The Great War and the End of the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1922* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016),113.

[20] Chiara Formichi, *Islam and Asia: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Erik-Jan Zurcher, *Jihad and Islam in World War I: Studies on the Ottoman Jihad on the Centenary of Snouck Hurgronje's Holy War made in Germany* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2016), 13-27.

[21] Cyrus Schayegh and Andrew Arsan (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of the History of the Middle East Mandates* (London: Routledge, 2015), 2-3.

[22] Sükrü Hanioğlu, *Anatürk: An Intellectual Biograp*hy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 103-108.

[23] Hanioğlu, *Anatürk: An Intellectual Biograp*hy, 103.

widespread support from Muslim communities around the world, including India, Libya, Syria, Central Asia, and even China.[24]

On July 24 1923, after defeating the Greek forces, Kemal's representatives signed the Treaty of Lausanne, which largely preserved most of the remaining Ottoman Empire's territories.[25] The military victory made Kemal a renowned hero in the Islamic world. Indian Muslims bestowed upon him the title of "The Sword of Islam" as if Kemal was the protector of the Islamic world.[26] Some Western scholars began to take notice of this change. Lothrop Stoddard (1882–1950), an American scholar, mentioned the connection between Muslims worldwide and Kemal, citing several examples, such as Arab notables, Turkic–speaking Muslims in the South Caucasus, and Muslims in India, who actively cooperated with Kemal and even assisted him in countering Western power.[27] Stoddard believed that the Muslim world was entering a revival period after World War I, and that colonised Muslim communities cooperated to achieve true independence and autonomy.[28]

However, the connection between Kemal and Muslims worldwide was short–lived especially after the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in October 1923. The Grand National Assembly led by Kemal initiated a series of reforms, including the abolition of the Caliphate in March 1924, marking the beginning of the detachment between Kemal and the Islamic world. The Caliphate holds significant religious, political, and historical importance in Islamic history. Despite the fluctuation of political authority throughout different periods, the Caliphate symbolises the political centre of the Islamic world.[29] Thus, its abolition caused an uproar

[24] Awad Halabi, "Liminal Loyalties: Ottomanism and Palestinian Responses to the Turkish War of Independence 1919-22," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 41, no.3 (2012): 19-37.

[25] Ahmad Feroz, *The Making of Modern Turkey* (London: Routledge, 2002), 50.

[26] Aydin, *The Idea of the Muslim World*, 137; Hanioğlu, *Anatürk: An Intellectual Biograp*hy, 141.

[27] Lothrop Stoddard, *The New World of Islam* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1922), 226-232.

[28] Stoddard, *The New World of Islam*, 77-81.

[29] Hugh Kennedy, *Caliphate: The History of an Idea* (New York: Basic Books, 2016).

among Muslim communities. Many Muslim scholars were quite disappointed with the decision, arguing that it had harmed the political unity of the Muslim community.[30]

The above brief analysis of the background of Pan-Islamism shows that it revolved around the Ottoman Empire, with the aims of unifying Muslims worldwide and countering the domination of European powers in Muslim lands. Nevertheless, with the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, followed by the abolition of the Caliphate, the Islamic world lost its centre. In addition, European powers, through direct or indirect rule, continued to disturb the Muslims pursuit of self-determination after World War I.[31] The engagement of Sino-Muslim intellectuals with Pan-Islamism occurred within this broad historical context.

## Sino-Muslim Intellectuals' Views on Pan-Islamism Before the End of World War I

Despite its emergence as a transnational political idea in the late nineteenth century, Pan-Islamism was rather unfamiliar to the Sino-Muslim intellectuals before the end of World War I. While several notable Sino-Muslim Imams had undertaken pilgrimages to Mecca or spent brief periods in Istanbul and Cairo, there are few travelogues or explicit mentions of their involvement with Pan-Islamism.[32] Furthermore, some Sino-Muslim intellectuals were sensitive to the idea of Pan-Islamism.

Wang Kuan (1848–1919), a prominent Imam in Beijing during the late Qing dynasty, was likely one of the first Sino-Muslims to meet Sultan Abdul Hamid II. In 1906, he embarked on a pilgrimage

[30] Rashid Rida, "Al-Khilāfah wa al-Sulṭān al-Qawmī wa Jiḥat Naẓar al-Turk ilā Hādhihi al-Mas'alah al-Kubrā (Caliphate and nationalist Sultan: Turk's views on the major issue)," *Al-Manār* 24 (1923), 692-693.

[31] Eugene Rogan, *The Arabs: A History* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 175-246.

[32] Ma Dexin (1794-1874) is often considered the precursor for the Sino-Muslim intellectuals. His work, *Chaojin Tuji* (*Record of the Pilgrimage Journey*), described his travelling experiences in the Islamic world between 1841 and 1848. However, he failed to provide detailed descriptions of his engagement with local Muslims during his trip. See Kristian Petersen, "Shifts in Sino-Islamic Discourse: Modelling Religious Authority through Language and Travel," *Modern Asian Studies* 48, no.2 (2014): 354.

to Mecca, after which he travelled to Istanbul and submitted a petition to Sultan Abdul Hamid II in a letter written in Arabic. Sun Shengwu (1896–1975), a junior disciple of Wang Kuan, summarised the engagement between Wang Kuan and Sultan Abdul Hamid II as follows:

> After the Sultan read the petition letter written by the Imam (Wang Kuang), he was amazed by the elegant Arabic writing in the petition. He was curious and asked the Imam about the overall situation of Muslim communities in China, including their political status, economic situation, and educational conditions. The Imam replied that Muslims in China did not have high-ranking politicians, entrepreneurs, or educators. Recognising the challenging situation of Muslims in China, the Sultan decided to dispatch two scholars to China along with a significant number of Islamic books. Additionally, the Sultan bestowed upon the Imam the title of Mufti of China...[33]

The description above regarding the engagement between Wang Kuan and Sultan Abdul Hamid II has been verified using materials from an Ottoman archive.[34] Wang Kuan initially praised Sultan Abdul Hamid II as a noble and forgiving Caliph. He then requested the Sultan's assistance in revitalising Muslim communities in China.[35] While Wang appears as one of the early Sino-Muslim intellectuals recognised Sultan Abdul Hamid II as the Caliph, his intention was not to advocate for the political unity of the Islamic world, which was the focus of Pan-Islamism. Rather, he intended to improve the well-being of the Sino-Muslim communities. Education was identified as a crucial factor in achieving this goal. Upon returning to Beijing in 1907, Wang Kuan, with the help of Sino-Muslim intellectuals and businessmen, established Islamic primary schools. These schools not only taught fundamental Islamic

[33] Sun Shengwu, *Huijiao Luncong* (*Studies on Islam*) (Taipei: Zhongguo Wehhua Yanjiuso, 1963), 276.
[34] Chen, *Islamic Modernism in China*, 55-56.
[35] Chen, *Islamic Modernism in China*, 55-56.

knowledge but also offered modern courses, such as Mandarin reading and writing, mathematics, history, geography and physical education.[36]

After Wang Kuan's visit to Sultan Abdul Hamid II, two Ottoman scholars, Sheikh Ali Rida and Sheikh Hasan Hafiz were dispatched to China in 1907.[37] During their stay in Beijing (1907–1908), they taught Islamic curriculums, including Quranic recitations, theology, Hadith, and Arabic to Sino-Muslims.[38]

*Review of the Muslim World* (*Revue du mondel musulman*), a French magazine, published a photo of the opening ceremony of a primary school in Beijing in 1908. The photo shows two Ottoman scholars standing in the centre, surrounded by hundreds of Sino-Muslim students. Notably, the primary school had a bilingual name written in Chinese and Arabic. The Chinese name of the school is 'Niujie West Mosque Public Primary school,' (*Niujie Qingzhen Xisi Gongli Xiaoxue Tang*), while in honour of Sultan Abdul Hamid II, the Arabic name of the school was 'Hamidiya Science House' (Dar Al-Ulum Al-Hamidiyah). Additionally, two Ottoman flags are displayed behind the Ottoman scholars, symbolising that Sino-Muslims were under the patronage of the Ottoman Empire.[39]

[36] Sun, *Huijiao Luncong*, 276-277; Ma Jing, "Wang haoran ahong yu jindai musilin de kaizhi huodon," (Wang Haoran Ahong and the Enlightenment Activities of Modern Muslims) *Zhongguo muslim* (Chinese Muslims), no.4 (2019): 60.

[37] Sun, *Huijiao Luncong*, 276; Wang Zhibin and Ha Baoyu, "Wan qing tuerqi muslim de lai hua ji she hui huo dong yan jiu," (A Study on the Arrival of Turkish Muslims to China in the Late Qing Dynasty and Their Social Activities) *Shi Jie zong jiao wen hua* (The World Religious Cultures), no.1 (2023): 24-31.

[38] Yin Boqing, "Wang haoran ah heng zhuan," (Wang Haoran Imam's biography) *Yuehua* (Radiance of the Crescent-Islam) 7, no.24 (1935): 15; Sun Shengwu, "San Shi Nian Lai De Zhong A Wen Hua Guan Xi," (The Cultural Relationship between China and Arabia over the Past Thirty Years) *Huimi Yanlun Ban Yue Kan* (Muslim Opinion Bi-Monthly) 1, no.3 (1939): 16

[39] *Revue du mondel musulman* (1908), 698.


Ceremony of the Niujie West Mosque Public Primary school in Beijing, 1908[40]

Not all Sino-Muslim intellectuals welcomed the arrival of the two Ottoman scholars. Ding Baochen (1875–1914) was sceptical of the intentions of the Ottoman scholars. As a disciple of Wang Kuan, he had received Islamic education during his youth but had never travelled to the Islamic world.[41] Despite not being a religious scholar, he also emphasised the importance of education for the Sino-Muslim communities. From 1906 to 1913, he served as the chief editor of *The True Patriotic Daily*, *TPD* (*Zhengzong aiguo bao*), a vernacular newspaper based in Beijing. Despite not focusing on Islamic matters, the *TPD* frequently covered stories related to Sino-Muslim communities across China. Ding and his fellows wrote several articles in the *TPD*, praising Wang Kuan and other *Imams* for their education reforms and introducing new ideas to address the stagnation of Muslim communities.[42]

[40] *Revue du mondel musulman*, 698.

[41] Zhang Juling, "Xinghui pian yu ding baochen de zhengzong aiguo bao." (Awakening the Hui and Din Baochen's the True Patriotic Daily) *Beifang minzu daxue xuebao* (Journal of Beifang University of Nationalities), no.6 (2012): 5-11.

[42] *Zhengzong aiguo bao*, 3 February, 1909; 16 March, 1909; 15 October, 1909; 24 November, 1909; 28 December, 1909; 23 January, 1910; 20 March, 1910; 13 June,

When Ding and his fellows praised Wang Kuan's education reform, they indeed mentioned Wang's trip to the Ottoman Empire. However, it is noteworthy that they did not support the idea of Pan-Islamism, viewing it as detrimental to the relationship between Sino-Muslim communities and the Qing government. Some Sino-Muslim intellectuals even hinted that Ottoman scholars were acting as economic spies, investigating cities such as Beijing, Shanghai and Nanjing. They speculated that the goal of Ottoman scholars was to pressure China into opening up trade and commerce with the Ottoman Empire, which was a move that would bring troubles to Sino-Muslim communities.[43]

The controversy surrounding the possibility of Ottoman scholars acting as spies also sparked concerns among Chinese intellectuals, European consulates and missionaries.[44] Some individuals expressed worry about the presence of Ottoman scholars on a diplomatic mission to China. They feared that the Qing government allowing Ottoman consulates in China would result in the Sino-Muslim communities coming under the jurisdiction of the Ottoman Empire.[45]

The Ottoman Empire did not establish an official relationship with the Qing government. If the two Ottoman scholars did indeed undertake a diplomatic mission, they did not make significant political or economic contributions to the Ottoman Empire, much less bring the Sino-Muslim communities under its jurisdiction. This raises the question of where the anxiety of the Sino-Muslim intellectuals came from. The *TPD* edited by Ding Baochen, provides a clue. During the stay of the Ottoman scholars in Beijing, a German ambassador[46] in China issued a *démarche* to other foreign

1910; 3 July, 1910; 14 July, 1910; 26 July, 1910; 1 June, 1911.

[43] *Zhengzong aiguo bao*, 18 July, 1908.

[44] Marshall Broomhall, *Islam in China: A Neglected Problem* (London: Morgan & Scott, 1910), 292-294.

[45] Wang Zhibin and Ha Baoyu, "Wan qing tuerqi muslim de lai hua ji she hui huo dong yan jiu," 30.

[46] *Zhengzong aiguo bao* did not mention the name of the German ambassador. It is possible that the German ambassador is Arthur von Rex, who served as the German ambassador in China between 1906 to 1911. See: George Steinmetz, *The Devil's Handwriting: Precoloniality and the German Colonial State in Qingdao, Samoa,*

ambassadors in Beijing, asserting that the Ottoman Empire's interest in China fell under the jurisdiction of Germany. In other words, Germany claimed the right to protect the two Ottoman scholars during their stay in China.[47]

This *démarche* alarmed the French ambassador.[48] After the *démarche* was issued, the French ambassador visited the residence of the two Ottoman scholars and inquired whether they were under the jurisdiction of Germany. The Ottoman scholars stated that they neither sought protection from the German ambassador nor received any instructions from the Ottoman government.[49] The German *démarche* likely led to the controversy surrounding the two Ottoman scholars among Sino-Muslim intellectuals, who were concerned about being viewed with suspicion by non-Muslim intellectuals and the Qing government. In response to the *démarche*, several Sino-Muslim intellectuals wrote articles in the *TPD*, disputing the role of the two Ottoman scholars.[50]

The dispute surrounding the two Ottoman scholars' visit to China revealed that Sino-Muslim communities did not fully embrace the idea of Pan-Islamism. Aside from the two Ottoman scholars, the negative perception of Sultan Abdul Hamid II among Sino-Muslim intellectuals served as another indication of their lack of enthusiasm about Pan-Islamism. Specifically, when the Young Turk Revolution took place in July 1908, forcing Sultan Abdul Hamid II to abide by a constitutional monarchy, Ding Baochen closely followed the news regarding the impact of the Revolution, which marked a significant historical transition from the late Ottoman era to the Republican era.[51] However, in the *TPD*, Ding did not attribute any significant role to Sultan Abdul Hamid II as caliph, instead portraying him as

*and Southwest Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 467.

[47] *Zhengzong aiguo bao* did not mention the name of the French Ambassador.

[48] *Zhengzong aiguo bao*, 18 July, 1908.

[49] *Zhengzong aiguo bao*, 21 August, 1908.

[50] *Zhengzong aiguo bao*, 18 July, 1908; 10 August, 1908; 21 August, 1908; 29 August, 1908.

[51] Sükrü Hanioğlu, "The Second Constitutional Period, 1908-1918," In: Resat Kasaba (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Turkey Volume 4: Turkey in the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 63-66.

indecisive and tyrannical.[52] Ding perception of Sultan Abdul Hamid II was indeed influenced by translations of Western news media.[53] As indicated earlier, the image of Sultan Abdul Hamid II was generally negative in the West. Moreover, Ding harboured suspicions toward the two Ottoman scholars dispatched by Sultan Abdul Hamid II during 1907–1908. Given this context, Ding was not inclined to embrace the idea of Pan-Islamism.

Apart from Wang Kuan and Ding Baochen, another contemporaneous group of Sino-Muslim students studying in Japan did not subscribe to the idea of Pan-Islamism. Those students organised an Islamic association entitled 'Tokyo Pure and True Study-Abroad Educational Society' (Liudong qingzhen jiaoyuhui) in Tokyo in 1907.[54] The purpose of this society included 'building bonds of friendship among peers of the same faith, promoting education accessibility and religious reform.'[55] However, their intention was not to connect with the Islamic world. They aimed to elevate the social and political status of Sino-Muslim communities as a priority. In 1908, they published a magazine, *Awakening Muslims* (*Xinghui pian*), revealing their overall thoughts on Islam and Sino-Muslim communities.[56]

Although *Awakening Muslims* is considered the first modern Sino-Muslim magazine, Sino-Muslim students in Japan were indifferent to Pan-Islamism. The Ottoman Empire under the reign of Sultan Abdul Hamid II was declining in the eyes of those Sino-Muslim students.[57] Therefore, they did not consider themselves part of the Islamic world, but rather worried about predicament of Sino-Muslim communities in China, such as their superstitions,

[52] *Zhengzong aiguo bao*, 10 August, 1908; 1 May, 1909.

[53] *Zhengzong aiguo bao*, 10 August, 1908; 13 August, 1908; 18 April, 1909; 26 April, 1909; 1 May, 1909.

[54] The English translation of Liudong qingzhen jiaoyuhui is taken from Chen, *Islamic Modernism in China*, 57.

[55] Liudong qingzhen jiaoyuhui, *Xinghui Pian* (Awakening Muslims) (Tokyo: Liu dong qingzhen jiaoyu bianji she, 1908), 94.

[56] *Xinghui Pian* 1908, p.94

[57] Bao Tingliang, "Zongjiao Gailiang lun," (On Religious Reform) *Xinghui Pian* (Awakening Muslims), 44.

ignorance, laziness, stubbornness and lack of modern education.[58] One of the students, Huang Zhenpan (1873–1942), pointed out that the rapidly occurring political and social transitions in China were generally detrimental to the Sino-Muslim livelihoods, arguing that Sino-Muslims should depart from narrow-minded thinking and engage with the public.[59] To help their co-religionists escape this predicament, Sino-Muslim students in Japan suggested setting up investigative institutions, organising Islamic newspapers and building Islamic colleges.[60]

After the collapse of the Qing government in 1912 and the establishment of Republic, Sino-Muslim intellectuals sensed a new era of political change coming. They grabbed an opportunity to promote the social and political status of Sino-Muslim communities. The Chinese Islamic Progressive Association (Zhongguo huijiao jujinhui), established in the same year, could be seen as the first nationwide Muslim organisation in China. The headquarter of the association was in Beijing, with hundreds of branches in other provinces.[61] The purpose of this association was 'Muslims united to support the Republic, uphold unity in order to strengthen the foundation of the country and promote Islamic doctrines as its objective.'[62] Like Tokyo Pure and True Study-Abroad Educational Society, this association did not focus on willingness to connect to the Islamic world. It advocated unity of Chinese nation and places Sino-Muslim communities under its care. The reason that Sino-Muslim organisations avoid connections to the Islamic world is probably that the Republic government would doubt their national loyalty.

[58] Bao Tingliang, "Zongjiao Gailiang lun," 42-43.

[59] Huang Zhenpan, "Xinghui pian fakan xu." (Preface to Awakening the Hui) *Xinghui Pian*, 1-3.

[60] Bao Tingliang, "Zongjiao Gailiang lun," 44-50.

[61] Sun, *Huijiao Luncong*, 156-157; Pei Feifei, "Zhongguo huijiao jujin hui jiceng zuzhi pingshu 1912-1915," (Review of Grassroots Organisation of Chinese Islamic Progressive Association 1912-1915) *Huizu yan jiu* (Hui studies), no.1 (2021): 6.

[62] Zhang Juling, "Zhongguo huijiao jujin hui chuchuang ji ping (zhong)," (Review of the Early Development of the Chinese Islamic Progressive Association) *Huizu yan jiu* (Hui studies), no.1 (1998): 16.

With the outbreak of the World War I, the Beiyang Government[63] announced its decision to join the Allied Powers (France, United Kingdom, Russia) against the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire) in August 1917. Since the Beiyang Government considered the Ottoman Empire a belligerent country, it traced several Ottoman Muslims who were instigating Sino-Muslims and Uighurs to oppose Britain and Russia.[64] Chinese newspapers also reported that Muslims from Shaanxi, Tianjin and Xinjiang donated money to the Ottoman Empire.[65] Perhaps, under the monitoring of the Beiyang government, no single Sino-Muslim intellectuals dared to publicly corresponded to a call of Jihad from the Ottoman Empire during the World War I.

One can see that Pan-Islamism was not welcome by Sino-Muslim intellectuals from the late Qing government to the early Republic. They may know the message of Pan-Islamism but being afraid of suspicion of governments, they diverged from the approach of advocating for symbolic political unity in the Islamic world, a stance embraced by many Muslim activists worldwide. Instead, they prioritised the improvement of education within Sino-Muslim communities and promoted their social status. This approach aimed to smooth the relationship between Sino-Muslim communities and governments.

## Sino-Muslim Intellectuals' Engagement with the Islamic World in the Post-Caliphate Era

The view of Sino-Muslim intellectuals held of Pan-Islamism underwent a significant change after World War I. Several Sino-Muslim intellectuals and young students started to engage with

[63] The Beiyang Government was established between 1913 to 1928 in China. It was one of the various competing governments during a period of political fragmentation known as the Warlord Era, which followed the collapse of the Qing dynasty and the establishment of the Republic of China in 1912.

[64] Beiyang zhengfu waijiaobu dang (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Northern Government's Archive), Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, no. 03-36-033-02-070 (1916), no. 03-36-033-02-054 (1916), 03-32-104-01-012 (1918). 03-11-004-01-001 (1919),

[65] Anonymous, "Huijiaomin shujuanzhutu," (The Islamic People Donations to Turkey) *Shengjing shibao* (*Shengjing Times*), 2 December 1914.

Pan-Islamism, discussing various related topics in the post-Caliphate era. Among them, Wang Jingzhai (1880–1949) could be regarded as the major pioneer. Known as one of the four Great Imams of the Republic, Wang Jingzhai travelled to Cairo, Mecca, Istanbul and Ankara in 1922–1923 to pursue advanced Islamic knowledge, like Wang Kuan did in 1906 and 1907.[66] However, the main difference is that Wang Jingzhai was probably the first Sino-Muslim intellectual to emphasise the importance of the political unity of the Islamic world.

After returning to China in 1923, Wang Jingzhai wrote a number of articles based on his travel experience in Egypt, Mecca and Turkey, many of which focused on Kemal's military achievement.[67] Perhaps due to his intensive coverage, several Sino-Muslim intellectuals viewed Kemal as a hero and a role model. Xue Wenbo (1909–1984), an active Sino-Muslim intellectual, regarded Kemal as a national hero and drew parallels between China and Turkey under imperialism exploitations. Xue argued that Huizu[68] shared the same faith and had historical connections to Turks. Turkey's success in overcoming the 'sick man' label could serve as inspiration for both China and Huizu to resist foreign invasion.[69]

Yet when it came to political and social reforms in Turkey led by Kemal, the opinions of Sino-Muslim intellectuals varied. Some justified the abolition of the Caliphate, the adoption of Latin script and the reform of religious institutions and ritual practices. For example, Hai Weiliang defended both the change in language of the *adhan* (the call to prayer), from Arabic to Turkish, and the adoption of the Turkish translation of the Quran. He claimed that Turkish Muslims, as reported by Turkish newspapers, were deeply moved by hearing the *adhan* in Turkish because they could understand its meaning for the first time. Concerning the adoption of the Turkish translation of the Quran, Hai cited an endorsement from an Egyptian

[66] Wang Jingzhai, "Wushi nian qiuxue zi xu (Fifty-Year Academic Pursuit)," *Yu Gong* (Tribute of Yu) 7, no.4 (1937): 111.

[67] Wang Jingzhai's articles on Mustafa Kemal can be found in *Musheng bao* (The Sound of Muslims), and *Yi guang* (Light of Islam).

[68] Xue indicated Huizu as Sino-Muslim at his time.

[69] Xue Wenbo, "Zhongguo yu tuerqi (China and Turkey)," *Yuehua* (Radiance of the Crescent-Islam) 4, no.15 (1932): 7-11.

*Imam,* who argued that the Turkish religious reforms did not violate *Sharia* principles.[70]

Not all Sino-Muslim intellectuals fully agreed with the Turkish political and social reforms. Wang Zengshan (1903–1961), who studied in Turkey from 1926 to 1930, was more cautious about these reforms. Regarding the Turkish language reform in 1928, Wang studied the background of why and how Kemal adopted the transition from the Arabo-Persian Ottoman script to a modified Latin alphabet.[71] Wang approached the language reform with a rational evaluation. While respecting Kemal's strong determination to reform the Turkish language, he was concerned that this, along with the abolition of the Caliphate and the removal of Islam from the constitution, would jeopardise Turkish society and trigger resentment among the Turkish people.[72]

Wang Jingzhai was another figure who criticised Turkey's new orientation. Despite initially supporting the Turkish War of Independence, he became disappointed with Kemal's policies, such as the removal of Islam from the constitution, and the Turkish elites' attitudes towards Islam after the establishment of the Republic of Turkey. [73] He criticised Turkish elites, who were prone to secularisation and observed that they did not attend mosques for *Jumu'ah*, regarded daily prayers and fasting as superstitions and thought of the prohibition on eating pork as mere stubbornness.[74] Additionally, he cited the Egyptian press condemning Turkey's hostility towards Islam. To prevent the deterioration of Islam from in Turkey, he called for Muslims around the globe to unite.[75]

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[70] Hai Weiliang, "Tu guo gai yong tu wen gu lan ji bang ke zhi ping lun," (A Comment on Adoption of the Turkish Translation of the Quran, and the Call to Prayer taken by Turkey) *Yuehua* (Radiance of the Crescent-Islam) 5, no.22 (1933): 10-11.

[71] Wang Zengshan, "Tuerqi de wenzi geming," (The Writing System Revolution in Turkey) *Yuehua* (Radiance of the Crescent-Islam) 3, no.36 (1931): 3-7.

[72] Wang, "Tuerqi de wenzi geming," 7-9.

[73] Wang Jingzhai, "Duiyu huanying bai zong zhihui you gan," (Reflection on the Commander-in-Chief Bai) *Yi Guang* (Light of Islam), no.10, June 1928.

[74] Wang, "Duiyu huanying bai zong zhihui you gan."

[75] Wang, "Duiyu huanying bai zong zhihui you gan."

In addition to the intensive discussion on the impact of political and social reform led by Kemal, Sino-Muslim intellectuals planned to engage with the Islamic world in the post-Caliphate era. The Muslim World Congresses could be seen as the first Pan-Islamic arena to which Sino-Muslim intellectuals reached out. After the abolition of the Caliphate in 1924, Muslim elites in Muslim-majority societies looked for alternative mechanisms of the political unity. Muslim world congresses were organised in Cairo, Mecca and Jerusalem from 1926 to 1931, drawing delegations from North Africa, West Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia and Central Asia.[76]

Sino-Muslim intellectuals were aware of the development of the Muslim world congresses. Zhao Bin (1895–1938) was an early Sino-Muslim intellectual who raised the question of whether Sino-Muslims should attend Muslim world congresses. In 1926, he wrote an article entitled 'The question of the Chinese representative at the World Islam Congress in Cairo' (Kailuo shijie huijiao dahui zhi zhongguo daibiao wenti). He emphasised that Islam in China had existed for a thousand years and estimated the number of Muslim populations to be sixty million. Theoretically, Sino-Muslims were part of the Islamic world; however, their engagement was limited, and they showed indifference towards the development of the post-Caliphate era. Therefore, he urged Sino-Muslims to participate in the World Islam Congress.[77]

The World Islamic Congress of the December 1931 hosted by Haj Amin al-Husseini, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, could be seen as an opportunity for Sino-Muslims. The question of Palestine was considered the most important issue in the post-Caliphate era. With the increasing numbers of Jewish immigrants to Palestine, encouraged by the British government, this congress called for Muslims worldwide to defend the Muslim holy places in Jerusalem against Jewish settlers and British manipulation.[78] Upon receiving an

[76] Martin Kramer, *Islam Assembled: the Advent of the Muslim Congresses* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986): 80-141.

[77] Zhao Bin, "Kailuo shijie huijiao dahui zhi zhongguo daibiao wenti," (The question of the Chinese representative at the World Islam Assembly in Cairo) *MuSheng Bao* (The Sound of Muslims) 19th February, 1926.

[78] Kramer, *Islam Assembled*, 168.

invitation letter from the World Islamic Congress, Sino-Muslim intellectuals had high expectations.[79] Wang Menyang, one such intellectual, stressed the significance of the congress. He pointed out that Muslims in China, having lived there for a thousand years, were distant from West Asia and often disregarded news from that region. As a result, Muslims in China had made little progress, and Islamic teachings were in decline. Therefore, he believed that Sino-Muslims should seize this opportunity to discuss important Islamic issues with other Muslim delegations at this congress.[80] However, in spite of their high anticipation, Sino-Muslim intellectuals ultimately failed to participate in the congress for unknown reasons.[81]

## The Role of Chinese Azharites

Compared to the previous generation of Sino-Muslim intellectuals, who were mostly observers of the Islamic world, Sino-Muslim students in Egypt, also knowns as 'Chinese Azharites', could be seen as practitioners. Approximately 33 Sino-Muslim students were sent to Al-Azhar for advanced Islamic studies during 1930s.[82] The numbers of Sino-Muslim students was small but they played a significant role in bridging Sino-Muslim communities and Egypt.[83] They not only brought the idea of Pan-Islamism to their fellows in China but also actively engaged with the Islamic world.[84] Most of

[79] Anonymous, "Shijie yisilan dahui gong han," (Invitation from the World Islamic Congress) *Yuehua* (Radiance of the Crescent-Islam) 3, no.32 (1931): 6.

[80] Wang Menyang, "Xiang shi jie yislan dahui jin shu yu," (Suggestions to the World Islamic Congress) *Yuehua* (Radiance of the Crescent-Islam) 3, no.32 (1931):1-4.

[81] Sino-Muslim intellectuals did not attend the congress in Jerusalem but they still knew the result of the congress from newspapers. See: Anonymous, "Balishitan yisilan dahui zhijieju," (The Result of the World Islamic Congress) *Yuehua* (Radiance of the Crescent-Islam) 4, no.3（1932）: 25.

[82] Ma Bozhong, Na Jiarui and Li Jiangong, *Licheng: Minguo liuai huizu xuesheng paiqianshi yanjiu* (A study on the History of Muslim Student delegations to Egypt during the Republican Period) (Yinchuan: Ningxia renmin chubanshe, 2011), 1.

[83] Benite,"Nine years in Egypt," 4-5; Chen, "Re-orientation the Chinese Azharites between Umma and Third world, 1938-55," 25.

[84] Lin Fengwu, "Zhongguo liu ai xuesheng tuan yu sha rucheng xiansheng," (A delegation of Chinese students to Egypt and Sha Rucheng) *Chen xi xun kan* (Dawn) 1, no.15-17 (1935): 17-18.

the Chinese Azharites had graduated from three modern Islamic schools—*Chengda shifan* in Beijing, *Mingde zhongxue* in Kunming and *Yisilan shifan xuexiao* in Shanghai. These schools were established in the mid-1920s to cultivate new Muslim leaders within Sino-Muslim communities.[85] Prominent Sino-Muslim intellectuals such as Wang Jingzhai, Zhao Bin, Wang Menyang and others actively participated as teachers, and managers in these modern Islamic schools.[86] It is possible that the Chinese Azharites, under their influence, might have widely accepted the idea of the political unity of the Islamic world before heading to Al-Azhar.[87]

For example, two Chinese Azharites, Wang Shiming (1913–1997) and Na Zhong (1909–2008), advocated an idea of "the Islamic nation" (*Yisilan minzu*) before studying at Al-Azhar. They wrote articles highlighting that the Islamic nation was awakening and resisting the oppression of European imperialism, evidence by the resistance activities of Muslims in places such as Turkey, Egypt, Persia, India, Morocco, Syria, Palestine and Iraq. They considered Sino-Muslims to be part of a worldwide Islamic nation.[88] Despite their strong sense of the unity of the Islamic world, they experienced culture shock in Egypt. Soon after arriving, they discovered that the majority of Arab Muslims were completely unaware of the existence of Chinese Muslims, and some even believed that Islam had been lost in China.[89] Lin Fengwu (1913–1991), one of Chinese Azharites, even sensed prejudice when he first met with Arabs, as Chinese

[85] Ma Bozhong, Na Jiarui and Li Jiangong, *Licheng*, 2-4.

[86] Ma Bozhong, "Wang Jingzhai yu cheng da shifan," (Wang Jingzhai and Cheng da Shifan) *Jinan Muslim*, no.2 (2004):25-27; Zhao Zhenwu, "Sanshi nian lai zhi zhongguo huijiao wenhua gaikuan," (The General Condition of Islamic Culture in China over Thirty Years) *Yu Gong* (Tribute of Yu) 5, no.11 (1936): 18-19.

[87] YuKe, "Wu suo gongxian yu liuxue aiji zhujun de ji ge yijian," (My several opinions to students studying in Egypt) *Yuehua* (Radiance of the Crescent-Islam) 4, no.16-18 (1932): 18.

[88] Wang Shiming, "Shijie yisilan dahui yu yisilan minzu yundong," (The World Islamic Congress and Islamic National Movements) *Yuehua* (Radiance of the Crescent-Islam) 3, no.32 (1931): 1-6; Na Zhong, "Yisilan minzu de xianshi ji women yingyou de juewu," (The Current Situation of the Islamic Nation and the Awakening We should Have) *Yuehua* (Radiance of the Crescent-Islam) 3, no.21 (1931): 3-8.

[89] Na Zhong, "Na zijia jun zhi lai han," (A letter from Na zijia) *Yuehua* (Radiance of the Crescent-Islam) 4, no.10-12, 36-37.

people were perceived by Egyptian intellectuals as antiquated, uncivilised and corrupt.[90]

To challenge this prevailing negative perception, Chinese Azharites vigorously engaged with Arab intellectuals through their participation in local Islamic associations, delivering lectures and publishing books in Arabic.[91] The dedication of these Azharites– especially Ma Jian (1906–1978), Hai Weiliang and Pang Shiqian (1902–1958) – to engaging with Arab intellectuals stood out. Between 1934 and 1950, each of these Azharites published books in Arabic aimed at introducing Islam in China.[92] The primary motivation behind their Arabic writing was to foster a better understanding of the Chinese Muslims among Arab intellectuals.[93] Despite variances in their focus on Islam in China, two common themes frequently appeared.

First, they considered Sino-Muslims as an integral part of the Islamic nation, but one that had been forgotten by the rest Islamic nation for a long time. For instance, Ma Jian's *Overview of the History of Islam in China and Conditions of Muslims therein* (*Nathrat jamiat al-tarikh al-islam fi al-sin wa ahawal al-muslimin fiha*) emphasised that 'Chinese Muslims had been isolated from their brethren in distant lands for the past five centuries, leading to a lack of awareness regarding religious, literary, economic and political movement in the Islamic kingdoms'.[94] He further argued that Chinese Muslims' isolated status was not their fault but rather a consequence of the Islamic world's neglect, as renowned intellectuals rarely visited China.[95] While Ma acknowledged the historical visit of

[90] Lin Fengwu, "Zhongguo liu ai xuesheng tuan yu sha rucheng xiansheng," 17-18.
[91] Lin Fengwu, "Zhongguo liu ai xuesheng tuan yu sha rucheng xiansheng," 19.
[92] Muhammad Makin (Ma Jian), *Naẓrat Jāmiʿat Al-Tārīkh Al-Islām fī Al-Sīn wa Aḥwāl Al-Muslimīn fīhā* (Al-Qāhira: Al-Maṭbaʿah Al-Salafiyyah wa Maqāntuhā, 1934); Muḥammad Tawāḍuʿ(Pang Shiqian), *Al-Ṣīn wa al-Islām* (Al-Qāhira: Al-Ikhwān Al-Muslimūn, 1945); Hai, *Al-ʿAlāqāt Bayn Al-ʿArab wa Al-Ṣīn.*
[93] Makin, *Naẓrat Jāmiʿat Al-Tārīkh Al-Islām fī Al-Sīn wa Aḥwāl Al-Muslimīn fīhā*; Tawāḍuʿ, *Al-Ṣīn wa al-Islām*; Hai, *Al-ʿAlāqāt Bayn Al-ʿArab wa Al-Ṣīn*.
[94] Makin, *Naẓrat Jāmiʿat Al-Tārīkh Al-Islām fī Al-Sīn wa Aḥwāl Al-Muslimīn fīhā,* 42-43.
[95] Makin, *Naẓrat Jāmiʿat Al-Tārīkh Al-Islām fī Al-Sīn wa Aḥwāl Al-Muslimīn fīhā,* 43.

the two Ottoman scholars to China in 1907, following Wang Kuan's visit to Sultan Abdul Hamid II, symbolising the initial reconnection between the Islamic world, he lamented the interruption that occurred after their departure.[96]

Secondly, Chinese Azharites articulated a concise historiography when introducing the general history of Sino-Muslims to Arab readers. According to this, Sino-Muslim communities were prosperous and enjoyed high political and social status in the Yuan (1271–1368) and Ming dynasties (1368–1644) due to their harmonious relationships with governments.[97] However, during the Qing dynasty (1636–1912), Sino-Muslims' development was stagnant and they were deprived of their social and political privileges. This led to rebellions by Muslims from the northwest and southeast regions against the Qing government, which ultimately failed and resulted in severe suppression.[98] The miserable situation of Muslims improved after Dr. Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925) overthrew the Qing government in 1912. The new republican government granted Muslims citizenship in the constitution, and they began to strive for revival, creating modern Islamic associations, modern Islamic schools and Islamic magazines.[99]

This historiography reflects the collective memory of Chinese Azharites' regarding the fluctuating status of Sino-Muslims over the past five centuries. They observed that the Republican era provided an opportunity to enhance Sino-Muslims' social and political status. In Pang Shiqian's *Islam and China* (*al-sin wa al-islam*), he argued that Sino-Muslims, as part of the Islamic nation, should collaborate with other Muslims to combat poverty, and ignorance, as stated in a

[96] Makin, *Nathrat jamiat al-tarikh al-islam fi al-sin wa ahawal al-muslimin fiha,* 43.

[97] Makin, *Nathrat jamiat al-tarikh al-islam fi al-sin wa ahawal al-muslimin fiha,* 45-49; Tawāḍuʿ, *Al-Ṣīn wa al-Islām,*10-16; Hai, *Al-ʿAlāqāt Bayn Al-ʿArab wa Al-Ṣīn,* 289.

[98] Makin, *Nathrat jamiat al-tarikh al-islam fi al-sin wa ahawal al-muslimin fiha,* 48-49; Tawāḍuʿ, *Al-Ṣīn wa al-Islām,*13; Hai, *Al-ʿAlāqāt Bayn Al-ʿArab wa Al-Ṣīn,* 289-292.

[99] Makin, *Nathrat jamiat al-tarikh al-islam fi al-sin wa ahawal al-muslimin fiha,* 52-69; Tawāḍuʿ, *Al-Ṣīn wa al-Islām,* 16; Hai, *Al-ʿAlāqāt Bayn Al-ʿArab wa Al-Ṣīn,* 288.

famous Quranic verse: "Hold firmly to the rope of Allah and do not be divided."[100]

Through the efforts of Chinese Azharites, some Arab intellectuals were willing to cooperate with them. Renowned Pan-Islamist intellectuals and activists such as Rashid Rida (1865–1935), Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib (1886–1969) and Hasan al-Banna (1906–1949), praised the commitment of Chinese Azharites to the Islamic revival and unity.[101] Hasan al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, wrote a preface in Pang Shiqian's book that recognised Chinese Muslims as part of the Islamic union (*jamiat al-Islam*) and expressed the expectation that the Muslim Brotherhood would seek cooperation with Muslims worldwide in this revival stage.[102]

Furthermore, other senior Sino-Muslim intellectuals were also pleased with the efforts of Chinese Azharites. Zhao Bin strongly praised the role of Chinese Azharites in bridging the gap between China and the Islamic world. He argued that 'since the dispatch of students to Egypt from 1931 onwards, the previously isolated Chinese Islam has entered the stage of the Islamic world and gradually formed an intimate group with Muslims around the world.'[103]

Sino-Muslims' participation to the Islamic world looks positive and promising, but this connection raised a doubt from the National Government. In 1934, He Yaozu (1889–1961), a high-ranking official from the National Government, sent a letter to Chiang Kai-shek (1887–1975), its president, accusing Sino-Muslim students of Japan's puppets.[104] He Yaozu argued that the works that the Islamic school (*Chengda shifan*) promoted such as dispatching students to Egypt, inviting Egyptian teachers to China and

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[100] Please refer to the preface. Tawāḍuʿ, *Al-Ṣīn wa al-Islām*.

[101] Chen, *Islamic Modernism in China*,131; Makin, *Naẓrat Jāmiʿat Al-Tārīkh Al-Islām fī Al-Sīn wa Aḥwāl Al-Muslimīn fīhā,* 3; Tawadu, *Al-sin wa al-islam*.

[102] Tawāḍuʿ, *Al-Ṣīn wa al-Islām.*

[103] Zhao Bin, "Bianzhe shuo," (The editor's saying) *Yuehua* (Radiance of the Crescent-Islam) 6, no.13, (1936), 1.

[104] Jiang Zhongzheng Zongtong Wenwu Dang (President Chiang Kai-shek Archive), Academia Historica, no: 002-080200-00175-045, 1934.

proclaiming Pan-Islamism to be aligned with Japan's strategy.[105] The National Government' worry has its grounds. After the Manchurian Incident in 1931, Japanese officials regarded Sino-Muslims as potential allies against communism. Thereafter, Japanese intelligence agencies made efforts to gain support from Sino-Muslims.[106]

Sino-Muslim intellectuals affiliated to the Islamic school denied their connection to Japan, but the tension between Sino-Muslims and the National Government persisted up to the World War II. Under the order of Chiang Kai-shek, Sino-Muslim elites organised the Chinese Muslim Salvation Association (Zhongguo huimin jiuguo xiehui) in June 1938. One its purposes was liaison with the Islamic world to counter the Japanese propaganda.[107] Chinese Azharites also contributed to the missions, during 1937 to 1940.[108] Despite these diplomatic missions failing to effectively stop Japanese propaganda in the Islamic world, many Chinese Azharites were assigned as Arabic professors in universities or diplomats in liaison with the Islamic world after World War II.[109] It can be said that they paved the way for stronger cultural and diplomatic ties between China and the Islamic world.

## Conclusion

A comprehensive discussion on the engagement of Sino-Muslim intellectuals with the Islamic world in the early twentieth century from all aspects is beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, it primarily examines the evolving views of Sino-Muslim intellectuals

[105] Jiang Zhongzheng Zongtong Wenwu Dang, no: 002-080200-00175-045, 1934.

[106] Wang Ke, *Minzu zhuyi yu jindai zhong-ri guanzi* (*Nationalism and Modern Sino-Japanese Relations)* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2015), 193-229.

[107] Bao Hsiu-Ping, "Zhong-Ri zhanzheng yu Huimin guomin waijiao, 1937-1941," (The Sino-Japanese War and the Public Diplomacy of Hui Muslims, 1937-1941) in: Mitsuo Sawai (eds.), *Japan's Policy of Assimilation and the Memory of Muslim Collaborators in Japan: A polyphonic Ethnography of Colonial Experience*) (2020): 118-132.

[108] Bao, "Zhong-Ri zhanzheng yu Huimin guomin waijiao, 1937-1941," 120-122.

[109] Bao, "Zhong-Ri zhanzheng yu Huimin guomin waijiao, 1937-1941," 131.

on Pan-Islamism, which determined the extent of their engagement with the Islamic world.

The topic of Chinese Azharites, who were expected to bridge the gap between Sino-Muslim communities and the Islamic world from the 1930s, has been extensively discussed in previous scholarly literature. In particular, Chinese Azharites considered themselves part of the Islamic nation, indicating their successful integration into the Islamic world. Nevertheless, the engagement of Sino-Muslim intellectuals with the Islamic world was not always harmonious, as it depended on their degree of acceptance of Pan-Islamism.

From 1906 to 1922, Sino-Muslims did not embrace the idea to the extent that other foreign Muslim intellectuals did. While Wang Kuan sought educational support from Sultan Abdul Hamid II, he did not advocate for the political unity of the Islamic world. Furthermore, Ding Baochen, and other young Sino-Muslim intellectuals were suspicious of the intentions of the two Ottoman scholars dispatched by Sultan Abdul Hamid II. They were worried that Pan-Islamism would hinder their relationship with the Qing government and non-Muslim intellectuals.

The situation gradually changed after 1922, when Wang Jingzhai, possibly the first Sino-Muslim, introduced the idea of the political unity of the Islamic world following his trip to the Middle East. Subsequently, a growing number of Sino-Muslim intellectuals were inclined to accept this idea and engaged in discussions on various topics. Their efforts facilitated the engagement of Chinese Azharites with the Islamic world in the 1930s and 1940s.

# CRITICISMS ON ONTOLOGICAL RELATIVISM OF MODERN SCIENCE BY SYED MUHAMMAD NAQUIB AL-ATTAS AND SEYYED HOSSEIN NASR

*Khalina Mohammed Khalili*[1]

**Abstract**

*Postmodern approaches to science introduce various methods, and result in multiple explanations and competing theories. This has exacerbated the science war in philosophy of science. The ongoing disputes known as 'science war' is a consequence of ontological disputes within the philosophical branch of metaphysics. Even though science had denied the importance of metaphysics in its practice, this paper argues that the recognition of philosophy specifically that in regards to metaphysics is a solution to the confusion arising from relativism of knowledge. As part of a preliminary attempt to confront this problem, this paper focuses on the criticisms of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas and Seyyed Hossein Nasr on the ontology of modern science, which issues from the denial of metaphysics by modern scientists. Their views on ontology are part of both scholars' Islamic philosophy of science. This is a qualitative research based on historical, doctrinal and comparative analysis of the primary works by the two scholars. The arguments are presented within the scope of philosophy of science based on the framework of the Islamic intellectual tradition. Thus, we find that a wider and transcendental epistemology is possible for understanding the multiple levels of reality subsumed within the metaphysics of Islam, which opens the door to reality and truth.*

**Keywords:** Ontology, philosophy of science, Islam, Tauhid transcendental reality

[1] Khalina Mohammed Khalili received a Ph.D. in Islamic Philosophy from the Raja Zarith Sofiah-Centre for Advanced Studies in Islam, Science and Civilisation (RZS-CASIS) of Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. This paper was presented during a webinar on Islamic Philosophy entitled "Naradata Falsafah Islam" organized by the Malaysian Association for the Education of Philosophy and Thinking (PPFPM) & Organization of Selangor Public Library (PPAS) on 13-14 March 2021.

## Introduction

In this paper, we propose that there is a confluence of interest between Islamic philosophy of science and modern scientific findings with regard to ontology. To begin with, we admit that there is an ambiguity with regard to the ontology of natural things, since contemporary science promotes multiple interpretations of natural phenomena without attempting to clarify their true realities (i.e. ontology). The theory mud-slinging between the realist and anti-realist camps of philosophy of science creates a lacuna for considering the criterion (or multiple criteria) for evaluating the most authoritative ideas amongst the contenders of the current 'science war.'[2] Thus we attempt to present the Islamic philosophy of science based on the framework of two contemporary Muslim scholars[3], Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (1930 - now) and Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1933- now) to arbitrate on their methodology and verification of knowledge. The framework of knowledge upon which both thinkers' philosophies of science are grounded upon is the metaphysics of Islam or the science of Sufism (*taṣawwuf*). Islamic metaphysics is generally referred to as Sufism or *taṣawwuf*. However, as an exact science, Islamic metaphysics is the subject of philosophical Sufism, which according to al-Attas represents a unified system that "integrates reason and experience with their higher orders in the supra-rational and trans-empirical levels of human consciousness."[4] The Sunni principles of the inner and outer

[2] The science war that we refer to is perhaps an extension of "heated public debates" between realists in the 1990s, involving objectivists versus social constructionists. Ava Kofman, "Bruno Latour, the Post-Truth Philosopher, Mounts a Defense of Science" Oct. 25, 2018 (https://nytimes.come/2018/10/25/magazine/bruno-latour-post-truth-philosopher-science.html (accessed 26/12/2018)

[3] The scholars whose thoughts are presented in this paper are prodigious scholars of our times. They have devoted their lives to preserving and upholding the Islamic intellectual tradition. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas is a Malaysian thinker born in Bogor, Indonesia in 1930, and Seyyed Hossein Nasr is an American philosopher who was born in Tehran, Iran in 1933. As living scholars their influence on the public discourse on Islamic intellectualism appears to be growing steadily amongst the global Muslim population.

[4] Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *A Commentary on the Hujjat al-Ṣīddīq of Nūr*

dimension originated with the teachings on the purification of the soul that can be traced back to the Prophet Muhammad. Nasr, in explaining Sunni and Shi'ah views simultaneously, defines Sufism as "the inner or esoteric dimension of Islam," which "beginning with the Shariah as the basis of religious life, seeks to take a further step toward that truth (*ḥaqīqah*), which is also the source of the Shariah. Sufism which is also called *tarīqah*, or the spiritual path, is the divinely ordained means of providing an answer to that ultimate question and leading us to the Truth or *ḥaqīqah* contained within that answer."[5] Al-Attas defines Sufism as the practice (*a'māl*) of the *sharī'ah* at the station (*maqām*) of excellence (*iḥsān*).[6]

Sufism, in modern times, is viewed in a negative light, and thus the term *tazkiyyat al-nafs* or purification of the soul may be the preferred term for the masses.[7] In lieu of the historical instances of the negative portrayals of Sufism, al-Attas has described his metaphysical framework as 'positive' *taṣawwuf* in the book *The Positive Aspects of Tasawwuf: Preliminary Thoughts on an Islamic Philosophy of Science* (1981) which outlines an introduction to the Islamic philosophy of science. This clarifies the intent of the work as being opposed to any charlatan representations of *tasawwuf*. For

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*al-Dīn al-Rānīrī : Being an Exposition of the Salient Points of Distinction Between the Positions of the Theologians, the Philosophers, the Sufis and the Pseudo-Sufis on the Ontological Relationship between God and the World and Related Questions* (Kuala Lumpur: Ministry of Culture: 1986), 465.

[5] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Garden of Truth: The Vision and Promise of Sufism, Islam's Mystical Tradition* (NY: Harper One: 2007), 5.

[6] Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: ABIM: 1978), 114 and Al-Attas, *Positive Aspects of Tasawwuf* (Kuala Lumpur: ASASI: 1981), 1.

[7] The focus on purification of the soul follows the descriptions of three levels of belief as explained in the famous Hadith of Jibrīl, in which the Prophet Muhammad explained that Islam is the outer manifestation of belief by a Muslim, *īman* is the cognitive certainty of belief and *iḥsān* is the self-awareness of God's ever-pervasive existence. The Hadith is stated as follows: "Then he (the man) said, "Inform me about *iḥsān*." He (the Messenger of Allah) answered, "It is that you should serve Allah as though you could see Him, for though you cannot see Him yet (know that) He sees you."" (Sahih Muslim) Hadith #2 in *Imam Nawawi's Collection of Forty Hadith: Arabic Text, Translation and Notes* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust:1996), 3-5.

al-Attas, his metaphysics covers ibn Arabi's works of theoretical Sufism, as well as al-Ghazali's synthesis and many other philosophers, theologians and Sufis, as part of his worldview of Islam. Nasr's world-view, which he equates with Islamic philosophy, emerges from the elements of perennial philosophy.[8] The perennial elements are studied in 'metaphysic' of which Nasr asserts that there is only one kind for all diverse representations of metaphysics which he refers to as - *scientia sacra* pointing to the sacredness embodied within every entity. For Nasr, the perennial philosophy harkens back to *javidan khirād,* the Persian inheritance of ontological reality that became intertwined with Islamic philosophy after the Islamization of that advanced civilization. Both of their perspectives provide an overarching view on philosophy of science from the Islamic perspective. Thus, this paper provides an introduction to their philosophy of science by outlining their arguments against the ontological relativism of modern science.

## Methodology and Scope of Research

The method employed in this paper is based on qualitative research consisting of analyses on historical, doctrinal and comparative aspects of the scholars' primary works. The arguments presented cover the scope of philosophy of science following the framework of the Islamic intellectual tradition. Among the significant books that contributed to this research are *Islam and the Philosophy of Science* (1989), *Concept of Education in Islam* (1991), *The Positive Aspects of Tasawwuf* (1981) by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas as well as *Religion and the Order of Nature* (1996), *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man* (1968), *An Introduction to the Islamic Cosmological Doctrines* (1964) by Seyyed Hossein Nasr.[9]

[8] Nasr has used the word "World-view" to highlight his philosophical synthesis, for example see Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Philosophy, Literature and Fine Arts* (Jeddah: Hodder and Stoughton/King Abdulaziz Universiti: 1982). Read more in Hahn et. al., *Library of Living Philosophers: Seyyed Hossein Nasr, L. E. Hahn, R. E. Auxier and L. W. Stone (eds.)* (Chicago: Open Court Press, 2001), 445-462.

[9] Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, I*slam and the Philosophy of Science* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC: 1989); Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC: 1999); Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Positive Aspects of*

## Findings:

The criticisms put forth by al-Attas and Nasr are part of their attempts to re-invigorate the Islamic epistemological framework of research in the Islamic and intellectual sciences, which include modern science. For Nasr, his response to modern science is part of a larger battle against modernism, as articulated by the Traditionalists, the perennial philosophers that first emerged in the 19th century, whose ideas Nasr represents and continues to refine.[10] For al-Attas, his criticisms on modern science are focused on the impact of secularization on human language and reason which has been shaped by the secularization of ideas, culminating in the heterodoxy of modern science. Their ultimate criticism on modern science, pertains to ontology or the lack thereof in contemporary secular science discourse, due to the materialist presuppositions of science. We now proceed by defining the terminology treated in this paper.

## Philosophical origin of the term 'ontology'

Ontology is a metaphysical study that is concerned with the status of existence of objects in both the seen and unseen world.[11] In simple words, ontology answers the question "what is there?" The origin of ontology can be traced to Parmenides and Plato's school of Idealism. Since idealism itself is archaic and passé, ontology has been

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*Tasawwuf* (Kuala Lumpur: ASASI: 1981); Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man* (London: Mandala: 1976), 2nd ed.; Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* (New York: State University Press: 1989), 120; Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press: 1964).

[10] Rene Guenon, Titus Burkhardt and Martin Lings are known as the Traditionalists within this philosophical movement. For further discussion on the Traditionalists, refer to my Ph.D. thesis, Khalina Mohammed Khalili, *The Philosophy of Science in Islam from the Perspectives Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas and Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, Ph.D. diss., (Kuala Lumpur: Universiti Teknologi Malaysia: 2020), 60-63 and Hahn et.al., *Philosophy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, 15, 19, 95-98.

[11] Bertrand Russell posits that Pythagoras (circa 570 BC) began the discussion of ontology through numbers, with his statement "all things are numbers" followed by Parmenides (circa 500 BC) and his discourse on being. See Bertrand Russell, *The History of Western Philosophy* (New York/London/Toronto/Sydney: Touchstone/ Simon & Schuster:1945), 35.

disadvantaged during the post-classical periods when science emerges from the cradle of realism, materialism, essentialism and nominalism – in opposition to the school of idealism. It is no wonder then that not all philosophers agree on the definition of ontology. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy describes ontology as "the study of what there is."[12] The encyclopedia immediately addresses the contemporary problem with ontology as follows:

> Some contest this formulation of what ontology is, so it's only a first approximation. Many classical philosophical problems are problems in ontology: the question whether or not there is a god, or the problem of the existence of universals, etc.. These are all problems in ontology in the sense that they deal with whether or not a certain thing, or more broadly entity, exists. But ontology is usually also taken to encompass problems about the most general features and relations of the entities which do exist.[13]

The disappearance of ontology from philosophical discourse in modern times is due to the skepticism from pre-modern skeptics such as Descartes and Kant. The latter may not be opposed directly to the possibility of knowing if things really do exist, but according to Paul O'Grady, Kant began an 'abstainment' movement:

> Those philosophers who abstained from these debates did so from the position of skepticism, holding that we just don't have the cognitive wherewithal to decide any of these issues. Nevertheless, there was clear agreement on all sides that ontology had to do with portraying the nature of reality: telling it as it really is. Kant upset this consensus. His Copernican revolution introduced a new dimension to the debate. His suggestion was that ontology has to do with articulating the nature of reality *as known to human cognition*, not *as it is in itself*. In

[12] Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy at https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/logic-ontology/ (accessed 20/8/2021)

[13] Ibid.

> common with skeptics he denies our access to a world in itself. However, unlike skeptics, he believes there is still a point to doing ontology and still an account to be given of the basic structures by which the world is revealed to us.[14]

In Islamic philosophy, ontology is synonymous with the question of existence (*wujūd*) which is dealt with within the science of metaphysics (theoretical sufism). This is opposed to modern philosophy and science, following the position of logical positivism which views metaphysics and anything metaphysical as pseudo-science. However, since Einstein introduced the theory of relativity as a new paradigm in physics, the question about ontology is pursued again and became the impetus to diverse opinions that include an instrumentalist view on ontology and metaphysics.[15]

Most commonly today, ontology is a term re-coined by research on Artificial Intelligence (AI) from the 1970s and 1980s, such that the AI pioneer Tom Gruber defines it thus:

> In philosophy, one can talk about an ontology as a theory of the nature of existence (e.g. Aristotle's ontology offers primitive categories, such as substance and quality, which were presumed to account for All That Is). In computer and information science, ontology is a technical term denoting an artifact that is designed for a purpose, which is to enable the modelling of knowledge about some domain, real or imagined.[16]

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[14] Paul O'Grady, *Ontological relativism*, 1st ed. (UK:Acumen Publishing, 2002), 53-88.
Such an instrumentalist view has risen in prominence in the field of computer science. Due to the conventional nature of the English language and its adaptability for conceptualizations, early creators of artificial intelligence (AI) have resurrected the term 'ontology' in relation to knowledge system. O'Grady considers this new field, applied philosophy.

[15] Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/logic-ontology/

[16] Roe, Charles, "A Short History of Ontology: It's Not Just a Matter of Philosophy Anymore, June 7, 2012. https://www.dataversity.net/a-short-history-of-ontology-its-not-just-a-matter-of-philosophy-anymore/#, 1

As we circumnavigate the history of the word 'ontology', it is clear that it has evolved in meaning from a more metaphysical implication constrained to a human-selected element which they consider significant and finally today, superimposed into the selective simulated world of Artificial Intelligence. Further discourse on the intricacies of such human phenomena would require a separate paper. This paper will probe into the resulting relativism that stems from the disparate understanding of ontology.

## Defining Relativism and Ontological Relativism

This paper highlights the perspective of al-Attas and Nasr in constructing an argument against ontological relativism. To do so, we now define what relativism is. Analytically, the word 'relative' implies uncertain knowledge, while the -ism affixed to it, indicates a state of mind that anticipates and accepts this implication for lack of certainty in knowing. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy defines it as follows:

> Relativism, roughly put, is the view that truth and falsity, right and wrong, standards of reasoning, and procedures of justification are products of differing conventions and frameworks of assessment and that their authority is confined to the context giving rise to them.[17]

In several works, al-Attas reminds us of the longstanding view within Islamic intellectual corpus regarding the relativists known as the *sufāstāiyyah* (sophists). This was recorded by al-Nasafī and al-Taftazānī in the creed prose (*matn*) called *'Aqā'id al-Nasafīyyah*.[18] Islamic scholars enlisted three groups of rhetoricians whose objectives serve other than the pursuit of true knowledge namely - *al-'inādīyyah* (the obstinate), *al-indīyyah* (the self-opinionated) *and al-lā adrīyyah* (the agnostics). *The al-'inādīyyah* insists that the world does not have any existence other than in human minds and so

[17] On Relativism see Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/relativism/ (accessed February 12, 2021)

[18] Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *The Oldest Known Malay Manuscript: The Aqā'id of al-Nasafi* (Kuala Lumpur: University Malaya Press:1988), 48.

there is no reality. The *al-indīyyah* upholds the right of every individual to assert their personal conjecture and so everyone's ideas can be accepted if it concurs with logical parameters. Al-Attas explains their view stating that "all knowledge, they say, is subjective, and the truth about anything is only one's opinion of it, thus they are considered as epistemological Subjectivists."[15] Finally, the *lā-adrīyyah* is content with stating that they do not know and can never know, which means they are constantly in doubt. Al-Attas explains his opposition to the relativism as espoused by these groups as follows:

> The beliefs of these three groups, which form the basic elements of the position of the Sophists, are in direct opposition to Islam which, as I said, affirms the objectivity of knowledge and the existence of realities. It is obvious that such beliefs represent fundamental deviations from religion and from science and can bring about destructive consequences in human society.[19]

This poses a major obstacle to Islamic conceptualization of knowledge, which upholds truth and affirms the existence of realities.[20] Al-Attas refers to the method of the sophists as philosophical skepticism, resulting in relativism. Philosophical relativism has been around since the beginning of philosophy. The three categories of sophists, were first mentioned by Socrates in Plato's *Theaetetus* as referring to philosophers who made a career out of dialectics – and just like today's scholars, they might insist on the superiority of their opinion (*al-inādīyyah*), or feign ignorance about any authoritative opinion (*al-lā adrīyyah*) or claim that any opinion is as good as the next one (*al-indīyyah*). Whichever category we choose, the result works in opposition to the objective of the Islamic intellectual tradition – which is the search for truth and to affirm and verify that truth.[21]

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[19] Ibid.

[20] On the Western historical "problem of truth" refer to William Sahakian and Mabel Lewis, *Ideas of the Great Philosophers*, (NY: Barnes & Nobles: 1966), 23-28

[21] Ibid. 48-49 and Plato, *Thaetatus*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/theatu.html (accessed March 1, 2021)

## Relativism in Science

Modern science as viewed from the perspective of Islamic epistemology, is not reliable due to its lack of a verifiable ontology. The presence of multiple competing theories and the construction of multiple paradigms of science, cast doubt on the ability of scientists to define true knowledge. It disproves the claim of science as authoritative knowledge.

We are now confronted with multiple theories that present various trajectories of human intellectual power (*'aql*) and with diverse results in the form of models (using physical objects, multi-dimensional illustrations and computer graphics) and of course mathematical formulae due to diverse methods of interpretations within a research program. All of them issue from different presuppositions about subject-object relationships - whether they be dichotomic, unified or entangled. Even among particle physicists, the definition of a particle is varied. These professional attempts at the definition of a particle include:

A particle is a *collapsed wave function*
A particle is a *quantum excitation of a field*
A particle is an *irreducible representation of the Poincaré group*
A particle might be a *vibrating string*
A particle is a *thing we measure in a detector*

The diverse viewpoints expressed above stem from the presuppositions embedded within each position. Such presuppositions can be generally identified as issuing from the mathematical philosophy of formalism versus structuralism. [22]

[22] Both formalism and structuralism de-ontologizes objects that are being studied, such as particles and quarks. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy explains formalism as the philosophy of mathematics which posits a mathematical proposition as representing an "abstract sector of reality", much like the game of chess is used to model possible events including possible problems, anomaly and strategies without being in any way real or meaningful. In structuralism, the structures of the universe are studied by abstracting away from "the nature of objects (that) are instantiating those structures". Structuralism is contrasted with the traditional view of mathematics as the science of number and quantity - which is referred to as 'empty formalism' because the number and quantity have no relationship to real existing things (ontology) other than being a representation of something (meaningless things). Explanation by A. Weir (2011) Stanford

Science journalist, Natalie Wolchover expresses it as follows:

> With any other object, the object's properties depend on its physical makeup — ultimately, its constituent particles. But those particles' properties derive not from constituents of their own but from mathematical patterns. As points of contact between mathematics and reality, particles straddle both worlds with an uncertain footing.[23]

As Wolchover admitted, mathematics has not been employed to confirm reality in this scientific paradigm (program) as it is not able to verify it.[24] However, theoretical physicists believe mathematical modeling can determine what a particle might be, as it offers a possible explanation, which of course remains to be verified.

Take for example, the third definition of a particle which states that, "a particle is an irreducible representation of the Poincaré group" – this means a representation of various symmetrical possibilities.[25] We detect the importance of mathematical structure in the last definition, which states that a particle is a "thing we measure in a detector."[26] This is a tautological statement which by virtue of its function of stating the obvious (such as a triangle is a "plane figure with three straight sides and three angles") diverts the meaning from the subject or observer, by structuring the sentences to state the obvious. However, this does not deny the special function of mathematics as a verification instrument. The measurements are representatives of what the particles exhibit to the world, which mathematics capture in numbers and shapes, forming the structure of an unobservable entity. This is indeed a metaphysical aspect of quantum science that can no longer be denied.

Other definitions presented above are more privy to the influence or contribution of the human observer, such as the

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Encyclopedia of Philosophy https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/structuralism-mathematics/(accessed November 15, 2020).

[23] Natalie Wolchover, "What is a Particle?" in *Quanta Magazine*, https://www.quantamagazine.org/what-is-a-particle-20201112/ (accessed November 12, 2020)

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid.

"collapsed wave function" despite being the result of an experiment with photons or electrons known as the Young Double Slit experiment is nonetheless a true event that occurred. The collapsed wave function is a state of affairs for particles whose wave-movement is neutralized by the overlap of two ripples of photons, electrons or other vibrating entities. Human intuition which scientists convey as 'thought experiment' allows for an understanding of phenomena through a multi-steps deduction or even, sudden analogical link generated in the mind between water ripple movements and the behavior of photons. Similarly a quantum excitation of a field is a definition based on the subject's observation of localized particle effects over a limited area of space-time. It is but another property (quiddity) of the entity being investigated. The question is, can different manifestations of particles qualify as the defining statement above the others? How do we find the ontological ground of this entity called particles?[27]

In this preliminary stage of our research program, we will not attempt to answer those questions. Instead, we will outline the Islamic traditional perspectives on ontology of objects, subjects and the effects (or traces) of the Divine according to Nasr and al-Attas as contemporary scholars of Islamic philosophy. In order to understand their perspectives, we will analyze their criticisms of modern science, particularly in relation to ontology and metaphysics.

[27] Amongst these definitions, the definition that takes into account the multiple views presented above, is string theory as stated in the fourth definition, a particle might be a vibrating string. Researchers placed even higher hopes in string theory: the idea that if you zoomed in enough on particles, you would see not points but one-dimensional vibrating strings. You would also see six extra spatial dimensions, which string theory says are curled up at every point in our familiar 4D space-time fabric. The geometry of the small dimensions determines the properties of strings and thus the macroscopic world. "Internal" symmetries of particles, like the SU(3) operations that transform quarks' color, obtain physical meaning: These operations map, in the string picture, onto rotations in the small spatial dimensions, just as spin reflects rotations in the large dimensions. "Geometry gives you symmetry gives you particles, and all of this goes together," Dimitri Nanopoulos made this statement in the article, "What is a Particle." https://www.quantamagazine.org/what-is-a-particle-20201112/

## Truth Verification in Islamic Ontology

Islamic philosophy of science is most concerned with the truth-verification aspect of science. Both scholars consider science as knowledge in its universal meaning, which can lead us to the discovery of reality and truth. The assumption of science as a branch of knowledge that is most authoritative is viewed by both scholars as a reductionism that cannot be substantiated. Thus, science as argued in the epistemology of Islam, is concerned with the understanding of true reality – both reality as in our existence in this world, and Absolute Truth. As far as modern science is concerned, Al-Attas defines (modern) science as "the definition of reality."[28] By this he means the physical reality (extra-mental) that is bound by space-time limitations. We will show the impact of this statement in due time. For Nasr, science as conveyed in its Latin etymology as '*scientia*' - has deep metaphysical connotation yet refers to knowledge in a larger sense than just scientific knowledge, which is similar to al-Attas. To Nasr, metaphysics is an exact science, which he calls *scientia sacra* and defines as a "*theoria* of reality."[29] Nasr describes metaphysics as "in fact (is) one and should be named metaphysics in the singular, is the science of the Real, of the origin and end of things, of the Absolute and, in its light, the relative." [30] Both scholars essentially point to the fact that 'science' no longer conveys the deep and encompassing meaning it used to embody.

## Metaphysics of Islam as the Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Science

Metaphysics of Islam refers to Sufism or the science of purification of the heart (*tazkiyyat al-nafs*). William Chittick considers Sufism as the third domain of human experience within the ambit of the Islamic worldview.[31] He states:

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[28] "Science is a definition of reality", according to al-Attas in *The Concept of Education in Islam*, 2.

[29] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man* (London: Mandala: 1968), 81.

[30] Ibid. and Hahn, *Library of Living Philosophers: Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, 498.

[31] Ibid. Also Hahn, *Library of Living Philosophers: Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, (eds.) (Chicago: Open Court Press, 2001), 445-462. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, 498.

> If we look at Islamic teachings as addressing three basic domains of human experience - doing, knowing, and being; or practice, doctrine, and realization; or islām, imān, and ihsān - then Sufism focuses specifically on the last, employing the first and the second, however, as its primary means to achieve this focus.[32]

He added that "The Sufis strove to achieve perfect *ihsān*, which involved, according to the Prophet's definition, "worshiping God as if you see Him." From the point of view of this "as if," the world appears as a far different place than from the point of view of Islamic law, whose stance in relation to God is "we hear and we obey," with no mention of 'seeing'. Both kalam and most of Islamic philosophy accepted that there was nothing of God to be seen in this world, but that God could be thought about."[33] The works of both scholars share that same objective of searching for reality and truth behind every object, including the most fundamental aspect of creation. Nasr focuses on the "conception of nature" while Al-Attas constructs his "formulation of the philosophy of science" based on the framework of Islamic metaphysics.[34]

Nasr and al-Attas reveal a philosophy of nature and science respectively (within a larger philosophy of knowledge), that is reflective of Islamic epistemology practiced by great Muslim scholars of the past – an epistemology that places revelation at the highest level and conform to its verification in judging other less authoritative branches of knowledge. Al-Attas distinguishes Islamic epistemology from those that are strictly philosophical as follows:

> Our affirmation of Revelation as the source of knowledge of ultimate reality and truth pertaining both to created things as well as to their Creator provides us

[32] William Chittick in the Foreword, to Al-Ghazali, *The Niche of Lights* (*Brigham Young University - Islamic Translation Series)*, trans. David Buchman, (Utah, US: Bringham Young University Press:1998), xii.

[33] Ibid.

[34] For more comprehensive comparisons of their criticisms read, Khalina Mohammed Khalili, *The Philosophy of Science in Islam from the Perspectives Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas and Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, Ph.D. diss., (Universiti Teknologi Malaysia: 2021), 300.

> with the foundation for a metaphysical framework in which to elaborate our philosophy of science as an integrated system descriptive of that reality and truth in a way which is not open to the methods of the secular philosophic rationalism and philosophic empiricism of modern philosophy and science.[35]

Foremost in the approach of the traditional scholars of Islam, is the Qur'an as a source of divine inspiration. This epistemological source is the nexus of communication between the Creator and His individual creations, provided that each of us has an open channel of communication at the center of our souls. In this way, we are tapping into the power of intellect embodied by individual men and women who are cognitively and spiritually grounded in the tenets of Islamic belief. The intellect (*'aql*) when expressed as intuition (*ilḥām*) and imagination (*khayāl*) is a shining light that can guide all of humanity towards a certainty of knowledge based on reality and truth, and to avoid the pitfalls of relativism that are now evident in various disciplines of knowledge. This epistemological conviction is expressed by both al-Attas and Nasr. Revelation for al-Attas, refers to the Qur'an as revelation, and Muslims as the receptacles of this divine knowledge. Revelation for Nasr consists of both a universal kind of revelation and the particularized kind as intended for different communities in human history. This marks his argument towards religious conviction with a hint of relativism, and is reflected in his view on the cosmological doctrines of various religions and civilizations, including diverse doctrines within the Islamic milieu.

Nasr however, stresses that *scientia sacra* or metaphysics are not privy to relativity, just as mathematics are exact and convey absolute representation of reality. He explains it as follows:

> This supreme science of the Real which in a certain light is the same as gnosis, is the only science that can distinguish between the Absolute and the relative, appearance and reality… It is only in its light that man can distinguish between levels of reality, states of being

[35] Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *Islam and the Philosophy of Science* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC: 1989), 9.

> and be able to see each thing in its place in the total scheme of things.[36]

## Nasr's Criticisms on De-ontologization of Cosmology

To Nasr, the banishment of metaphysics marks the beginning of an ontological disconnection between man and nature. It is a consequence of the slippery slope into rationalism by Christian clerics such as the Aristotelian Thomists who are part of the Scholastics, culminating in a reductionism of knowledge that occurred in stages during the Late Medieval period, the Renaissance and the Enlightenment to usher the modern ideology which includes modern science and its ideology of scientism. According to Nasr, the secularization of Christianity follows these stages:[37]

1. Desacralization of the Cosmos
2. Desacralization of Man
3. Desacralization of the Absolute
4. Destruction from the Modern Age

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[36] Nasr, *Man and Nature* (London: Mandala: 1968), 81.

[37] The author analyzes Nasr's criticisms based on a series of reductionism that occurred at the hands of several philosophical schools and positions in her thesis (Khalina Mohammed Khalili: PhD thesis: 2021). Ibrahim Kalin, on the other hand, outlined Nasr's criticisms as follows: "Five main traits of modern science come to the fore in Nasr's critical analysis. The first is the secular view of the universe that sees no traces of the Divine in the natural order….The second feature is the mechanization of the world-picture upon the model of machines and clocks. Once couched in terms of mechanistic relations, nature becomes something absolutely determinable and predictable - a much needed safety zone for the rise of modern industrial society and capitalism. The third aspect of modern science is rationalism and empiricism…. The fourth trait is the legacy of Cartesian dualism that presupposes complete separation between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, that is, between the knowing subject and the object to be known. With this cleavage, the epistemological alienation of man from nature comes to completion by leaving behind a torrent of pseudo-problems in modern philosophy, the notorious mind-body problem being a special case in point. The last important aspect of modern science is in a sense a culmination of the foregoing features, and it is the exploitation of nature as a source of power and domination - a fact not unknown to modern capitalist society." Ibrahim Kalin, "The Sacred Versus the Secular: Nasr on Science", in *Library of Living Philosophers: Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, L. E. Hahn, R. E. Auxier and L. W. Stone (eds.) (Chicago: Open Court Press, 2001), 453.

As a result of the development of the nominalist and materialist perspective by Thomists scholars (the Scholastics) on nature and religiosity, the ancient cosmology that grounds the framework of knowledge and symbolic structure of nature began to be replaced with a mathematized framework, making it more suited to be called cosmography rather than cosmology. This refers to the mapping of the universe based on quantified data on distance, size and others as opposed to the overarching view of the entities that permeates the universe, both physically-measured ones and unobserved entities, such as the classical monads. The quantification of celestial objects and motions along with the mechanistic view on phenomena is one example of desacralization and de-ontologization of the environment we live in.[38]

Nasr proposes a re-sacralization program based on his synthesis of perennial philosophy and Islamic philosophy. Following the worldview of perennial philosophy, there are two principles or elements of significance, namely hierarchy of knowledge and the inner-outer dimensions. These two elements mark the ontology of at least two realms of existence – the universe and man. In the perennial cosmology, the universe has God (or often referred to as the Absolute) at the top of the hierarchy, which is an ancient cosmology representing the existential processes variedly understood as either monism, pantheism or panentheism (each school of philosophy may subscribe to a particular one). Cosmology is the primary symbolism inherent in the hermeneutics of perennial philosophy. A scientists or scholar who can comprehend the inner significance of this cosmology can fathom deeper levels of knowledge due to his or her possession of a symbolist spirit that can perceive multiple ontological realms through the power of his or her intellect.[39]

This representation of the hierarchy of nature or "the great chain of being" – reflects various ontologies or degrees of existence

[38] Nasr, *Islam and the Modern World*, 91.
Today, quantification takes the form of models and computer manipulations of telescopic photographs, such as the photographic construction of a black hole in December 2022. See Event Horizon Telescope, https://eventhorizontelescope.org/blog/astronomers-reveal-first-image-black-hole-heart-our-galaxy featuring the image here: https://cdn.eso.org/images/large/eso2208-eht-mwh.jpg
[39] Ibid.

that the human intellect has the capacity to penetrate. However, part of Nasr's criticisms of modernity is the loss of this power of human intellect.

## Desacralization of Man and Nasr's Resacralization Project

What does it mean for humanity to be desacralized? Nasr states that a desacralized man is one whose inner dimension is emptied out while his intellectual capacity is limited to the rational and logical spheres. Nasr differentiates this mental process from a higher ontological attainment by referring to it as ratiocination.[40] For Nasr, the symbolist spirit within man can be harnessed so long as he or she remains attached to metaphysics represented by the tradition that he or she came from or the religious or philosophical tradition that he or she adopts, whereby he or she becomes familiar with all the symbols of that tradition. With that perceptiveness along with the employment of his intellective intuition and/or illumination of both mind and sensory organs, Nasr assures his audience that such a man is the 'contemplative man' who can achieve an intellective and illuminating experience. Thus, by balancing his inner and outer dimension, the contemplative man attains to higher ontological levels that allow him or her to unlock the 'sacred' meaning behind symbols and to even allude to the deeper knowledge he has attained. Nasr states:

> Symbols are ontological aspects of a thing, to say the least as real as the thing itself, and in fact that which bestows significance upon a thing within the universal order of existence. In the hierarchic universe of traditional metaphysics, it can be said that every level of reality is ultimately a symbol, only the Real being Itself as such. But on a more limited scale, one can say that symbols reflect in the formal order archetypes belonging to the principial realm and that through symbols the symbolized is unified with its archetypal reality.[41]

For Nasr, his strongest criticisms are directed more towards

[40] Khalina Mohammed Khalili (2021), Ph. D. dissertation, 276.

[41] Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, 135; also Khalina Mohammed Khalili (2021) Ph.D. dissertation, 276.

modernity and its impact on the world-view of science than science as a corpus of knowledge. A change of perspective occurred at the hands of the logical positivists whom Nasr says "remove the last specter of metaphysical significance from modern science" by "establishing connections between mathematical and physical signs" called symbols. The logical positivists do not describe the science of the real, but instead prescribe how nature should be, by controlling and dominating its processes and casting its explanation in the edifice of formal logic. This prescriptive role of science de-ontologizes phenomena.[42] "The positivist interpretation of science is, in reality, an aim to de-ontologize science completely-not by shifting the ontological status from the physical domain to the Pythagorean-Platonic world of archetypes connected with mathematics, but by denying its ontological significance completely." [43] With the development of formalism within philosophy of mathematics, objects and phenomena are detached from its ontological states and ironically become building blocks of facts *sans* meaning.

More investigation needs to be pursued in order to understand why Nasr highlights the significance of symbols in nature and calls for the revival of the 'symbolist man' (contemplative individuals) who can unlock their meaning, while simultaneously attacking the symbols ascribed by the philosophers of mathematics in formal logic. In the next section, we make a comparison between Nasr's and al-Attas's criticisms of modern science.

## Al-Attas's Criticisms of the Explanation of Science

According to al-Attas, secularization is the threatening social and intellectual force throughout human history that culminates with modern science. However modern science itself is not a menace in its methods and body of knowledge, though it is far from neutral. He states that "in our time, the greatest challenge is the surreptitious encroaching of secularization as a philosophical programme into the social consciousness" of societies.[44] Al-Attas refers to the multiple

[42] Khalina Mohammed Khalili (2021), Ph.D. dissertation, 207.
[43] Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1968, 1976), *Man and Nature*, 24-27.
[44] See Author's Note in Al-Attas, *Prolegomena*, xi.

stages of ideological shifts that occurred since the period of ancient Greek philosophy to our times as a set of reductionisms within a philosophical program. This humanistic philosophical program is what al-Attas considers the instrument of secularization. The following is an outline of the path to secularization that Al-Attas refers to as a philosophical program:

1. Realism vs Nominalism
2. Empirical vs Rational (methodology) + pragmatism
3. Supremacy of Logic above Human Reason
4. Interpretation based on Symbolic Logic and Analytical Language
5. Postmodern Influences of Analytic philosophy

His criticisms trace the changes occurring in the explanation of scientific phenomena from that of a description of objects and phenomena to a prescription and even a projective role which natural philosophy cultivated with the shift from the Platonic school of idealism to Aristotelian's realism. In the modern period this prescriptive role of science is supported by formal logic to cultivate the construction of theoretical facts based on scientific convention.[45] This position of power results in the dominance of scientific knowledge or scientific imperialism in all fields of knowledge, and impacts the general public with the ideology of scientism.[46] However, the cultivation of science based on its nominalist values is antithetical to the discovery of the true essence of things, and is therefore not supportive of ontology.

[45] For a logical and axiomatic treatment of the modern polemic on ontology in religion, also known as the ontological argument see Aqil Azmi B.A. thesis in which he argued that Godel's formal logic resumed from the presumptions of Kant, Descartes and Kripke etc. Aqil Azmi, *The Logic of Modality in Gödel's Ontological Argument*, B.A. thesis, (Harvard University: March 2024).

[46] Alexander Rosenberg defines scientism as "the unwarranted overconfidence in the established methods of science to deal with all questions, and the tendency to displace other "ways of knowing" even in domains where conventional scientific approaches are inappropriate, unavailing, or destructive of other goals, values and insights." Alex Rosenberg, *Philosophy of Science: A Contemporary Introduction* (3rd ed.) (New York: Routledge: 2012), 23.

## The Importance of Ontology in Contemporary Science and al-Attas's Islamization Project

Many ontological questions have been marred by skepticism, for which al-Attas blames Western philosophy for adopting 'doubt as an epistemological tool' an epistemological method that runs contrary to Islamic tradition and belief.[47] The question raised by Descartes, as the father of modernism, lingers on the same ontological questions – do we really exist? To Descartes, his ability to wonder (i.e. to doubt) about these ontological questions confirms that he exists. He raised the awareness that "I am thinking therefore I exist" (commonly translated as "I think therefore I am" (English) from the Latin, "*cogito ergo sum*"). The fact that humans exist and can grasp ideas individually, allows them to construct their version of reality shaped by Descartes, Kant and others through a systematic banishment of metaphysics. This brings us to the relativism of the 21st century.

Al-Attas deems doubt and skepticism as elements of the Western worldview which fuel the climatic episodes in Western prose such as the Greek Tragedies, Shakespeare's sonnets and even Freudian theory of psychoanalysis. This ingrained emotional baggage is highly illogical and thus rightly belongs in the category of superstition. He urges all scholars of Islam to partake in the formulation of theories or the explanation stage of scientific research. In other words, scholars of Islam and Muslim scholars generally, despite being educated in the field of humanities (especially the Islamic sciences), can be critical much like the philosophers of science who influenced the epistemology of science. They should exert their knowledge of Quranic revelation, the Prophetic tradition and other branches of Islamic knowledge upon the corpus of natural science in order to exhume all the corrupting elements embedded in its theoretical construct as well as any long-held presuppositions (including superstitions) such as their reliance on doubt, skepticism and falsification. The doubting mind is not capable of reaching certainty and attaining truth about reality. Al-Attas focuses on the attempt to verify reality as part of the Islamization of contemporary

[47] Al-Attas, *Islam and the Philosophy of Science*, 8-9 and al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: Universiti Teknologi Malaysia: 2014), 1-118.

knowledge, for which modern science can play a role of providing evidence and defining the reality of objects and phenomena.

## Islamic Philosophy of Science and Nature

Based on the criticisms of both Nasr and al-Attas, we can develop a corpus of natural science as well as other areas of knowledge that are based on the worldview of Islam. The philosophical positions of idealism and realism sit in an equilibrium in the traditional Islamic perspective that stresses the role of human intellect or noumena. This similarity with idealism was treated in the author's thesis as follows, "The trans-empirical and trans-rational instrument with the participation of the human faculty of the intellect, can access the permanent entities (*a'yān thābitah*), similar to the Platonic ideas so as to form the conceptual understanding of the universal attribute of objects."[48]

Al-Attas and Nasr recognize the functioning of a supra-rational intellect that transcends the average reasoning ability of the common man. Nasr's efforts are directed towards reviving man's reliance on this power of the soul. The intellectual capacity of individuals are reflected in his language, and each scholar therefore places certain emphasis on language - for Nasr it is symbolism and for al-Attas it is semantics.[49] Through a method of contemplation and illumination, Nasr calls for a return to the traditional method which employs symbolism in the interpretation of nature. Nasr believes that the cultivation of the individual's intellectual and illuminative reasoning has an ontologically transformative power that can lift one to ever higher realms of existence culminating in the self-realization (gnosticism). Achieving gnosis is the highest aim of re-sacralization according to Nasr, which he expresses as when "knowledge and being coincide; it is there that science and faith find their harmony."[50] Nasr attempts to revitalize a method of scientific interpretation according to the perennial epistemology using English (and other

[48] Khalina Mohammed-Khalili, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, 2021; 285;

[49] Ibid. To understand more on the significance of semantic analysis, refer to Salina Ahmad (2017) *Al-Attas' Conception of Language and His Utilization of Semantic Analysis*, unpublished PhD dissertation, UTM.

[50] Ibid. 266-7.

European languages) as the contemporary medium of transmission. Thus, for Nasr languages along with the symbolisms that are contained within it play an important function in returning the ontology of nature and our perception of it. Nasr had cited the metaphorical nuances contained in ancient prose of English, French and other European languages, which render them capable of delivering metaphysical knowledge. He alludes to the possibility of delivering the metaphysical teachings of Mulla Sadra into modern languages, and therefore making them accessible to contemporary seekers of knowledge.[51]

The use of symbolism however, is challenged by ambiguity and personal hermeneutics when symbols are not understood correctly by the people receiving the message. Thus, symbols cannot always offer accurate meaning intended by the source of a symbol, metaphor or allegory. A symbol might have different interpretations based on cultures and religions. A symbol might be accessible to describe the higher levels of meaning of objects, but the same symbol might infer different meanings to different groups of people. Its possibility of verification as true knowledge, is thus, limited. However, this is acceptable based on the perennial hermeneutics that Nasr propagates. Al-Attas considers hermeneutics to be outside of the Islamic intellectual traditions, and relies upon the interpretation method of tafsīr and ta'wīl, which is not elaborated upon here due to space limitation.[52] For al-Attas, language is the most important vehicle of reasoning and for the cultivation of the intellect. He highlighted this relationship in his semantic method of analysis for the preservation of linguistic accuracy. Through his semantic method, al-Attas demonstrates how to rely upon the use of a scientific language in writing definitions of objects and phenomena that reflect their true ontology. According to al-Attas the scientific language that can perform this role is the Arabic language and other Islamic languages that follow the grammar and morphology of Arabic. As such it is imperative for Muslim scholars to continuously revise their definitions of objects and phenomena through the publications of

[51] Khalina Mohammed-Khalili (2021), unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, 262-270.

[52] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Science and Civilization in Islam* (New York: Barnes and Noble Books: 1968), 337.

lexicons, dictionaries and encyclopedia. Based on this aspect of al-Attas's philosophy of knowledge, we can see why he reserves his strongest criticisms to the philosophers of language amongst the logical positivists and analytic philosophers.[53] Semantic change and infiltration of alien concepts occur frequently in modern languages, and al-Attas believe that these "two linguistic factors…can corrupt the truth-value and metaphysical foundation of knowledge."[54]

Today, science is a competitive enterprise that is sometimes associated with the production of statements that report scientific findings known as 'facts' and 'information'. In certain cases, these facts are constructed to fit the intended hypothesis or for the purpose of achieving commercial gains or political clout.[55] Oftentimes due to scientism, half-truths are presented as a possible likelihood or even marketed as a verified phenomenon to the ignorant general public, putting the integrity of science at risk. The pursuit of science under such circumstances cannot be considered as the pursuit of true knowledge. In such an academic climate, diverse and opposing theories can be endorsed after each one is filtered through its prospective reductionist lens that separate each theory into paradigms of relativism, pluralism and post-truths. Al-Attas's philosophy of science aims to protect knowledge from being tainted with falsehood and unverified assumptions, as he states:

> …(T)he study of nature by science ought not to be reduced to the methods of empiricism and rationalism that operate solely on the world of objects or events in space and time and their relations. The statements and general conclusions derived from these methods must be reformulated, and the methods themselves modified,

[53] Read on *tafsir* and *ta'wil* in Khalina Mohammed Khalili, Ph.D. dissertation:2021, 153-160.

[54] Refer to my discussion on postmodern influences of the school of analytical philosophy in Khalina Mohammed Khalili, Ph.D. dissertation: 2021, 108-122.
Refer to pages 169-170 which discuss the two factors as semantic change and infiltration of alien key concepts and terminology such as evolution, development, faith et cetera

[55] Bruno Latour and Wolgar, S., *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts*. (2nd ed.) (New Jersey: Princeton University Press: 1986).

> such that they can be integrated into a unified system that discloses the ultimate Reality in positive terms.[56]

The unified system mentioned here refers to the metaphysics of Islam, which is the study of higher Sufism. The study of Sufism or *tasawwuf* does not necessarily mean the adoption of the Sufi-lifestyle or becoming a Sufi. However, this is a cursory statement about what it means to come to terms with the significance of Sufism in the Islamic intellectual history and tradition. Sufism was a reality without a name in the life of the early Muslims. The current impact of modernism in Islamic thought has cast a negative light on this science relating to the purification of the hearts (at its foundational level of discourse). At its higher level of discourse, known as theoretical Sufism or *tasawwuf al-nazariyyah* (or Irfan for Shi'a Muslims), this science is essential to every Muslim for it casts a positive light on the true meaning of existence and provides answers to complex and urgent existentialist questions.

## Conclusion

In this paper, we attempted to show that Islamic metaphysics or theoretical Sufism is the foundation of the Islamic philosophy of science. In our modern classification of knowledge, metaphysics no longer occupy the top position in the hierarchy of knowledge, because it is now replaced by mathematics or science. These two, along with technology and engineering that make up STEM, are the prerequisite branches of knowledge that are considered essential for the survival of the current materialistic civilization. Mathematics is the scaffold for certain presuppositions of science because through symbols and numbers, scientists and mathematicians assume that their emotional and metaphysical (read superstition) tendencies are controlled. With skepticism as a guide like shadows in the cave, modern philosophers and scientists produce various hypotheses that can be crafted into explanations of science or theories. These theories co-exist as part of the relativist framework. However, within this relativist framework, lurks an opportunity for an expansion of the scientific scope to include metaphysics as an element of science. Islamic scholars and philosophers of science have the prerogative to

[56] Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *A Commentary on the Hujjat al-Sīddīq,* 50.

reaffirm the significance of metaphysics in natural science and all branches of knowledge.

Returning to the definitions of particles discussed previously, what matters is the search for the true meaning of a particle, among other things. In exploring what is meaningful rather than just practical for description or whatever fits into a prescriptive formula, the human intellect as a subjective participant has the most significant role. Ironically, in the search for true knowledge, there exists the possibility of not knowing. This limit of truth begs the humility of the seeker of knowledge to admit the true ontology of an object when it is not knowable to the human intellect. However, the arguments we delved into in this paper have highlighted two sources of ontological verification in the secular and religious framework respectively, namely mathematics and True revelation - which Muslims affirm to be the Quran.

# THE MALAY EPISTEMOLOGICAL BACKGROUND IN THE ISLAMIC WRITINGS OF HAMZAH FANSŪRĪ

*Tee Boon Chuan*[1]

**Abstract**

*The study of Hamzah Fansūrī's writings has long been focused on understanding its connection to Islamic philosophy rather than its indigenous philosophical origins. The objective of this study is to identify and expose the traditional Malay epistemological background behind Hamzah Fansūrī's writings. This objective is achieved through the evidence and analysis methods of historical linguistics on the one hand, and by judging these analytical conclusions based on Buddhist Yogācāra's epistemology of Śrīvijaya on the other hand. Three important research findings are as follows: 1) the overall style of Hamzah Fansūrī's writings is the logical tradition of Dignāga, 2) all the metaphors of Hamzah Fansūrī's writings, which are of the type of pariṇāma theory, can be understood in the epistemological tradition of Vasubandhu, which was influential in the writings of Śrīvijaya from the end of the seventh century to the beginning of the eleventh century, and 3) Hamzah Fansūrī's works are also influenced by the recent Malayu-Singapura philosophy of Saṃkhyā, mainly the distinction between śabda and katā, which is used to receive the new Islamic epistemological distinctions and traditions. In other words, to say that the Śrīvijaya period had no major impact on philosophy, and that pre-Islamic Malay mind was more aesthetic than philosophical cannot be supported by the writings of Hamzah Fansūrī.*

**Keywords:** Hamzah Fansūrī, becoming Malay, Sufi metaphysics, Malay epistemology, Śrīvijaya

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## Background of Research: Study on Islamic Sources of Hamzah Fansūrī's Writings

Hamzah Fansūrī is a familiar philosophical figure known to Malay-Indonesian Islamic scholars in history. Hamzah Fansūrī's writings and thought not only influenced his birthplace from Aceh region, but also to southern Sumatra region of Palembang as well as the island of Java, Kalimantan and Sulawesi.[2] Today he is also better known to Islamic scholars outside the Malay-Indonesian region, especially from the Persian-speaking world in which three of Hamzah Fansūrī's outstanding writings (*Asrāru'l-'Ārifīn*, *Sharābu'l-'Āshiqīn*, and *Al-Muntahī*) have been translated into and for Persian readers in 2018.[3]

One of the dominant trends of recent study on Hamzah Fansūrī's writings is to trace the Islamic sources as per quoted in his treatises on Sufi doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd.* Scholars have reached a consensus that Hamzah Fansūrī owed his understanding mainly to the Ibn ʿArabī (d. 1240 CE) school with its Persian members like Fakhr al-Din Iraqi (d. 1289 CE), Abd al-Rahman Jami (d. 1492 CE), Jalal al-Din Rumi (d. 1273 CE), Sa'di-e Shirazi (d. 1291 CE), and Mahmoud Shabestari (d. 1340 CE). In fact, Hamzah Fansūrī's writings are only an example of Persian phase of Islamization in Malay-Indonesian region from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century.[4] However, the Persian phase of Islamization seems to have quickly dwindled after the time of Hamzah Fansūrī as his works were officially classified as heresy by the Aceh kingdom.

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[2] For Hamzah Fansūrī's influence in Malay-Indonesian archipelago in history, see Miftah Arifin, *Wujudiyah di Nusantara: Kontinuitas & Perubahan* (Yogyakarta: STAIN Jember Press & Pustaka Pelajar, 2015).

[3] See Amir H. Zekrgoo and Leyla H. Tajer, "An introduction to Ḥamzah Fanṣoūrī's asrārul 'arifīn, sharābul-'ashiqīn, al-muntahī: a translation project in progress," Syed Farid Alatas & Abdolreza Alami eds., *The Civilizational and Cultural Heritage of Iran and the Malay World: A Cultural Discourses* (Kuala Lumpur: Gerakbudaya Enterprise & Cultural Center Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2018), 107-118.

[4] See Paul Wormser, "The limits of Persian influence in the 17th century Malay World', *International conference of The Frontiers of Persian learning: testing the limits of an Eurasian lingua franca*," University of California Los Angeles, 16 October 2015.

Under this trend of the current study, the scholars' concern is always on exploring Hamzah Fansūrī as an Islamic philosopher purely and not a Malay-Islamic philosopher. Their scholarly exploration so far does not help us understand the Malay philosophical background of Hamzah Fansūrī.[5] To recognize Hamzah Fansūrī as the first Islamic philosopher in Malay language is probably a doubtless claim, but scholars seldom realize (and seldom discuss) that it was made possible only on the shoulders of Malay language from the philosophical tradition especially. Hamzah Fansūrī used to cite his predecessors from Pasai kingdom (ca. 1250 CE-1524 CE) in support of his new Sufi metaphysics of *waḥdat al-wujūd* which was also in Malay, with a favorite analogy of the seed and the tree ("*biji dan pohon*").[6] But the Malay language (and the seed-tree analogy) was not invented by the Pasai kingdom; it was already the administrative language of Śrīvijaya in the seventh century. If we consider that the word *biji* in Malay is borrowed from Sanskrit (*bijā* /**बिजा**, also *bija* in Malay) and has been used by the seventh century Śrīvijaya philosopher Śākyakīrti (**शाक्यकीर्ति**, ca. 650 CE-693 CE) to convey the same analogy of the seed and the tree,[7] does this have nothing to do with Hamzah Fansūrī linguistically and analogically for the philosophical purpose at hand?

One weakness of the current Islamic study on Hamzah Fansūrī's treatises is to attribute their content to the Islamic sources without their possible local contribution. The analogy of the ocean and the waves ("*laut dan ombak*") in Hamzah Fansūrī's treatises, for

[5] For more recent examples, see Amir H. Zekrgoo and Leyla H. Tajer, *Tracing Persian Sufi Literature In Hamzah Fansuri's Writings* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2023), 2; Thibaut d'Hubert and Alexandre Papas, *Jāmī in Regional Contexts: The Reception of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Jāmī's Works in the Islamicate World, ca. 9th/15th–14th/20th Century* (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2019); and Imtiyaz Yusuf, *Measuring the Effect of Iranian Mysticism on Southeast Asia* (Bangkok: Cultural Centre, Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2004).

[6] See Hamzah Fansūrī, *Al-Muntahī*, in Syed Muhammmad Naguib Al-Attas, *The Mysticism of Hamzah Fansūrī* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malay Press, 1970), 558.

[7] See Tee Boon Chuan, "*Hastadandaśāstra* (Naskah Tertua Kerajaan Śrīwijaya) dalam sejarah logik dan metafizik Melayu," in Ros Mahwati Ahmad Zakaria, Ahmad Bazri Mokhtar, Muhamad Shafiq Mohd Ali eds., *SEMALU 2022: Prosiding Seminar Antarabangsa Manuskrip Melayu* (Bangi: ATMA-UKM, 2022), 19-40.

another example, has been usually attributed by many scholars as "the analogy…favourite of Ṣūfīs generally in their attempt to describe their conception of Being."[8] In the reality, the analogy was also a favorite analogy between Śākyakīrti (a Buddhist Yogācāra philosopher earlier cited) and his unnamed opponent (a Buddhist Mahīśāsaka [one of Hinayana schools] philosopher) when they were debating the philosophical proposition of Vasubandhu (**वसुबन्धु**, ca. 4th to 5th century) in seventh century Śrīvijaya. The analogy appeared in verse 15 of Vasubandhu's fundamental writing on *Thirty Verses of the Consciousness Only* (*Triṃśikā-kārikā* / **त्रिंशिकाकारिका**) that:

> [15] In the root-consciousness (*mūla-vijñāna*), the arising of the other five takes place according to conditions, either all together or not, just as waves (*taraṅga*) in water (*jala*).[9]

The root-*vijñāna* that gave rise to the five *vijñānas* was analogous to the ocean and the waves, and both were consciousness in nature in terms of describing the Buddhist Yogācāra's the-consciousness-only metaphysics ("the unity of consciousness"). Does this ocean-waves analogy of Hamzah Fansūrī, along with other analogies in his treatises, come from an earlier time other than the coming of Islam to the Malay-Indonesian region?

## Objective of Research: "Becoming Malay" ("Masuk Melayu") or the Domestication of New Islamic Philosophy in Hamzah Fansūrī's Writings

Based on the above examples of analogy, we believe that Hamzah Fansūrī and other Malay intellectuals in his times were already familiar with their pre-Islamic Malay versions. Just like the Malay language, these analogies were not invented by the Pasai kingdom nor by Hamzah Fansūrī. It was already there even before the Pasai

[8] See Syed Muhammmad Naguib Al-Attas, *The Mysticism of Hamzah Fansūrī*, 160. See also Abdul Hadi W. M., *Tasawuf Yang Tertindas: Kajian Hermeneutik Terhadap Karya-Karya Hamzah Fansuri* (Jakarta: Paramadina, 2001), 94.

[9] See Vasubandhu, "The thirty verses: 15," adapted from Stefan Anacker, *Seven Works of Vasubhandu: the Buddhist Psychological Doctor* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2005), 187.

kingdom was founded in 1250 CE. To say Hamzah Fansūrī was the first Islamic philosopher to write in the Malay language might sound plausible based on received evidence, but to claim that Malay language did not become a literary vehicle of philosophy until the writings of Hamzah Fansūrī appears to be an exaggeration.

In Hamzah Fansūrī's writings, for example, divine and prophetic sources of knowledge were referred to as *sabda* (from Sanskrit, śabda / **शब्द**) which were to be distinguished from the category of sayings known as *kata* (from Sanskrit, kathā / **कथा**). Hamzah Fansūrī used the latter word *kata* when referring to the works of all members of the Ibn ʿArabī school as well as other Islamic philosophers, theologians and any wisely sayings before him. This epistemological distinction between *śabda* and *katā* is also true in the earlier Islamic writings prior to Hamzah Fansūrī, such as the *`Aqā'id al-Nasafī* (1590 CE), *Hikayat Amir Hamzah* (ca. 1380 CE), and *Hikayat Muhammad Hanafiyah* (ca. 1380 CE) and in the Hindu writings such as *Hikayat Seri Rama* (no latest by 1633 CE), *Hikayat Pandawa Lima* (ca. 1525 CE), and *Hikayat Bayan Budiman* (1371 CE).

In other words, we cannot simply regard Hamzah Fansūrī's writings as a pure translation work in Malay. It is true that Hamzah Fansūrī has mentioned at the beginning of *Sharābu'l-'Āshiqīn* that he is writing it in Malay for those "who do not understand Arabic and Persian."[10] However, when we consider that Hamzah Fansūrī's writings employ the same epistemological distinction between *śabda* and *katā* as other writings from 1371 CE up to his times, using a number of analogies that may or may not be found in Islam, including the analogy of milk and butter ("susu dan minyak sapi") which is well known not only in Hindu *Bhagavad Gīta* but also in Javanese Hindu *Arjuna Wiwāha* as pointed out by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas,[11] it is quite clear that he was adopting what is now called the domestication of translation approach in writing his three treatises on Sufi metaphysics of *waḥdat al-wujūd*.

[10] See Hamzah Fansūrī, *Sharābu'l-'Āshiqīn*, in Syed Muhammmad Naguib Al-Attas, *The Mysticism of Hamzah Fansūrī*, 297.

[11] See Syed Muhammmad Naguib Al-Attas, *The Mysticism of Hamzah Fansūrī*, 160.

The domestication of translation is a translation strategy that makes the text conform to the reader's culture. In contrast, the foreignization of translation is to retain original information from the source text and culture. So, when Hamzah Fansūrī categorised the sayings of God and the Prophet as *śabda*, and everything else as *kata*, he was in fact observing the Malay epistemological tradition of distinguishing between sources of knowledge. Also, when Hamzah Fansūrī explains the Sufi metaphysics with many Sanskrit-based analogies, it means that the reader is assumed to be aware of the earlier metaphysical background that employed those analogies. In a nutshell, the works of Hamzah Fansūrī contain the metaphysical traditions of Malay society that had existed for generations, which made his domestication of translation possible.

However, the objective of this paper is not to expose the Malay metaphysical tradition entailed in the writings of Hamzah Fansūrī. Rather it is to highlight on the Malay epistemological ideas used by Hamzah Fansūrī in his writings in Malay language on the sources of knowledge, the kinds of (religious) knowledge and even the way he argues for the epistemological propositions along with his domestication of translation for his new Sufi metaphysics of *waḥdat al-wujūd.*

## Statement of Problem: Malay Epistemological Background in Hamzah Fansūrī's Writings

As mentioned above, the language domesticated by Hamzah Fansūrī is in Malay, and it was not invented by him or the Pasai kingdom. He must use the habits or the practices of Malay language in order to make his translation understandable by Malay readers. In this case, his works retain the epistemological tradition of the readers at that time. The research problem of this article may be hence described as follows based on Hamzah Fansūrī's three prose writings of *Asrāru'l-'Ārifīn*, *Sharābu'l-'Āshiqīn* and *Al-Muntahī*:

First, what was the intellectual background when Hamzah Fansūrī differentiated between the epistemological significance of *sabda* and *kata* viewed as sources of knowledge? For example, Hamzah Fansūrī in *Asrāru'l-'Ārifīn* referred to the sayings of Allah

as "*śabda* Allāh", "lagi *śabda* Allāh" ("again the word of Allāh") [12] and the those of prophets as "seperti *śabda* Nabī" ("like the words of the prophet"), "*śabda* Rasūlu'Llāh" while for other sayings the word kata was used such as "*katā* Shaykh Junayd Baghdādī" ("Shaykh Junayd Baghdādī said") and "*katā* Lam'at" (the *Lam'at* said). Considering that both *śabda* and *katā* are Sanskrit loanwords, does such usage have something to do with the pre-Islamic Sanskrit's epistemological tradition from which Malay literary history originated?

Second, Hamzah Fansūrī expounded the Sufi theory of "the unity of being" *(Waḥdat al-Wujūd)* on the basis of the sources of *śabda* and *katā* in *Sharābu'l-'Āshiqīn*. In the theory he used the analogy of *biji-pohon* ("seeds and trees") and other equivalent metaphors and mentioned that unity can be achieved by human *berahi* ("love") and not *buddi* ("reason") as mentioned in the seventh and the last chapter of *Sharābu'l-'Āshiqīn*. It is to be noted here that not only are *biji*, *berahi*, and *buddi* Sanskrit loanwords, but *biji-pohon* is also a popular metaphor in the philosophical works of the Śrīvijaya period since the late seventh century. Are these terms and metaphors as used in the *Sharābu'l-'Āshiqīn* traceable to the epistemological tradition of Śrīvijaya kingdom?

Third, an attentive reader would be able to feel the elaboration style of Hamzah Fansūrī's works, which abundantly use the words *seperti*, *ibarat*, *tamsil*, *misal* ("like, example" in English) to clarify his epistemological thesis. At the beginning of *Asrāru'l-'Ārifīn*, for example, Hamzah Fansūrī expounds that Allāh is the transcendental possessor of Essence *("Dhāt")* and the essence was the necessary being *("wājibu'l-wujūd")* like the sun and its light *("mithal matahari dengan cahayanya")*. This way of exposition, which consists of thesis, reasons and examples, is very similar to the genre of writings from the Śrīvijaya period, not to mention that *seperti* is the Sanskrit

[12] For the sayings of Allāh, Hamzah Fansūrī also used the Arabic word *"firmān"*, meaning that it is equivalent to *sabda*. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas has edited all the *"sabda"* into *"firmān"* in his romanized texts, see his *The Mysticism of Hamzah Fansūrī*, 382-561. Sangidu, the author of *Tugas Filolog: Teori dan Aplikasinya dalam Naskah-Naksah Melayu* (Yogjakarta: Gadjah Mada University Press, 2016) has also replaced all *"sabda"* into *"firmān"* in his edited texts of Hamzah Fansūrī

loanword and these analogues examples (sun-light, seed-tree, water-waves, etc.) may also be found in the Śrīvijaya epistemological works. In other words, does the elaboration style of Hamzah Fansūrī's works betray an influence of the Śrīvijaya intellectual tradition?

In view of the above epistemological features, coupled with other metaphysical features in Hamzah Fansūrī's works, the influence of the Śrīvijaya intellectual tradition is quite apparent. In *Asrāru'l-'Ārifīn*, Hamzah Fansūrī argues that Allah created the world with two aspects of *nama* and *rupa*:

> Know, O sons of Ādam who are Muslims, that God the Glorious and Exalted creates us; from being nameless, He bestows upon us names ("*nama*"); and from being formless, He fashions for us a form ("*rupa*") complete with ears, hearts, soul and intellect. [13]

Actually, the words *nama* (nāma / नाम) and *rupa* (rūpa / रूप) are of Sanskrit origin and the *nāmarūpa* (नामरूप) theory or "name and bodily-form" of creationism conformed to the Buddhist Yogācāra theory of the Śrīvijaya period. Therefore, the research questions posed in this article are meant to raise the issue of the possibility of the Śrīvijaya's Buddhist Yogācāra epistemological tradition being the source of influence on Hamzah Fansuri's epistemology.

## Methodology of Research: A Study on Historical Linguistics of Buddhist Yogācāra's Epistemological Links to Hamzah Fansūrī's Writings

So far, based on the Malay linguistic expressions in Hamzah Fansūrī's works, we may infer the surviving epistemological tradition of the people at that time. The keywords used by Hamzah Fansūrī in Malay to translate the new Islamic Sufi metaphysics of *waḥdat al-wujūd* were almost all Sanskrit loanwords. The metaphor of *biji-pohon* used in the Pasai kingdom must have been older than the foundation of the kingdom itself because the word *biji* was not an

[13] See Hamzah Fansūrī, *Asrāru'l-'Ārifīn*, trans. by Syed Muhammad Naguib al-Attas, in *The Mysticism of Hamzah Fansūrī*, 355.

Arabic or Persian loanword. Then there is the concept of *berahi*, which is a more advanced theory of knowledge than *buddi*; also expressible through Sanskrit equivalences is the *nāmarūpa* theory of creationism, and even the elaboration style of writings itself may also be seen in Śrīvijaya's works. The evidence, according to our understanding of the Śrīvijaya epistemological tradition, points to the domestication of Buddhist Yogācāra epistemology in Malay language.

Therefore, to expose fully the epistemological background of Hamzah Fansūrī's domestication of translation works in Malay language, through the answering of three research questions mentioned above, two research methods will be used as follows:

First, the method of historical linguistics. Historical linguistics is a study on how language like Malay could change over time from, say, the Śrīvijaya kingdom from the seventh century up to Hamzah Fansūrī's Acheh kingdom in the late sixteenth to the early seventeenth century. According to this research method, in the case of Hamzah Fansūrī's writings, we are not just concerned with how he changed sometimes *śabda* to *firmān* (**فرمان**) to match the Arabic word for Allah's sayings, but also with why he still retained *śabda* to refer to the sayings of God in the Islamic context? In other words, the method is concerned with why the keywords, metaphors, theories, and the elaboration style of writing of Buddhist origins were retained by Hamzah Fansuri for the purpose of the new Malay Islamic discourse?

Second, the method of Buddhist Yogācāra's epistemology. According to our understanding of Malay dynastic history and from the general knowledge of philosophy, the keywords, the metaphors, the theories, and the elaboration style of writing mentioned above are very consistent with the characteristics of Śrīvijaya's language from its official Buddhist Yogācāra philosophical tradition. As we all know, in the Malay speaking world after the end of Śrīvijaya in the thirteenth century, except for a small area that entered into the Islamized Pasai kingdom, the rest of the area were still under the jurisdiction of the Malayu-Singapura kingdom. In the latter era, not only the inscriptions of the king of Ādityavarman (**आदित्यवर्मन्**,

1294 CE-1375 CE) were in Sanskrit mixed with Malay,[14] but the oldest book written in Malay *Nītisārasamuccaya* (**नीतिसारसमुच्चय**, in the fourteenth, previously known as *Kitab Undang-Undang Tanjung Tanah*) still recognized five Vedas ("*pancaweda*") as the *śabda* or testimonial knowledge at that time.[15] So it is not at all surprising if Hamzah Fansūrī 's epistemological background can be traced back to Malayu-Singapura kingdom and earlier Śrīvijaya kingdom based on the writings' features and evidence mentioned above.

In a nutshell, this article argues that the epistemological background of Hamzah Fansūrī's writings derives from Śrīvijaya's Buddhist Yogācāra epistemological tradition. Therefore, a study of historical linguistics shall be carried out on Hamzah Fansūrī's writings for its epistemological background from the Śrīvijaya period.

## Finding of Research: The Evidence of Śrīvijaya's Buddhist Yogācāra Epistemological Background in Hamzah Fansūrī's Writings

### On the background of Hamzah Fansūrī's epistemological distinction of *śabda* and *katā*

As we have pointed out earlier Hamzah Fansūrī based his sources of knowledge on *śabda* and *katā* in writing his three outstanding works, namely *Asrāru'l-'Ārifīn*, *Sharābu'l-'Āshiqīn*, and *Al-Muntahī*. The main difference between *śabda* and *katā* is that the former is an authoritative testimonial knowledge that cannot be debated ("tiada dapat dibicarakan") while the latter is the perceptive and inferential knowledge by wise men which is falsifiable hence debatable. In some cases, Hamzah Fansūrī also distinguishes *firmān* (79 times in total) from *śabda* (94 times),[16] the former referring to the saying of God

[14] See "Delapan belas Prasasti Adutyawarman sebagai benda cagar budaya peringkat nasional," (Jakarta: Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan), 2019.

[15] See Kuja Ali, "Nītisārasamuccaya," in Uli Kozok, ed., *A 14th century Malay Code of Laws: The Nītisārasamuccaya* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2015), 69.

[16] In this paper, all textual statistics were taken from *Malay Concordance Project*,

that is Allāh, and the latter to the sayings of the Prophet. Such a *firmān*, *śabda*, *katā* trichotomy already appeared in the earliest Islamized text in Malay *Hikayat Bayan Budiman* in 1371 CE (provenance in Singapore or Malacca) in which the *śabda* also includes the saying of the king. Other Islamized Hindu or Islamic texts before Hamzah Fansūrī like *Hikayat Pandawa Lima*, *Hikayat Seri Rama* and *Hikayat Amir Hamzah*, *Hikayat Muhammad Hanafiah* also have the same trichotomy of sources of knowledge. Even the works of Nuruddin al-Raniri (d. 1658 CE), the opponent of Hamzah Fansūrī, are no exception as indicated by his *Hujjat al-Siddīq* and *Bustan al-Salatin*.

However, other more philosophical texts before or during Hamzah Fansūrī's time, such as *`Aqā'id al-Nasafī* (possibly in 1590 CE), appear to use *śabda* solely (the word *firmān* has not appeared yet) in reference to Allah's sayings as in Hamzah Fansūrī's works. Two examples from *`Aqā'id al-Nasafī* are as follows:

i) "dan sesungguhnya ber*śabda* Allah Ta`ala" ("and verily Allah Ta`ala said")
ii) maka ketahuilah olehmu bahwa Allah Ta`ala menyuruhkan NabiNya, salla Allahu `alayhi wa sallam, menanyai Dia penunjuk akan Islam. Maka ber*śabda* Ia (ya`ni: *Kata* olehmu, ya Muhammad: "Tunjukkan aku jalan yang betul") (the last sentence, "So He said (i.e.: Say by you, O Muhammad: "Show me the Right Way")[17]

Three conclusions may be drawn here from the historical linguistics' viewpoints: 1) the existing testimonial knowledge was identified as *śabda* in Malay and it was a Sanskrit loanword, 2) when Arab-Persian sources of Islam became widespread, testimonial knowledge was still identified as *śabda* but the sayings of God are now attributed to the new coming religion of Islam, and 3) when translated into English in modern times, *śabda*, *firmān*, and *katā* all become "say", losing its receiving function as identifier in

https://mcp.anu.edu.au/Q/mcp.html.

[17] See *`Aqā'id al-Nasafī*, a16, b2, in Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, ed., *The Oldest Known Malay Manuscript: a 16th century translation of the `Aqā'id of al-Nasafī*, Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya, 1988.

epistemology. Based on Hamzah Fansūrī's writings and *`Aqā´id al-Nasafī*, we can probably be sure that prior to them Malay society not only had testimonial knowledge but also identified it as *śabda* in Malay language which was Sanskrit in origin.

When did such epistemological distinctions between *śabda* and *katā* exist in Malay society? Why are these distinctions made with Sanskrit loanwords? From what Sanskrit epistemological traditions might these distinctions come? From the general viewpoint of Sanskrit philosophy, it should come from the Saṃkhyā (**संख्या**, both *sangka* and *angka* are its loanwords in Malay) philosophy of the Malayu-Singapura period, not Śrīvijaya because its official Buddhist Yogācāra philosophy did not recognize the authority of the *śabda* as a source of knowledge.[18] There is no doubt that in *Saṃkhyā Kārikā* (verse 4) and *Saṃkhyā Sūtra* (verse 101 of part I), *śabda* is clearly identified as a source of valid knowledge in addition to perception and inference. But the Saṃkhyā philosophical text from the Malayu-Singapura kingdom has unfortunately not survived like *Tutur Aji Sangkya* in Jawa and Bali area,[19] but the surviving evidence of *sangka* and *angka* loanwords and its *śabda-katā* distinction doubtlessly points to the influence of Malay language and civilization.

Malay has two other Sanskrit loanwords, *sisa* and *purba* which people today do not know that they were, in fact, two kinds of inference of Saṃkhyā, namely *śeşavat* and *pūrvavat*.[20] The *śişa*-inference is inferring the cause – *kāraṇa* (**कारण**, *kerana* in Malay today) through the remains, residue or effect, which is termed *kārya* (**कार्य**, *karya* in Malay today). The *pūrba*-inference, on the other hand, is an inference of effect through the cause that has been previously seen. The Saṃkhyā uses *śişa*-inference to demonstrate that this material world ("*śişa*") has a cause called *prakŗti* (**प्रकृति**, *pekerti* in Malay today), and this article may also use Malay

[18] See Richard King, *Indian Philosophy: An Introduction to Hindu and Buddhist Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 128-130.

[19] For its modern transliteration and translation version, see I. Wayan Sukayasa tr., *Aji Sangkya: Suntingan Teks, Terjemahan dan Analisis Isi* (Denpasar: PT Mabhakti, 2017).

[20] See Swami Virupakshananda, *Sāmkhya kārikā of Iśvara Kŗşņa with the Tattva-kaumudi of Vācaspati Miśra* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1995), 17-18.

civilization ("*śiṣa*") to prove the historical influence of Saṃkhyā, especially from the Malayu-Singapura period.

The Saṃkhyā *śiṣa* or remains in Malay civilization includes lingual, literary, thinking, and ethical evidence which are still clearly recognizable in Malay society. Due to length limitations, this article can only briefly explain the *śiṣa* of Saṃkhyā in Malay civilization as follows:

i. Saṃkhyā loanwords in Malay - If we read the original Sanskrit texts of Saṃkhyā *kārikā* and *sūtra*, we would be able to see their connection to the loanwords in Malay: Iswara (*Īśvara* / ईश्वर, the personal god in epic Saṃkhyā) is the creator of material cause of *pekerti* (also named *perdana*, *pradhāna* / प्रधान) and spiritual cause of *puruṣa* (पुरुष, no corresponding loanword). The *pekerti* comprises three *gunas* (*guṇa* / गुण) and its imbalance leads to the creation of the physical world, first *budi* (*buddhi* / बुद्धि) followed by *ahaṁkāra* (अहंकार, probably translated as "perangai" in Malay) which comprises *pancaindera* (*pañcendriya* / पञ्चेन्द्रिय) and many other constituents. With the help of the Saṃkhyā texts in Sanskrit, the Saṃkhyā philosophy as the source of these loanwords in Malay is traceable.

ii. Saṃkhyā literature in Malay – the above *Iswara* or theistic epic Saṃkhyā texts like *Hikayat Pandawa Lima*, *Hikayat Seri Rama*, which were not Islamized until Nuruddin Raniri in 1644 CE as per observed in his *Sirat al-Mustaqim* (الصراط المستقيم) that "it does not contain the name of Allāh".[21] For *Hikayat Seri Rama* (MS Laud Or. 291, Bodleian Library, Oxford), its plot is the cosmological and soteriological interpretation of Saṃkhyā philosophy in terms of *puruṣa* represented by Rama and Sita while *pekerti* by Rawana (with two brothers Bibasenam, Kambakarna constituted tri-*gunas* of *rajas*, *sattva* and *tamas*). Rawana abducts Sita and leads to displacement, symbolizing the creation and suffering of the world. Sita's return to Rama and separation from Rawana ended displacement and suffering so that peace could be born.[22] It should be noted that these *hikayat*s

[21] See Nuruddin Raniri, *Sirat al-Mustaqim*, in Siti Chamamah Soeratno, *Memahami Karya-Karya Nuruddin Arrarini* (Yogyakarta: FS & K Gama, 1982), 132.

[22] See Swami Krishnananda, *A Short History of Religious and Philosophic Thought*

are epic or theitic Saṃkhyā, which is different from the generally known atheistic classical Saṃkhyā whose spread in the Malay world is not very clear because of the lack of localized Saṃkhyā *kārikā* and *sūtra* text.[23]

iii. Saṃkhyā thinking mode in Malay – The influence of Saṃkhyā on Malay thought has been fitted into idiomatic thinking. Malay proverbs related to *budi*, for example, *budi pekerti* (personal habit, behavior) resulting from its combination with *pekerti*, *budi bicara* (mind, reasoning), which is combined with *bicara*, and *budi bahasa* (polite, elegant) that results from its combination with *bahasa*, and so on. These idioms are composed of Sanskrit loanwords with very positive connotations and are still commonly used in Malay society today.

iv. Saṃkhyā ethical thought in Malay – the proverb *budi pekerti* also has an ethical meaning, that is, a person's temperament and character depends on his or her *budi* cultivation as argued by Za'ba (Zainal Abidin bin Ahmad, 1895 CE-1973 CE) that "behavior depends on oneself" ("perangai bergantung pada diri sendiri"), "the nurturing of *budi*" ("asuhan budi") and many others.[24] This is consistent with the Saṃkhyā cosmological thought that *ahaṁkāra* comes from *budi*, and *budi* comes from *pekerti*. In these writings, Za'ba specifically mentioned that "in order to make it easier for Malays to accept *budi* thought, it must be brought from the path of religion (that is to Islamize it)."[25] This is enough to show that *budi* ethical thought has an earlier

*in India* (Rishikesh: Sivananda Ashram, 1994), 55-60.

[23] For the theistic and non-theistic development of Saṃkhyā philosophy, see Anima Sen Gupta, *The Evolution of the Sāṃkhya School of Thought* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1986), 2nd edition.

[24] These books are different compilations of similar articles. Readers only need to *read Mencapai Ketinggian Dunia Akhirat* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2015) to know the general *budi* idea of Za'ba.

[25] Original in Malay, "jika ajaran-ajaran membaiki sifat-sifat perangai dan tingkah laku kehidupan (i.e. the *budi* cultivation) dibawakan kepada mereka menerusi jalan agama…nescaya boleh diharap mereka akan menerima dan berusaha mengubah diri mereka menjadi baik." See Za'ba, "Pendahuluan Pengarang", in *Asuhan Budi Menerusi Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: Akademi Jawi Malaysia, 2020), 4.

source other than Islam, and it can be traced back to the Saṃkhyā philosophy of the Malayu-Singapura period.

Based on the above *śişa* or evidence, we may argue that there must have been a period in history when Saṃkhyā prevailed with a profound impact on Malay civilization. This period could have been either the Malayu-Singapura kingdom (1200 CE-1400 CE), or even the earlier Śrīvijaya kingdom (650 CE-1200 CE) because the atheistic and dualistic form of Saṃkhyā thought was already prevalent in Southeast Asia as attested by the chapter XII of Arāḍadarśano in Asvaghosa's *Buddhacarita* (बुद्धचरित) around 671 CE. [26]

As we all know, the Saṃkhyā of Hindu philosophy and the Yogācāra of Buddhist philosophy were intellectual rivals with each refuting the other in a way that helped preserve their respective systems of thought. It is more plausible that Malay society had become familiar with domesticated Saṃkhyā ideas during the Śrīvijaya period through the Arāḍadarśano chapter in *Buddhacarita*, rather than as late as the thirteenth century after the formation of the Malayu kingdom with its form of epic and theistic Saṃkhyā. From the evidence of *Hikayat Bayan Budiman* which was first Islamized and also the earliest Jawi manuscript in 1371 CE, it is not just common with Saṃkhyā loanwords mentioned above, but also the Saṃkhyā proverbs like *budi pekerti* (or budi perangai), *budi bicara* (or budi akal), *budi bahasa* as well as the epistemological distinction between *śabda* (appears 3 times) and *katā* (appears 710 times), how was it possible that these were achieved within 100 years after the establishment of Malayu kingdom? In fact, what we observe is that from the 1371 CE of *Hikayat Bayan Budiman* up to 1590 CE of *`Aqā'id al-Nasafī* and Hamzah Fansūrī's writings, the uses of Saṃkhyā loanwords and proverbs in Malay thought and the distinction of epistemological sources have been in currency

[26] On the prevalence of *Buddhacarita* in Śrīvijaya and Southeast Asia around 671 CE, see Yi Jing (I-Tsing), *A Record of the Buddhist Religion as Practised in India and the Malay Archipelago*, tr. J. Takakusu (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1896), 165.

throughout implying their probable domestication into the Malay language itself.

In other words, the distinction between *śabda* and *katā* was not unique to Hamzah Fansūrī's writings. It was already around in the Malay epistemological thought prior to 1371 CE. From the Saṃkhyā epistemological viewpoint, *śabda* refers only to the Vedic source of knowledge, [27] and the *Nītisārasamuccaya* a code of laws from Malayu kingdom around 1304 CE-1370 CE has also firmly claimed for the sacred, unalterable status of the "*pancaweda*" or five Vedas (four Vedas with *Mahabhrata*). This means that *śabda* at that time refers to the Vedic scriptures, which is different from the later use of it by Hamzah Fansūrī and *`Aqā'id al-Nasafī* to refer to the sayings of Allah. From the perspective of intellectual history, this epistemological distinction and background can only be attributed to Saṃkhyā philosophy which has been domesticated as Malay epistemological tradition as later shared by Hamzah Fansūrī and other subsequent Malay authors.

## On the *biji*-theory of Hamzah Fansūrī's Sufi metaphysics of "the unity of being"

If the epistemological distinction of *śabda* and *katā* was not necessarily related to Buddhist Yogācāra philosophy, then Hamzah Fansūrī's metaphysical system and his elaboration style of writings could be traced back to Śrīvijaya's intellectual tradition. This tradition is none other than the Buddhist Yogācāra philosophy of Vasubandhu-Dignāga which appeared in the writings of Śrīvijaya scholars like Śākyakīrti at the end of the seventh century. Just as we don't know why the writings of Za'ba today still have the *budi* ethical thoughts of ancient Saṃkhyā, we also don't know why Hamzah Fansūrī still retained the same ideas and style 900 years after their currency in the works of Śākyakīrti? The only plausible reason is that these traditions have become Malay domesticated with no longer any distinction being made between native and foreign long before Hamzah Fansūrī's era.

[27] See Anima Sen Gupta, *Essays on Sāṃkhya and Other Systems of Indian Philosophy* (Allahabad: M. R. Sen, 1977), 181.

To understand the metaphysical system of Hamzah Fansūrī, the treatise of *Sharābu'l-'Āshiqīn* or *The Drink of Lovers* is a good example. In the first three chapters of this treatise, Hamzah Fansūrī expounds that the gnostic metaphysics of *waḥdat al-wujūd* or "the unity of being" can only be achieved through the stages of *sharī'at, ṭarīqat* and *haqīqat,* or the law, the (concentrative) way and the truth.[28] Such three stages of gnostic metaphysics are not unfamiliar to Śrīvijaya scholars. To reach the soteriological wisdom of *nirvāṇa* (**निर्वाण**), the Buddhist effort consists of three necessary steps of *śīla* (*sila* in Malay, but the loanword *susila* is closer to the Sanskrit meaning), *samādhi* (*semadi* in Malay), and *prajñā* (probably *pana* but mixed later with Arabic loanword *fana* [*fanāʾ* / **فناء**] in Malay) with its wisdom connotation being retained in another Malay loanword *sunyi*). Equivalently, the three stages are the moral conduct, the concentration, and the wisdom. A closer textual witness to Hamzah Fansūrī times is one of the main textbooks that Atiśa (**अतिश**, 982 CE-1054 CE) studied from Dharmakīrti (**धर्मकीर्ति**, ca. 986 CE-1025 CE) during period 1013 CE-1025 CE was *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (**बोधिसत्त्वाचर्यावतार**, "*A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*") of Śāntideva (ca. 685 CE-763 CE). The three paths of *śīla*, *samādhi* and *prajñā* of Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra* have been revived in Atiśa's magnus opus of *Bodhipathapradīpa* (**बोधिपथप्रदीप**, "*Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*") which formed a fundamental text of Tibetan Buddhist philosophical tradition.[29] In other words, the three stages of *sharī'at, ṭarīqat* and *haqīqat* taught by Hamzah Fansūrī in his *Sharābu'l-'Āshiqīn* is nothing new to Śrīvijaya's soteriological tradition.

For the soteriological wisdom of *waḥdat al-wujūd* or "the unity of being," it was Hamzah Fansūrī's explanatory purpose in the second half of the treatise of *Sharābu'l-'Āshiqīn*. Our concern here is not the similarity between the new Islamic *waḥdat al-wujūd* and the indigenous Śrīvijaya's equivalent gnostic wisdom, but the way

[28] This is a translation adapted from Syed Muhammad Naguib al-Attas, in *The Mysticism of Hamzah Fansūrī*, 418.

[29] See Atiśa, *A Lamp for the Path and Commentary of Atiśa*, tr. and annotated by Richard Sherburne (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983).

Hamzah Fansūrī explained the nature of the wisdom that enables us to have true knowledge about the new Islamic soteriological wisdom. Hamzah Fansūrī used a lot of metaphors to illustrate the nature of "the unity of being" including the less used of Hindu's milk and butter ("susu dan minyak sapi") pointed out by Syed Muhammad Naguib al-Attas above. In *Al-Muntahī*, Hamzah Fansūrī used four metaphors in a row to express the connotation of "the unity of being," namely sea and waves *("laut dan ombak"),* seed and tree *("biji dan puhun"),* rainwater and plants *("air hujan dan tanaman"),* and sun and heat *("matahari dan panas").*[30] Relatively speaking, the more commonly used metaphors are sea and waves, seed and tree, and sun and heat (or light) that are found in his three treatises of *Asrāru'l-'Ārifīn*, *Sharābu'l-'Āshiqīn* and *Al-Muntahī*. However, in these writings Hamzah Fansūrī does not indicate the source of these metaphors except for the sea and waves metaphor, which he attributed to *Al-Lama'at* (**اللامعات**) of Abd al-Rahman Jami.[31] Why did not Hamzah Fansūrī indicate the source for the two other metaphors but did for the sea and waves metaphor when it had already appeared in a popular work of Vasubandhu since the late seventh century in Śrīvijaya? One plausible reason, in our opinion, is that these are local metaphors, but it so happens that the sea and waves metaphor also appears in *The Lama'at* of Jami. The metaphors are all in authentic Malay terms, except *biji* in *biji-puhun* metaphor, which is a philosophical loanword from Sanskrit, revealing their possible origin in the Sanskrit epistemological tradition.

As mentioned before, in the Malay literature from 1371 CE to Hamzah Fansūrī's time, the word *biji* is generally used with a quantifier meaning such as "one grain" and "two grains," "engkaulah *biji* mataku" (you are the apple of my eye) quoted from *Hikayat Bayan Budiman*, "lalu jadilah empat *biji* ladam" (then become four horseshoes) quoted from *Hikayat Amir Hamzah*, and "dua *biji* diberikan kepada isterinya" (two seeds were given to his wife) quoted from *Hikayat Seri Rama*. But in Hamzah Fansūrī's

[30] See Hamzah Fansūrī, *Al-Muntahī* (14-15) in Syed Muhammad Naguib al-Attas, *The Mysticism of Hamzah Fansūrī*, 537-539.

[31] See the quotes in Syed Muhammad Naguib al-Attas, *The Mysticism of Hamzah Fansūrī*, 437 and 522.

writings and Nuruddin al-Raniri's *Tibyan fi Ma'rifat al-Adyan*, for example, the *biji* is used in a totally different sense, which is metaphysical, as in the seed-tree metaphor for the doctrine of "the unity of being." In this case, Malay has another way of writing *bija*, which was the original Sanskrit loanword from *bīja* (**बीज**), and it is more commonly used as personal name such as Sri Bija Diraja (Tun Hamzah) in *Sejarah Melayu* ( **سجاره ملايو**, *The Malay Annals*). The Sanskrit *bīja* or the Malay *bija* or *biji* has the same non-quantifier meaning for "seed" as expressed by seed-tree metaphor in Hamzah Fansūrī's writings.

His seed-tree metaphor means unity of being understood as non-duality between God and the world. From the phenomenal viewpoints, God and the world are different entities. But in reality they are one. Hamzah Fansūrī explained the metaphor as follows:

> The analogy is like a seed within which is a tree complete. At first there is only that one seed, but after the tree had grown out of it, the seed vanishes – only the tree is seen. [The tree grown] having different colours and is [productive of] varying tastes, yet originally it grows out of that one seed.[32]

From the ontological viewpoint, the component or determination (*"hukum"* as used in Malay by Hamzah Fansūrī) of the tree is already within the seed before it emerged out and both seed and tree are the same from that withinness.

Is Hamzah Fansūrī proposing a pantheistic teaching of Islam through this sameness of God and the world? Certainly not. For Hamzah Fansūrī, all of his metaphors have an essential cosmological difference of denotation between God and the world: the seed, the sea (or water), the sun, the rainwater, the milk and many others in the metaphor can refer only to God and not the world because they were the source to the tree, the waves, the light (or heat), the plants, the butter and many others. To say Hamzah Fansūrī is a pantheist is certainly a wrong interpretation of his metaphors of "the unity of being".

[32] See Hamzah Fansūrī, *Al-Muntahī*, 15, translated by Syed Muhammad Naguib al-Attas in *The Mysticism of Hamzah Fansūrī*, 458.

The second reason why we consider these metaphors are local is because Hamzah Fansūrī used them to interpret the *katā* of Shaykh Junayd, Shaykh Muhyī'l-Dīn ibn 'Arabī, Abd al-Rahman Jami (with *seed-tree* metaphor) and many others, and also the *śabda* of Allah and the Prophet as in *Al-Muntahī*. In a translation, the *interpreter* and the *interpreted* shall not be the same source. If these metaphors were originally Persian or Andalusian, that is, unfamiliar yet to the local people, then wouldn't it be strange that Hamzah Fansūrī was translating something that is not familiar to Malay readers? Therefore, he used the local metaphors instead of the foreign Persian or Andalusian ones when interpreting the doctrine.

The third and the strongest evidence that Hamzah Fansūrī's metaphors were local is that the meaning of *biji* and the metaphysical connotation of *biji* are completely consistent with the Buddhist Yogācāra theory of *bīja* since the seventh century of Śrīvijaya kingdom. As well-known, the *bīja* theory is a metaphor to refer to Yogācāra's metaphysical theory of *vijñāna* (**विज्ञान**, *bijana* or *jana* in Malay). The Malay loanwords *bijana* and *jana* still retain today the metaphysical meaning of the original Sanskrit words, that is, something that gives birth, life, or soul to others. In other words, it is *vijñāna* or human consciousness that gives birth to the phenomenal world, or the phenomenal world was determined by our human consciousness. Such a metaphysical position is usually described as subjective idealism (represented by George Berkeley, 1685 CE-1753 CE) in the Western philosophical world. This also means that Buddhist Yogācāra theory of *vijñāna* in the late seventh century Śrīvijaya was an epistemic idealism in favour not of "the unity of being", but of "the unity of consciousness."

The textual evidence above came from the late seventh century work of Śākyakīrti, *Hastadaṇḍaśāstra* (**हस्तदण्डशास्त्र**, "*A Treatise on Walking Stick*"**)**, a famous Yogācāra master of Śrīvijaya. The original work (not sure if it was written in Sanskrit or Malay) was written prior to 693 CE but assumed lost in history while the classical Chinese translation completed in 711 CE still survived until today.[33] However, the work was studied seriously by scholars until the past

[33] See Teuku Iskandar, *Kesusasteraan Klasik Melayu Sepanjang Abad* (Jakarta: Penerbit Libra, 1996), 9-10.

two or three years from the perspective of Malay intellectual history.[34] This work is not complicated. It was about Śākyakīrti and his opponents from other Buddhist schools debating a philosophical thesis of Vasubandhu consisting of seven debates with the fourth to the seventh being on *bīja* theory. *Bīja* theory is a metaphor theory used by Buddhist Yogācāra philosophers to explain the tenet of "the unity of consciousness." The analogy is that *vijñāna* is like a *bīja* ("storehouse consciousness") and the phenomenal world is the externalization of *bīja*'s inner quality or determination. The other similar metaphors used by Vasubandhu in his *Thirty Verses of the Consciousness Only* was that *vijñāna* is like a sea and the phenomenal world its waves. The waves are phenomenally different from the sea, being its fluctuations and hence different by nature. This work of Vasubandhu was still quoted by Dharmakīrti, Atiśa's master of Śrīvijaya, in his *Durbodhālokā* written around 991 CE-1005 CE at the capital of Śrīvijaya.[35] Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the *bīja* theory still existed in the eleventh century, and it served as the domesticated background of Hamzah Fansūrī's uses of metaphors in the late sixteenth century in the Aceh kingdom.

The metaphorical uses in Hamzah Fansūrī's writings are not the only evidence of the influence of Śrīvijaya Buddshit Yogācāra philosophy on him. As earlier mentioned the Buddhist Yogācāra's *nāmarūpa* (**नामरूप**) theory or "name and bodily-form" of creationism is another. Hamzah Fansuri understands *nama* and *rupa* as two aspects of created beings. More examples from *Asrāru'l-'Ārifīn*:

> That is to say, cast off your name and your form, for you possess no name and no form.

And,

> When your name and form are cast away, then you will be able to be "united" with the Possessor of the Name

[34] See Tee Boon Chuan, "Hastadaṇḍaśāstra (Naskah Tertua Kerajaan Śrīwijaya) dalam Sejarah Logik dan Metafizik Melayu," 19-40.

[35] See Guan Di, *Abhisamayālaṃkāravivṛti and Its Commentary Durbodhālokā by Dharmakīrti of Suvarṇadvīpa: A Study on the Basis of Newly Identified Sanskrit Manuscripts* (in Chinese), unpublished doctoral thesis, Beijing University, 2019.

> and Possessor of the Form.[36]

Also, from *Al-Muntahī*:

> His self, although it has acquired name and form, in its reality has no form and name. It is just the reflection in the mirror; it has form and name, [but it has no reality].

And,

> Though its name and forms and colours are variegated, [its] reality is one.[37]

The expression above is a perennial form and pattern for a *nama* and *rupa* theory of creationism. It is hard for us to say that this is Hamzah Fansūrī's personal creativity, rather than a fixed and domesticated tradition with a certain mode of understanding and expression of a creationism in history. Strictly speaking, this is not a creationism but a transformation theory or *pariṇāma* (परिणाम, *peri-nama* in Malay) theory named by Vasubandhu in his *Thirty Verses of the Consciousness Only* (verses 1, 17, and 18). Whether it is Hamzah Fansūrī's "the unity of being" in Aceh kingdom or Śākyakīrti's "the unity of consciousness" in Śrīvijaya kingdom, they are not the mode in which A creates B, but the transformation of A into B as seen in the metaphor of seed-tree, sea-waves, sun-light and many others. That was *pariṇāma* theory as it is an ontological theory believing that the source is "changing into (another form)" to become beings. Therefore, Hamzah Fansūrī's metaphorical uses of the change of seed into the form of tree (so are other kinds of metaphor) with each tree (separate being) having its own name and form, appeared to be influenced by the *pariṇāma* theory that can be traced back to Vasubandhu's Yogācāra tradition in Śrīvijaya period.

[36] See Hamzah Fansūrī, *Asrāru'l-'Ārifīn*, 48, translated by Syed Muhammad Naguib al-Attas in *The Mysticism of Hamzah Fansūrī*, 453-454.

[37] See Hamzah Fansūrī, *Al-Muntahī*, 4, translated by Syed Muhammad Naguib al-Attas *in The Mysticism of Hamzah Fansūrī*, 524, 526.

**On the Dignāga's elaboration style of Hamzah Fansūrī's writings**

Another apparent feature of Hamzah Fansūrī's writings that could be related to Śrīvijaya epistemological tradition is his exemplary style of argumentation. All the metaphors mentioned above are used as examples in Hamzah Fansūrī's writings. The first metaphor in *Al-Muntahī* is the seed-tree metaphor, for example, which consists of three parts as follows:

1. Thesis: "He who knows his self knows his God" (a *śabda* of the Prophet)
2. Reason: the Self of the Hidden Treasure is [none other than] his self, and everything is in God's knowledge.
3. Example: like the seed and the tree; the tree in that one seed, although not seen, yet exists within the seed.[38]

To be noted here is that the word "like" or *seperti* in Malay here was a Sanskrit loanword from *sa-prati* (स-प्रति) meaning likeness and resemblance. Hamzah Fansūrī also used Arabic loanwords *tamsil* (*tamthīl* / تمثيل, 16 times), *misal* (*mithal* / مثال, 15 times), *ibarat* (عبارات, 52 times) for its equivalent, but the most frequent word is still *seperti*, which was mentioned 269 times throughout his three treatises. A more complex example from *Al-Muntahī* is the following:

1. Thesis: "the existence (when you [still think that you] are one being and the Truth is another being) is a sin which no other sin can be compared." (a *katā* of Shaykh Junayd)
2. Reason: "'there is no partner unto Him', and this mean that there is no other being than That of the Truth" (a *śabda* from the *Qur'an*)
3. Example: 1. *seperti* the sea and its waves, 2. *tamthīl seperti* the seed and the tree, 3. *tamthīl seperti* rainwater in a growth of plant, and 4. *tamthīl seperti* the sun and its rays.[39]

[38] See Hamzah Fansūrī, *Al-Muntahī*, 1-2, translated by Syed Muhammad Naguib al-Attas *in The Mysticism of Hamzah Fansūrī*, 448.

[39] See Hamzah Fansūrī, *Al-Muntahī*, 14-15, translated by Syed Muhammad Naguib al-Attas *in The Mysticism of Hamzah Fansūrī*, 457-458.

In the same way as the usage of the metaphor above, it does not seem to be Hamzah Fansūrī's personal style of elaboration. This *seperti*-style of elaboration is very reminiscent of the same style in Śākyakīrti's writings from the late seventh century Śrīvijaya.

As we have pointed out before, the *Hastadaṇḍaśāstra* is a work written by Śākyakīrti against the opposite interpretation on the same thesis of Vasubandhu. It is rather surprising that the arguments of both sides are the same as what we have seen in Hamzah Fansūrī's writings:

Table 1: The Argumentation Between Śākyakīrti and His Opponents[40]

| Inference | | Śākyakīrti | The Opponent |
|---|---|---|---|
| Thesis | | Vasubandhu: "The Buddha appeared to enlighten the creatures. But the enlightenment did not end." | |
| Reason | | Because there are too many | Because there is a new creature |
| Example | Same example | Like the sky (no boundaries) | Like a tree (grows back) |
| | Counter example | - | Like sesame (decreasing if not added) |

This was exactly a logico-argumentative tradition of Dignāga (दिग्नाग, ca. 480 CE-540 CE), a Buddhist logician as well as a Yogācāra philosopher, as exposed by Bochenski for its structure of inference as follows:

Table 2: Reasoning Structure of Dignāga's Tradition [41]

| Structure | | Example |
|---|---|---|
| Thesis (*sādhyá*, *sedia* in Malay) | | The hill is fiery |
| Reason (*hetu*, *liṅga*, *lingga* in Malay) | | Because it smokes |
| Example (*pakṣa*, | Same example | Like a stove, everything that smokes are fiery |

[40] See the details of Tee Boon Chuan, "Hastadaṇḍaśāstra (Naskah Tertua Kerajaan Śrīwijaya) dalam Sejarah Logik dan Metafizik Melayu," 23-24.

[41] See Bochenski, I.M., "The Indian Variety of Logic (1956)," in Jonardon Ganeri ed., *Indian Logic: A Reader* (London & New York: Routldege, 2008), 136-137.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *paksa* in Malay) | Counter example | Like a lake, all that is not fiery because it is not smoky |

By the way, there are many proverbs of *smoke*-f*ire* in Malay idioms, and it seems that the logic of Dignāga proved to be effective in Malay intellectual history.[42] If the works of Hamzah Fansūrī can also be regarded as adopting the logical style of Dignāga, then it may be regarded as a real textual evidence.

In other words, neither the Śākyakīrti of the seventh century, nor the Dharmakīrti of the tenth and eleventh centuries are not isolated examples. Their works demonstrate that the philosophical influence of Vasubandhu-Dignāga has become a tradition of Malay philosophy until the early seventeenth century as revealed in Hamzah Fansūrī's writings. This was the philosophical background of Hamzah Fansūrī that could be attributed to the Buddhist Yogācāra philosophy of Śrīvijaya.

## Conclusion: Revisiting Al-Attas' Theory of Islamization in Malay Archipelago

According to the above analysis results, we can firmly identify the traditional epistemological background of Hamzah Fansūrī's writings as the Buddhist Yogācāra tradition of Vasubandhu-Dignāga in the Śrīvijaya period. The Malay epistemological background of Hamzah Fansūrī's writings can be pointed out in the following three points:

1. The overall style of Hamzah Fansūrī's writings is the logical tradition of Dignāga, which is the same as the *Hastadaṇḍaśāstra* of Śākyakīrti at the end of the seventh century.
2. All the metaphors of Hamzah Fansūrī's writings, which are of the type of *pariṇāma* theory, can be understood in the epistemological tradition of Vasubandhu, which was influential in the writings of Śrīvijaya from the end of the seventh century to the beginning of the eleventh century.
3. Hamzah Fansūrī's works were also influenced by the more recent Malayu-Singapura philosophy of Saṃkhyā, especially

[42] See Tee Boon Chuan, "Keberkaitan mantik Sriwijaya dengan pepatah asap-api Melayu," *Kesturi*, vol. 32, nos. 1 &2 (2022), 149-182.

on the distinction between *śabda* and *katā*, which he used extensively in his new Malay Islamic epistemological discourse.

The above epistemological background may be observed in Hamzah Fansūrī's works. These backgrounds were not formed in one day but they were accumulated through several periods from Śrīvijaya to Malayu-Singapura, and they were also the epistemological tools for Islamization in the Pasai and Aceh eras.

What is the significance of such research findings on our long-standing research on Hamzah Fansūrī's philosophy and the understanding of Islamization in the Malay world? In the light of such findings, we find that the influential Islamization theory of Syed Muhammad Naguib al-Attas, for example, needs to be re-examined. The style of Al-Attas' works differs from that of Hamzah Fansūrī in that its arguments have no examples and thus have no connection with the logical tradition of Dignāga from the Śrīvijaya period. Two of Al-Attas' theses related to, but cannot be supported by, Hamzah Fansūrī's writings and philosophy may be inferred from his theory of Islamization in Malay-Indonesian Archipelago:

1. The first thesis is on the Buddhist intellectual impact on Sumatra / Malay society in which Al-Attas believes that "yet the influence of the Buddhist clergy in Sumatra did not seem to have made itself felt in realm of philosophy, but again in that of art," and "it is strange and surprising that Buddhist philosophy did not flourish as well in Sumatra itself." [43]As an expert in the study of Hamzah Fansūrī's works, it is unfortunate that Al-Attas did not realize that his object of research was itself an example of the influence of Vasubandhu-Dignāga's philosophy from the Śrīvijaya period as we have exposed above.
2. The second thesis is on the nature of pre-Islamic Malay mind in which Al-Attas claims that "the people of the Archipelago (in pre-Islamic times) were more esthetic than

[43] See Syed Muhammad Naguib al-Attas, "On Islamization: The Case of the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago," in *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1993), 172.

> philosophical by nature," and "Islam came to the Archipelago…through *tasawwuf* the highly intellectual and rationalistic religious spirit entered the receptive minds of the people, effecting a rise of rationalism and intellectualism not manifested in pre-Islamic times." [44] The problem is that *the interpret* of Hamzah Fansūrī's works comes from the pre-Islamic tradition and is able to meet the translation and interpretation needs of *the interpreted* (Islamic), how can we say that only the latter is "rationalism and intellectualism" by nature in this case?

It is obvious that our understanding of Hamzah Fansūrī's philosophy and the Islamization of the Malay world has always been based on insufficient understanding of the traditional background of Malay philosophy. Therefore, it is not only necessary to understand the traditional background of Hamzah Fansūrī's philosophy, but also to conduct serious research on the history of philosophy in various periods of Malayu-Singapura and Śrīvijaya especially.

[44] See Syed Muhammad Naguib al-Attas, "On Islamization: The Case of the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago," 173.

## *Review Essay*

# THE ISLAMIZATION OF THE MALAY ARCHIPELAGO IN OTTOMAN MANUSCRIPTS

*Alaeddin Tekin*[1]

**Abstract**

*The Ottoman archives possess one of the most extensive collections globally. With its repository of 95 million documents, it stands out as a rare archive that not only illuminates the Ottoman Empire but also contributes to the broader scope of world history. Within the Ottoman archives, numerous documents pertain to the Malay World, predominantly encompassing the colonial occupations within the region and diplomatic endeavours undertaken by the Ottoman Caliphate. Each of these documents has been meticulously examined, unearthing original insights into the propagation of Islam in the Malay Archipelago. Among these insights are correspondences dispatched by regional sultans to Istanbul, while a significant portion emerges from research conducted by Ottoman-appointed consuls in the archipelago. This study's central aim revolves around assessing the progression of Islam into the Malay Archipelago—a region housing the world's most densely populated Muslim community—using resources within the Ottoman archives.*

**Keywords:** Islamization, the Malay Archipelago, Ottoman Archives, Ottoman Caliphate.

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## Introduction

The manuscripts analyzed in this study encompass writings from the mid-sixteenth century to those from the early years of the twentieth century in the Ottoman archives.[2] These manuscripts have undergone meticulous scrutiny. Following a comprehensive examination of these records pertaining to the Malay Archipelago within the Ottoman archives, the present article systematically categorizes relevant documents. Ultimately, significant insights regarding the introduction and diffusion of Islam in the Malay Archipelago were inferred from the implicit content of these documents and are now presented for the reader's perusal. Ottoman Language or Ottoman Turkish, an archaic form of writing, is no longer in contemporary use. Over its extensive history within the empire, this writing style has undergone notable transformations. For instance, substantial distinctions exist between the calligraphy employed in the sixteenth century compared to that of the nineteenth century. Consequently, even minor errors in deciphering these documents can lead to significant interpretation errors.

The official connection that commenced between the Ottoman Caliphate and the Malay Archipelago during the mid-sixteenth century, initiated through the establishment of relations with the Sultanate of Aceh, gradually expanded to encompass the entire Malay Archipelago by the mid-nineteenth century. The increased connections between the two regions during the nineteenth century led to a greater abundance of manuscripts from that era. During this period, the Ottoman Caliphate fostered connections and documented interactions across a broad geographical expanse, including regions such as Riau, Jambi, Johor, Kedah, Pattani, and the Java Islands.

Over the past few years, select documents from the Ottoman archives pertaining to Southeast Asia have been translated into both

[2] Diplomatic interactions between the Ottoman Empire and the Malay World occurred in two distinct historical epochs. The initial period transpired during the mid-sixteenth century, while the second phase unfolded in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Consequently, the Ottoman archives contain a plethora of records pertaining to the Malay world, authored in both the 1560s and the latter half of the nineteenth century.

English and contemporary Turkish.[3] An illustrative instance is the publication in 2017 of a research work titled *Ottoman-Indonesia Relations in the Context of Ottoman Records* authored by a team of researchers.[4] Subsequently, in 2019, the collaborative effort of İsmail Hakkı Kadı and Andrew CS Peacock resulted in the work *Ottoman-Southeast Asian Relations (2 Vols.): Sources from the Ottoman Archives*.[5] This valuable compilation brought together numerous manuscripts from the Ottoman archives pertaining to Southeast Asia.

The scope of this study is limited to elucidating the process of Islamization within the Malay Archipelago as depicted in the Ottoman manuscripts, along with previously unexplored documents. Throughout the development of this study, the emphasis remains solely on presenting information from historical manuscripts housed in the Ottoman archives, deliberately avoiding reference to existing studies concerning the Islamization of the Malay World. Therefore, any interpretive commentary within the text has been consciously omitted.

## Sixteenth-Century Manuscripts in the Ottoman Archives

The initial manuscript on this topic consists of a 122-line letter, originally penned in Arabic then translated to Ottoman Turkish, dispatched to the Ottoman sultan by the ruler of Aceh, Sultan Alâeddin Riʿayat Shah al-Qahhar (1537-1571), in January 1566. By chance, this letter was unearthed in the Topkapı Palace Museum Archive by Razaulhak Shah, originally hailing from Pakistan, in 1967, subsequently undergoing publication in Turkish.[6] Within this

[3] The abbreviation "BOA," mentioned in numerous footnotes throughout this article, denotes *Directorate of the State Archives of Türkiye* (Cumhurbaşkanlığı Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı Osmanlı Arşivi). This archive contains a significant portion of manuscripts related to Ottoman history.

[4] Mehmet Akif Terzi, Ahmet Ergün, Mehmet Ali Alacagöz. *Osmanlı Belgeleri Işığında Osmanlı Endonezya İlişkileri* (Istanbul: Hitay Holding, 2017).

[5] Ismail Hakkı Kadı and Andrew CS Peacock, *Ottoman-Southeast Asian Relations: Sources from the Ottoman Archives*, 2 vols., (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

[6] Razaulhak Şah, "Açi Padişahı Sultan Alaeddin'in Kanuni Sultan Süleyman'a Mektubu," *Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi* 5, no. 8 (1967): 373-409.

extensive letter, the Acehnese Sultan Alâeddin Riʿayat Shah al-Qahhar appeals for military support from the Ottomans in their conflict against the Portuguese. The substantial length of the letter offers insight into the state of Islam within the Malay Archipelago, with implicit information conveyed between its lines. As per the contents of the letter, Alâeddin Riʿayat Shah al-Qahhar expounds that;

> It is furthermore humbly stated to [your Imperial Majesty's] Illustrious Court that: Between this land and the city of Mecca [may Allah Almighty ennoble her!] there are twenty-four thousand islands, known [collectively] as Diva [the Maldives]. At one extremity of these islands lies Goa of the Franks, while the other extremity reaches to the Lands of Darkness. Of these twenty-four thousand islands, twelve thousand are inhabited by men, while the other twelve thousand are desolate and uninhabited. The people of these islands, in their entirety, belong to the community of [Muhammad] the Prophet of the Last Day, and pray and fast in the manner of the Shafiʾi school [of Islam]. They have built mosques on all of the islands, and read the call to prayer in the noble name of your most high and blessed Imperial Majesty, refuge of the world and shadow of Allah [on earth].[7]

Continuing within the same manuscript, it becomes evident that the Sultanate of Aceh in the Malay Archipelago extended its backing to the Islamization endeavors not only within the confines of the Malay Archipelago itself but also across certain territories encompassing present-day Sri Lanka and India. This insight is gleaned from the

[7] Topkapı Palace Museum Archive No: E-8009. H. 16/Jumādā al-ʾĀkhirah/973 [January 7, 1566]. See for the full English translation of this manuscript; Ismail Hakkı Kadı and Andrew CS Peacock, *Ottoman-Southeast Asian Relations: Sources from the Ottoman Archives*, 2 vols., (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 43-51. See for the full Turkish translation of this manuscript; Razaulhak Şah, "Açi Padişahı Sultan Alaeddin'in Kanuni Sultan Süleyman'a Mektubu." *Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 5/8 (1967): 373-409.

manuscript originating in 1566; it underscores that:

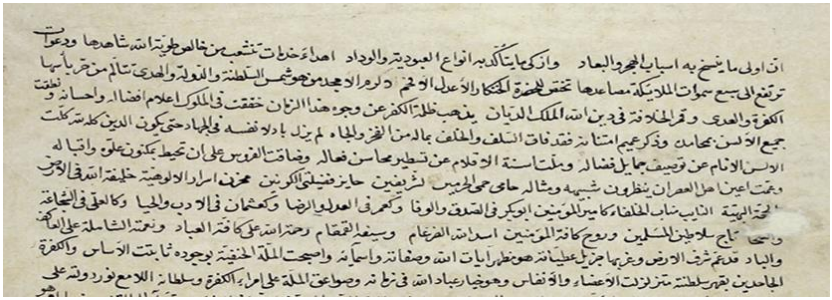

Figure 1: The Arabic prayer section of the extensively prepared letter[8] sent by Acehnese Sultan Alâeddin Riʿayat Shah al-Qahhar in the year 1566. [Topkapı Palace Museum Archive No. E-8009]

> Ceylon [Sri Lanka] is situated at a distance of eight-day sea journey from our land, and among its inhabitants are Muslims who devoutly follow the true religion. They have built a total of fourteen mosques and read the call to prayer in the noble name of your most high and blessed Imperial Majesty, refuge of the world, and pray for the longevity and prosperity of Your Majesty's state. […] Likewise, the ruler of Calicut (Calcutta) is a famous infidel ruler known as the "Samuri." Most of the inhabitants of his country are Muslims, and they have built twenty-four mosques and also read the call to prayer in the noble name of your most high and blessed Imperial Majesty, refuge of the world, and pray for the longevity and prosperity of [Your Majesty's] state. […] When the rulers of Ceylon and Calicut received news that your Majesty's servant Lutfi had arrived here, they

[8] The original version of the letter, consisting of a total of 122 lines, is likely to have been written in Arabic, and the translation into Ottoman Turkish may have been commissioned either while the envoy delegation was at the port of Jeddah or after their arrival in Istanbul. It seems more plausible that the delegation, traveling by sea, would have arranged for the translation of the Arabic letter in Jeddah. During the translation process, the Arabic prayer section in the initial part of the letter was not omitted; instead, it was reinserted into the beginning of the letter. The section provided in the article corresponds to this Arabic portion.

> sent ambassadors to us who proclaimed: "We are servants of his Imperial Majesty, Refuge of the World and Shadow of Allah" and then took an oath swearing that if your Imperial Majesty's propitious fleet were to journey to these lands, they themselves would come to the faith and profess the religion of Islam, and that likewise all of their infidel subjects would forsake the way of false belief for the straight path of the one true religion.[9]

For a lengthy period, there existed no correspondence between the Ottoman State and the Malay Archipelago. This situation endured until the initial years of the latter half of the nineteenth century. During the nineteenth century, the Ottoman Archives host more substantial resources pertaining to this region.

For example, much like his great-grandfather, Sultan Ibrahim Mansur Shah (1838-57 / 1857-1870) dispatched an envoy to Istanbul back in 1850. For him we gain insights into the Muslim populace of the Malay Archipelago. Ibrahim Mansur Shah's letter conveyed that under his rule, the Acehnese sultanate governed 22 million Muslims and 1 million pagans [*majūsiyy*]. This information left Ottoman diplomats taken aback, as this number seemed remarkably substantial. When questioned, Mansur Shah's envoy clarified that 1 million corresponded to 10 sets of 100 thousand.[10] Thus, the Ottomans were introduced to the existence of such a considerable Muslim population within the Malay Archipelago.

## Nineteenth-Century Manuscripts in the Ottoman Archives

Certain documents provide even more specific insights into the process of Islamization on particular islands within the archipelago. For instance, a six-page manuscript delves into the Islamization of

[9] Topkapı Palace Museum Archive No: E-8009: H. 16/Jumādā al-ʾĀkhirah/973 [January 7, 1566]. The original date of the letter is Hijri calendar in Arabic and written as "Tahfîran fî evâsıt-ı şehr-i Cumâzi's-sâni sene selâse ve seb'în ve tis'a ve mi'e."See also; Kadı: 47-48.

[10] BOA, İ. MVL, 226/7706: H. 30/Muḥarram/1268 [November 25, 1851].

Java Island. The original text, authored in French[11] in 1874, outlines the progression of events. The content within these documents, fully translated into Ottoman Turkish and meticulously compared, reveals coherence between the original text and the translation. The initial segments of these records emphasize that the Malays orchestrated the introduction of Islam to Java. Leveraging their adeptness in navigation and active participation in trade, the Malays played a pivotal role in transmitting the Islamic faith to Java, a strategically important island within the archipelago. In accordance with the manuscripts;

> It is acknowledged in Constantinople [Istanbul] that there exists a Muslim populace on the island located between India and China, known in a somewhat vague manner as the inhabitants of Java. This island, Java, holds a prominent status within the Indian archipelago, and its inhabitants constitute a distinct ethnic group situated amidst this archipelago. The Malay people, a conquering race with the longest-standing affiliation to Islam in this region, represent the earliest Muslims in this land. This role of introducing Islam into the expanse of this new world was undertaken by the Malays, whose population is approximated to range from 15 to 20 million individuals. While the Javanese populace is largely inclined towards a sedentary lifestyle, the Malays, renowned as maritime experts, traverse the seas encompassing these regions and frequent ports in India and China. Their reputation extends beyond their audacious maritime capabilities and the spirit of daring they infuse into their commercial pursuits. The Malays are also known for their remarkable courage, verging on recklessness. They are amenable to positive treatment, yet provoking their dignity can yield hazardous consequences.[12]

[11] I would like to thank Assoc. Dr. Selim Tezcan for helping with the transcript of the French manuscript.

[12] BOA, HR. TO, 582/32: H. 22/Ḏhu'l-Qaʿdah /1291 [December 31, 1874].

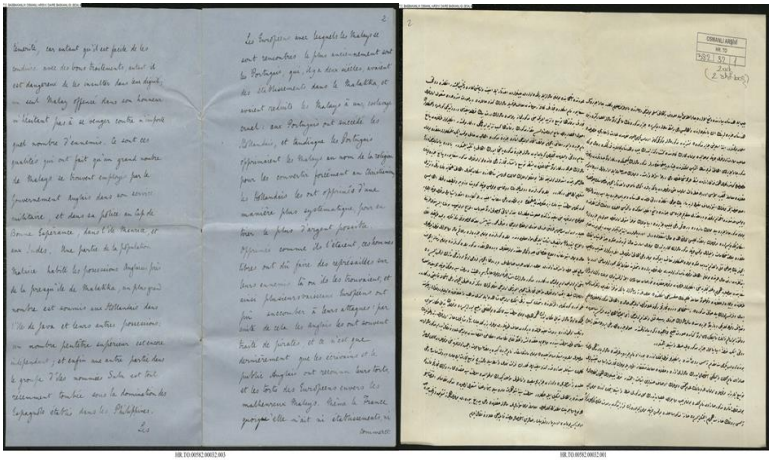

Figure 2: Manuscripts dated 1874, written in French and Ottoman Turkish, concerning the Island of Java.

Continuing within the same document, the interactions between the Europeans who arrived in the region, the Malays, and their endeavors to alter their religious beliefs are succinctly outlined in the following statements: "The Portuguese subjected the Malays to persecution and sought their conversion, while the Dutch pursued a more systematic persecution in order to extract financial gains from them."[13]

In addition to intergovernmental diplomatic correspondence, reports prepared by Ottoman consuls sent to the region also provide clearer information about the initial arrival and spread of Islam in the Malay World. More details that are explicit emerge in an 1897 report written for the Ottoman Ministry of Foreign Affairs by Kamil Bey, the Ottoman Consul in Batavia. The report states: "The total population of the Malay Archipelago has reached 35 million. Moreover, based on the places of worship and graves in the region, it can be deduced that the inhabitants of Java, Sumatra, and nearby islands within the Malay Archipelago believed in the religions of Buddha and Brahma due to their historical interactions with the Chinese and Indians. However, starting from the thirteenth century

[13] BOA, HR. TO, 582/32: H. 22/Ḏū al-Qaʿdah/1291 [December 31, 1874].

AD, following the migration of Arabs to these islands for commercial purposes, Islam rapidly spread throughout the Malay Archipelago."[14]

Merely four months after that aforementioned report, Kamil Bey composed another report that delves into the Islamization of the Malay Archipelago in much greater detail. In the introduction of this report, after providing an extensive account of the Hadramaut region in Yemen, he then discusses the descendants of Prophet Muhammad's grandson, Hussein (RA). He notes that their number has reached 40,000, with a portion of them still residing in Hadramaut. However, a significant group is engaged in trade and resides in the vicinity of India. Kamil Bey indicates that these descendants, known as *'Alawi* (a term historically associated with a variety of Islamic sects), were compelled to migrate to India around five centuries ago due to conflicts among Bedouin tribes in Hadramaut, which forced the urban population into migration. Subsequently, they migrated to the Malay Archipelago.[15] Although the introduction of the Ottoman consul's extensive report focused primarily on the Hadramis, the subsequent sections of the report delve into how the Islamization of the Malay Archipelago took place. The report goes on to discuss the process as follows;

> The spread of Islam in the Malay Archipelago began much earlier than the arrival of these mentioned Hadrami Arabs; it initiated through the efforts of Maghribi Arabs who had come here from Al-Andalus [Islamic Spain]. This fact is evident from the tomb inscriptions found in the cities of Banten and Surakarta [Solo] on Java Island. However, the Hadrami Arabs who migrated from Hadramaut significantly contributed to the further consolidation of Islam already present in the region. […] Among these Hadrami settlers in the Malay Archipelago were those from the Sayyid class. Among them, the most influential and renowned were the families of Âl-Sakkâf, Âl-Kâff, Âl-Cüneyd, Âl-Sırrî, Âl-Attâs, Âl-Shihâb, Âl-Aydrûs, Âl-Aydîd, and

[14] BOA, Y. PRK. EŞA, 28/58: H. 19/Rajab/1315 [December 13, 1897].
[15] BOA, Y. A. HUS, 385/2: H. 21/Ḏū al-Qaʿdah/1315 [April 13, 1898].

Âl-Haddâd. These families enjoyed prosperity for about one and a half centuries from the time of their settlement in the region. However, with the arrival of Europeans, they fell into a vulnerable state.[16]

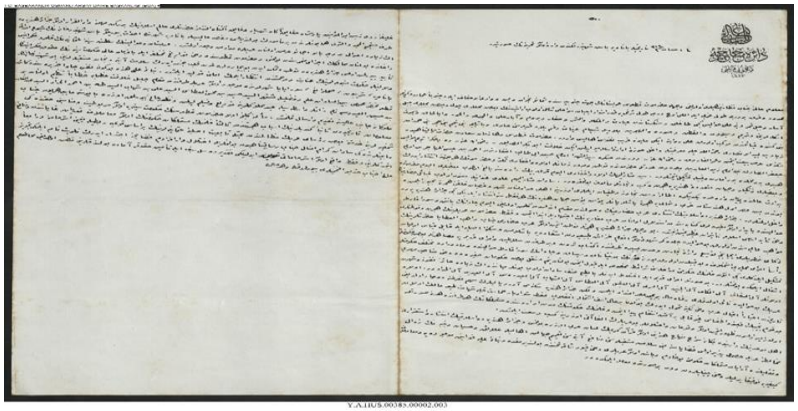

Figure 3: Report of Kamil Bey, the Ottoman Consul in Batavia, dated April 13, 1898.

Thanks to these and similar reports prepared by Kamil Bey, a young and determined consul, during his relatively short tenure, Sultan Abdulhamid II (1876-1909), the reigning Ottoman emperor of that era, gained insights into the Muslims of the Malay Archipelago.

Another manuscript on the subject appears to be authored by Sahl Bey, an intellectual from the recent times, known to be the son of Sayyid Fazıl Pasha. He prepared an extensive report about the Malay Archipelago, containing significant information about how the region was Islamized, intended to be presented to the Ottoman Sultan. Although this document in the Ottoman archives was prepared in 1903, it is apparent that Sahl Bey wrote it much earlier and had already passed away by the time it was translated into the Ottoman Language. The main purpose of his report is to convey the Dutch oppression in the region to the Ottoman sultan. However, at the beginning of the report, he explains when Islam arrived in the archipelago with the following sentences;

[16] BOA, Y. A. HUS, 385/2: H. 21/Ḏū al-Qaʿdah/1315 [April 13, 1898].

> During the period when the Islamic State of Al-Andalus collapsed and Muslims fled from the oppression of Christians in groups towards North and Central Africa, a family of Prophet Muhammad's descendants arrived in the Malay Archipelago via the route of the Cape of Good Hope. Reaching the Sumatra Island from these archipelagos, which were still unknown to Europeans, they conveyed Islam to the local populace. From that point onward, Islam rapidly spread throughout these islands and was embraced by millions. Half a century later, Arabs hailing from the southern regions of Arabia, for the purpose of trade, reached the shores of India and the Malay Archipelago, attempting to spread Islam from Sumatra Island to the Maluku Islands. By the time the Portuguese arrived in the Malay Archipelago, all the archipelagos had already embraced Islam.[17]

While we do not have precise information about its exact authorship, the document states that it was penned by Seyyid Fazl Pasha-zâde (Ed-dâ'î) Sehland presented to the Ottoman sultan. As indicated in this document, it becomes apparent that this route, known as the Cape of Good Hope, was used to reach the Malay Archipelago long before the discovery of the Cape. This indicates that this route was utilized to access the Malay Archipelago.

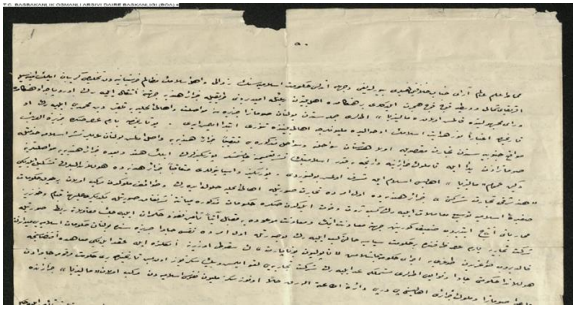

Figure 4: The manuscript regarding when Islam arrived in the Malay Archipelago in the Ottoman Archives.

[17] BOA, Y. PRK. AZJ, 46/10: H. 29/Ḏū al-Ḥijjah/1320 [March 29, 1903].

The last manuscript on the subject is a translation document concerning a session of the State-General [the Dutch Parliament] discussing the budget for the East Indies in the year 1898. The translation was carried out by the Ottoman Embassy in The Hague on January 12, 1898, from French to Ottoman Turkish. During this assembly, a Catholic Member of Parliament, Mr. Van Den Biesen, proposed that the Dutch government should take measures against Islam in the Malay Archipelago to promote Christianity. This document was previously translated by İsmail Hakkı Kadı and Andrew CS Peacock, and the complete content can be found in their book.[18] This document sheds light on the ongoing process of Islamization even in the nineteenth century. It appears that this development unsettled certain individuals within the Dutch Parliament. According to the translated manuscript, the Catholic Member of Parliament remarked that;

> As stated in the most recent colony report, Islam's presence is gradually but consistently spreading into the interior regions of Palembang. The report indicates that leaders of the country have recently embraced Islam. Efforts are being made to advance Islam even in Tebing-Tinggi. New mosques are being constructed and existing ones are renovated to ensure their permanence in Langgars [Langgur?].[19] In the northern regions of Borneo, Ceram, and the Kei islands, Islam has made inroads among some individuals. Particularly in North Ceram, the spread of Islam poses a challenge to the growth of Christianity. Consequently, my question is

[18] Ismail Hakkı Kadı and Andrew CS Peacock, *Ottoman-Southeast Asian Relations): Sources from the Ottoman Archives*, 2 vols., (Leiden: Brill 2019), 523-528.

[19] Some of the geographical names mentioned in the manuscript are not clear. For example, while Tebing-Tinggi (Medan) is clear, the second city or region is not specified. This could be either an old settlement or a mistake in the Ottoman translation. Ismail Hakkı Kadı and Andrew CS Peacock have read this name as it is or as possible alternatives. See for the full translation of this manuscript; Ismail Hakkı Kadı and Andrew CS Peacock, *Ottoman-Southeast Asian Relations (2 Vols.): Sources from the Ottoman Archives* (Leiden: Brill 2019): 526-528.

> whether the government plans to take measures to prevent Islam from prevailing over Christianity and thwarting this perceived threat. Mr. President, I propose that the government initiates actions such as restricting the travel of pilgrims to the esteemed Mecca, or alternatively, disrupts the Hajj by issuing passports at an exorbitant cost.[20]

The viewpoint of the Catholic Member of Parliament, suggesting a ban on Hajj, did not receive approval from the Minister of Colonies. The Minister stated that prohibiting Hajj would not offer a solution. Notably, it is intriguing that a central city such as Palembang has not undergone complete Islamization during this period.

## Conclusion

Understanding the process of Islamization in the Malay Archipelago, a significant region within the Islamic world, holds considerable importance. To gain insights into the spread of Islam in this densely Muslim-populated region, this research has delved into the archives of the Ottoman Empire, historically one of the most influential states within the Islamic World. This investigation not only sheds light on the propagation of Islam in the Malay World but also provides a glimpse into how the Ottomans comprehended the Malays and their relationship with Islam. The complexities inherent in the Islamization process across Southeast Asia, home to the world's largest Muslim population, continue to be subject to scholarly discourse. While conventional narratives posit Arab merchants as the primary agents of Islam's dissemination, scholarly investigation underscores the nuanced contributions of Sufi orders and indigenous Muslim communities in both facilitating and shaping the trajectory of Islamization. Therefore, this article presents a new dimension to the existing debates from primary sources.

From the correspondence regarding the Ottoman Caliphate and the Sultanate of Aceh relationship that took place in the mid-sixteenth century, the Ottomans had gained a general understanding of the Islamization in the Malay Archipelago during

[20] BOA, Y. A. HUS, 383/50: H. 18/Shaʿbān/1315 [January 12, 1898].

that period. However, in documents written in the nineteenth century, the Ottomans encountered different information about how these archipelagos underwent Islamization. Perhaps the most intriguing of these claims is the assertion that, following the fall of the Umayyad Caliphate of Cordoba, a group of Muslims who had been residing there crossed the Cape of Good Hope and arrived on the island of Sumatra.

It is asserted that the commencement of Islamization began during this period. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that Muslim Arabs from Yemen migrated in cohorts to the Malay Archipelago, sparking a significant upswing in Islamization, ultimately leading to the swift conversion of nearly all the islands in a brief span. Beyond these points, the archival records also present diverse assertions and details, including the assertion that Java Island embraced Islam through the influence of Malay traders. Consequently, the Ottoman archives stand as crucial primary sources that aid in comprehending the process of Islamization in the region.

# חינוך, CHINUCH: ISRAEL'S EDUCATION SYSTEM AND QUESTIONS OF IDENTITY

*Arief S. Arman*[1]

*"I pray to the God within me that He will give me the strength to ask Him the right questions."*[2]
(Elie Wiesel)

Albeit in a different context, Wiesel's soliloquy resonates with the pressing questions on the formation of identity, and contingent quest for meaning for many Jews. Indeed, what are the right questions to ask the divine, in as much as the divine seems to be indifferent to the indignation suffered by Jews, especially when it comes to the memory of *the Shoah* (?) The space to ask such questions sets itself in the rigmarole of the everyday, and ties in with notions of belonging and memory. These concepts are thus linked to the theme of religion in global politics, exemplified in the curious case of Israel. Prior to its establishment in 1948, the founders of Israel often applied religious justifications for its creation and subsequent existence, with a 'return to homeland' among the oft-heard sentiments. The purposes of this paper are varied. The first is to understand the character of Israel through the theoretical framework provided by Rogers Brubaker in his 'Four Approaches to Nationalism', with a focus on how *nationalism itself can be argued as a form of religion*. Secondly, we will look at the justifications to why secular education – as an extension on nationalism as religion – has taken root in Israel. We proceed with an argument that the removal of religious knowledge

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[2] Elie Wiesel, *Night*, trans., Marion Wiesel, 2006. (Hill & Wang).

(primarily ethics) from the Israeli education system will prove to be detrimental in the long run, as the relationship between individuals will thus be determined purely in the language of capital, and 'success' as defined by market forces, which runs counter to genuine solidarity.

First and foremost, we need to come to terms with the arguments brought forward by Brubaker. He breaks down four different approaches to nationalism, with the first (1) being an assertion that "religion and nationalism, along with ethnicity and race, as analogous phenomena."[3] Next, he (2) contends the ways in which religion helps explain things about nationalism, before moving on to (3) treating religion as part of nationalism, and to the (4) positing of a distinctly religious form of nationalism.[4] Brubaker also argues that nationalism is not entirely secular[5], in that it is still intertwined within discourses on religion.[6] These approaches indicate a moving away from the **s**ecularisation thesis, whereby the modernisation of society is equated to a decline in religion, both in the minds of the individuals, and the collective that make up the polity. There are basic analytical distinctions to be ascertained here, with 'the secular' being a central modern epistemic category, while 'secularisation' an analytical conceptualisation of modern-historical processes, and 'secularism' as a worldview and ideology[7]. In contemporary Israel,

[3] Rogers Brubaker, "Religion and nationalism: four approaches," *Nations and Nationalism*, 2012, 18(1), 3.

[4] Rogers Brubaker, "Religion and nationalism: four approaches," Nations and Nationalism, 2012, 18(1), 3.

[5] In the context of Israel, the term 'secular' does not correpsond entirely to '*hiloni*' which has been used to designate Jews who have completely abandoned the practice of Judaism. In the Israeli framework, the term has acquired a more militant connotation, and now tends to imply 'anti-Judaic', or occasionnaly, 'anti-Semitic'. See Yakov M. Rabkin, *A Threat from Within: A Century of Jewish Opposition to Zionism*, (Zed Books, 2006).

[6] It seems to be the case that any discussion on secularism will always be made in contradistinction with religion, in its myriad forms. There is a "dialogic and entwined nature of the interaction between 'the secular' and 'the religious'". See Mohita Bhatia, "Secularism and secularisation: a bibliographical essay," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 48, No. 50, (2013).

[7] José Casanova, "The secular, secularizations, secularisms," *Rethinking Secularism*, eds., Craig Calhoun, M. Juergensmeyer, and J. VanAntwerpen (Oxford and New

these distinctions are blurred and constantly re-assessed, since there is still the inherent struggle of moving away from "… the Jewish tradition which never accepted the Augustinian division between the two cities of God."[8] For current Premier, Benjamin Netanyahu (as well as his predecessors), Casanova's analytical distinctions facilitate a hybrid construction of governance; neither entirely secular nor fully Judaic.

## Early Days

Did nationalism emerge from the decline of religion, or did it rise from a period of intensified religious sentiment? In the context of Israel, Jewish political theorising is *sui generis*, since much of its discourse pertains to an ancient longing of return, and a form of sovereignty that is as much political as it is spiritual.[9] Historically, the Jewish community in Europe lived in the peripheries of society, often enclosed within the space known as *Judengasse* or ghettos[10]. This isolation from other Europeans *made self-governance necessary*, with reliance on non-Jews kept at a minimum. Such non-reliance galvanised the spirit of European Jews (*Ashkenazim*) to slowly establish their own state. Through the ideals of Zionism[11] pioneered by Theodor Hertzl, what was once a faraway dream is now a lived reality. In 'The Zionist Idea', Joseph Heller opines that "the particular character of a national culture is determined by a common psychological, economic, and historical condition, which subconsciously shapes a common way of life: out of which arise…

York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 54-74.

[8] Sam N. Lehhman-Wilzig & Bernard Susser, *Comparative Jewish Politics: Public Life in Israel and the Diaspora* (Bar-Ilan University Press, 1981), 11.

[9] There are, however, arguments made that 'Israel' is a spiritual community without arbitrary borders, rather than a fixed nation-state. See also Rabin (2006) in footnote 1.

[10] Howard Sachar, *The Course of Modern Jewish History* (Dell Publishing, 1977), 25.

[11] Zionism is defined as "the name given to a particular form or manifestation of Jewish nationalism, and its object is defined as the realisation of the Jewish national idea." See Joseph Heller, *The Zionist Idea* (London: The Joint Zionist Publications Committee, 1947), 6.

(an) individually differentiated creative energy."[12] These common conditions can also be manufactured in that the narratives of *aliya* (waves of Jewish immigration into then British Palestine) were at odds with the *Yishuv*[13] (Jewish community who were already living in the contested area, and without any central governance). However, reconciliation between the two is assumed to have taken place as time progressed. Heller also argues that the ethos of a specific nation is not a combination of several specific features, but rather a general predisposition to specific mental and spiritual functions.[14] After the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, a transformation of culture took root, with the obvious transition being a move away from feudalism to a central form of governance, identified as commensurate to those 'specific mental and spiritual functions.'

The concept of transition is not novel here, in that "after a millennia of reacting to ever-shifting circumstances, Israeli Jews have now institutionalised, in their political culture, the idea of change, but in such a way as to preserve those institutions and ideals which they had struggled to develop."[15] The potential for Israel's social, economic, and political growth stems from the notion of the *Yishuv* as an autonomous political system in embryo, defined as 'a state in the making', or 'a state within a state'[16] From here, Susser points out that *Halachic*[17] authority does not imply that Jewish political tradition is either autocratic or uncritical or unchanging[18]. As

[12] Joseph Heller, *The Zionist Idea*, 6.

[13] The term came into use in the 1880s, when there were about 25,000 Jews living across the land of current-day Israel. See Alan Dowty, *Arabs and Jews in Ottoman Palestine* (Indiana University Press, 2021).

[14] Joseph Heller, *The Zionist Idea*, 4.

[15] Sam N. Lehhman-Wilzig & Bernard Susser, *Comparative Jewish Politics: Public Life in Israel and the Diaspora*, 12.

[16] Dan Horowitz & Moshe Lissak, *Origins of the Israeli Polity: Palestine under the Mandate* (University of Chicago Press, 1979), 2.

[17] Jewish law (or code of conduct) known as the *Halakha* or *Halachah.* For a brief introduction, see, https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/4165687/jewish/What-Is-Halakhah-Halachah-Jewish-Law.htm.

[18] Sam N. Lehhman-Wilzig & Bernard Susser, *Comparative Jewish Politics: Public Life in Israel and the Diaspora*, 9.

such, the living of a Jewish life is dependent on the circumstances that one finds him/herself in.

## Ambiguity of Identity and Politics of Education

The initial consensus (known as the 'status quo' in Israeli history) between statists and their religious counterparts (the rabbinical class) began to wane in the 1980s, as secular resentment towards religious orthodoxy became more pronounced.[19] There are three crucial changes that provided fertile ground for the seeds of secularisation to germinate. These include the (1) ascent of a neoliberal economy, (2) mass immigration of a million Jews from the former Soviet Union, and (3) emergence of religious and spiritual alternatives to Judaism.[20] Since "ethnicity and nationalism have been characterised as basic sources and forms of social and cultural identification,"[21] there was a need for the reconciliation of different modes of 'Jewishness' in Israel. Similar to the *Ashkenazis* who had to 'educate' *Mizrahi* Jews (of Arab or North African descent), or as 'assimilating Israelis' and 'identity-preserving Jews'[22] we observe that there is no one way of expressing Jewish identity.[23] In contemporary settings, the contestation of space and influence between Orthodox Jews and their secular counterparts (often from the *Ashkenazi* polity) proves to be a tremendous challenge for the Israeli authorities.[24] This clash is

[19] Guy Ben-Porat, *Between State and Synagogue: The Secularization of Contemporary Israel* (University of Cambridge Press, 2013), 37.

[20] Guy Ben-Porat, *Between State and Synagogue: The Secularization of Contemporary Israel* (University of Cambridge Press, 2013), 37.

[21] Rogers Brubaker, "Religion and nationalism: four approaches," in *Nations and Nationalism*, 18(1), 2012:4

[22] Eliezer Schweid, "Judaism in Israeli culture," *In Search of Identity: Jewish Aspects in Israeli Culture* (London: Routledge, 1999), 26.

[23] We see similar patterns of trying to define the self based on the other. Although the context is dissimilar, the idea of a 'narrative trap' is espoused further in Rosemary Hollis' *Surviving the Story: The Narrative Trap in Israel and Palestine* (Red Hawk Books, 2019).

[24] If we are to consider 'secular Jews' as a sort of sect different to Orthodox (Hasedi) Jews, then parallels can be drawn to the divide between Sunnis and Shi'is in the Muslim world. In understanding this split as further fuelled by Western influence, see Reidar Visser's 'The Western Imposition of Sectarianism on Iraqi Politics' in *The Arab Studies Journal* (Vol. 15/16, No. 2/1 pp. 83-99);

brought about by varying iterations of what it means 'to be a Jew', and is very much related to the ambiguity of identity inherent in its own history and trajectory. Yet, 'Israeliness' is understood by the majority as a civil political-linguistic-territorial belonging.[25] This usually incorporates a certain measure of 'Judaism' in the religious, traditional, or national sense, but these notions are often fragmented.[26] The urgent call for unity in the state focused on the immediate work at hand, which is:

> "the establishment of state institutions and their economic, technological, administrative, socio-professional, legal-professional and political functioning – areas whose development and perfection predominantly required the internalisation of knowledge and expertise drawn from external, Western sources, and not specifically from the values of the tradition."[27]

The above is essential, since "economic growth was accompanied by cultural changes, often described as 'Americanisation'. This transition gained momentum in the 1990s, owing to globalisation and the initiation of the peace process that added to the economic growth and opened up new parts of the world to Israel and to Israeli consumers."[28]

The central form of governance mentioned earlier is pivotal, in that education in Israel is influenced by who is at the helm. Again, the influence of the post-modern condition adversely impacts Israel, and is observed in the aspect of public policy-making through education.[29] Nationalism in this regard takes the form of a merging

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http://www.jstor.org/stable/27934026

[25] Discussions on the essence of Judaism – if it is a religion, a people, a nation, an ethnic group, a race, and/or a civilisation –remains unsettled. "Either we serve God and suffer the fate that comes our way by virtue of linking our fate to God's fate, or we sever the connection to God and become a nation like any other, an ethnic diaspora like any other." See (Eisen, 2020) https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/our-covenant-with-god/.

[26] Eliezer Schweid, "Judaism in Israeli culture," 10.

[27] Eliezer Schweid, "Judaism in Israeli culture," 10.

[28] Guy Ben-Porat, *Between State and Synagogue*, 39.

[29] Abraham Yogev, "Bringing order to chaos? Educational policy in Israel in the

with capitalism, and an extension of a neoliberal *zeitgeist*. It is thus required that the education system prepares its students for economic uncertainty, and the planning of an assumed (impending) financial collapse.[30]Why then, did secular education take root in Israel? The first argument to be made here is that Israel's education system has reduced religious studies *as a mere afterthought*. Instead, significance has been placed on subjects that can facilitate the securing of a 'good job' in the future, whereby "the educational philosophy of high school and university is thus primarily directed to 'preparation of life' in the narrow sense of professional socialization: individualistic, contemporary minded and pragmatic-functional."[31] Claims of institutional autonomy (involving the control over school systems and media), are part of the phenomenon of politicised ethnicity, "broadly understood as encompassing claims made on the basis of ethno-religious, ethno-national, ethno-racial, ethno-regional, or otherwise ethno-cultural identifications, which have proliferated in both the developed and developing world in the last half century."[32] As such, Israel is the perfect example of the aforesaid phenomenon as authorities ground themselves in an identification and meaning attached to varied iterations of Judaism, which includes a modern (re)interpretation. Thus, institutional autonomy plays a key role in maintaining an assumed balance in a secular nation-state. Such an outlook is reminiscent of Jewish history, specifically from the eighteenth century onwards. This timeframe was replete with instances of a need to counter the demands of life related to the merchant class, in which "this middle-class orientation explained, too, the social philosophy of the *maskilim*. They urged that the Jews 'productivise' themselves, move into useful, dignified livelihoods so as to be an engaged polity, and not merely idle bystanders in the sweeping tides of modernity.[33] The American historian, Howard

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postmodern era," in *Public Policy in Israel*, eds., David Nachmias & Itai Sened (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2002), 209.

[30] Abraham Yogev, "Bringing order to chaos? Educational policy in Israel in the postmodern era," in Public Policy in Israel, eds., David Nachmias & Itai Sened (London: Frank Crass Publishers, 2002), 209.

[31] Eliezer Schweid, "Judaism in Israeli culture," 10.

[32] Rogers Brubaker, "Religion and nationalism," 18(1), 2012, 5.

[33] Howard Sachar, *The Course of Modern Jewish History* (Dell Publishing, 1977).

Sachar (d. 2018) puts it rather bluntly that "Jews helped to shape the destiny of capitalism, but capitalism also shaped the destiny of the Jews."[34]

Going by the earlier claim that *nationalism itself can be understood as religion*, does a removal of religion from the education system entail a removal of an aspect of nationalism (vice versa)? We contend that if there is a removal of religious education, the younger generation of Israelis will not fully understand its diverse history, which runs on varying levels of abstraction and theory.[35] Instead, this void is supplanted by a contemporary notion of what it means to be both 'Israeli' and 'Jewish', highlighting notions of valiant patriotism (which one can argue as borderline xenophobia) and reconfiguration of memory at the behest of the authorities. This is the shift from to the 'corporatism[36] found in ghettos of days past to central government, highlighting an extraordinary need to exert influence on its impressionable population. There is an added element of the fear of *yerida* (emigration), whereby Israelis who are dissatisfied with the government might opt to leave the country, potentially causing demographic imbalance. Against the backdrop of a strong religious orthodoxy, it is a mistake to assume that secular education will quell any concerns of *yerida*. This situation is again, indicative of a cognitive dissonance prevalent in Israel; that is of wanting to be rooted, but also desiring to move away, due to disagreements based on a lack of political clarity and definition.

[34] Howard Sachar, *The Course of Modern Jewish History* (Dell Publishing, 1977), 39.

[35] Susser however argues, the departure from traditional modes of Jewish discourse is exemplified by the Jewish philosopher Maimonides, who had valiantly attempted to synthesize Aristotle with Jewish ideas. However, its status remains indeterminate in contemporary Jewish life. "It stands as a prodigious intellectual monument that one is duty-bound to visit but unwilling to adopt at home." See Bernard Susser, "Jewish political theory," in Lehman-Wilzig & Susser, eds., C*omparative Jewish Politics* (1981).

[36] A technique by which the ruler decentralised responsibilities and rights, in the hopes that barons and townships would perform functions for him, that he, the king, could not afford, or did not have the strength to perform himself. In a decentralised society, Christian rulers permitted Jews to control their own autonomous corporations, for as long as they paid a collective tax or assizes (which were hefty in nature). See Howard M. Sachar, *The Course of Modern Jewish History* (1977).

Nevertheless, despite its secular-religious ambiguities, Israel is often taken to be the only truly modern state in the Middle East, which indicates a vagueness and the shifting of standards for assessing a state's modernity.[37]

## Problems Now, Problems After

What are the consequences of widespread secular education? There are numerous impacts, but we shall only highlight two. The first is an abdication of cultural-value-socialisation transmission to students, or a passing down of heritage and hope. If this transmission of knowledge does not take place, a genuine sense of belonging and of community will not be felt by the younger generation.[38] Such a situation would open up a vacuum of meaning and identity in the lives of students across Israel, which could easily be supplanted by extremist opinions of a violent nature. There is the added issue that even if 'Judaic' subjects are taught, it will take the form of a collection of information, and not so much a specific formation of a worldview (or ethical framework). Such education is still stuck within the rubric of exams and marks, "like those other kinds of instructional matter that are taken 'seriously'.[39]

As it were, the telling of stories of hope is not a transmission of knowledge applicable to the capitalist market. It is not mistaken to say that a heightened sense of competition with others will inevitably create a citizenry that will always look outward to come to terms with what is inward. This dual aspect, that of the physical/corporeal and the spiritual/metaphysical were not entirely removed from the lives of Jews prior to the establishment of the state of Israel. What we observe in the current milieu is a separation between the two, which is of course understood through the lens of secularism, and the desire to be on par with (if not better than) other democratic, liberal, and secular states. We would do well to remember that the process of neo-liberalisation has entailed a 'creative destruction' of sorts, impacting divisions of labour, social relations, welfare provisions,

[37] Hussein Ali Agrama, *Questioning Secularism: Islam, Sovereignty, and the Rule of Law in Modern Egypt* (The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 6-7.
[38] Eliezer Schweid, "Judaism in Israeli culture," 15.
[39] Eliezer Schweid, "Judaism in Israeli culture," 16.

attachments to land, and perhaps most crucially habits of the heart. If market exchange within neoliberalism is upheld as an ethic in itself there is a real danger of it acting as a guide to all human action, which substitutes for all previously held ethical beliefs. It seeks to bring all human action to the domain of the market[40], entailing a worldview that looks at others as means to an end, and not an end in themselves. Genuine solidarity cannot be attained if almost everyone is seen as an economic rival.

Secondly, any identification of the students with the Jewish cause and of Judaism, as well as Zionism as a national ethos, is superficial, which could lead to the temptation of *yerida*[41] as mentioned prior. To express simply the problem at hand the Israeli education system depends too much on external models and is too reactionary towards changes from outside its borders. By applying the logic of emigration, what is stopping parents from sending their children overseas, where better economic opportunities (and lower cost of living) are available? We argue that the content and quality of education should *not be fully compromised* in succumbing to modernity. It is suggested that Israeli education policy should be established by schools themselves (as well as the local authorities) rather than by a central regulator.

Recent developments in Israel highlight a nascent antagonism towards authority, which can be inferred as a direct result of the education policies in the nation-state. The intelligent young adults begin to question the vestiges of power which rests in the Knesset. Benjamin Netanyahu's sacking of Defence Minister Yoav Gallant seems to indicate his desire to hold on to power at all costs, even with the risk of increasing collateral in his never-ending war against Hamas. The sacking comes after Gallant called for a stop to the judicial overhaul that was made by Netanyahu and his cabinet.[42] It is indeed a trend in modern nation-states that all domains of power are

[40] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford University Press, 2005), 3.

[41] Eliezer Schweid, "Judaism in Israeli culture," 17.

[42] For a better understanding of the issue at hand, see: https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2023-03-26/ty-article/netanyahu-fires-defense-minister-gallant-for-calling-to-stop-judicial-overhaul/00000187-1f31-d4ca-afff-1f39e2be0000

questioned and are subsequently removed. Therefore, it should not be entirely surprising that secular education in Israel has paved the way to a post-Zionist (which is rather ironic) and post-Jewish (if one can ever mention as such) praxis, which does not bode well for both Orthodox Jews and their secular counterparts. Could there possibly be an internal implosion in the near future?

## Moving Forward

Since there is no written constitution in Israel, competing claims to legitimacy must be addressed accordingly. The imperative for change is mentioned by Susser, as he quotes the Anglo-Irish political theorist Edmund Burke; "a state without the means of some change is without the means of its conservation."[43] However, the change suggested here is one that is based on Jewish tradition and are on Judaic terms, in which we borrow Susser's truth-claim that the "*Halacha* is a total way of living, a religio-legal constitution of existence that legislates with such… thoroughness that it constitutes a non-philosophical but densely real portrait of the good life. As with political discourse, it is an embedded theory that incarnates itself in institutions and practice." [44] Such is the significance of the transmission of knowledge (of heritage and hope) onto future generations. Furthermore, and on the point of *Halacha*[45], we ought to appreciate the words of the Lithuanian-born Jewish philosopher, Emmanuel Levinas, that "For Judaism, the goal of education consists in instituting a link between man and the saintliness of God and in maintaining man in this relationship."[46]

For the sake of brevity, we did not delve into 'the how' education in Israel is secular. It is hoped that the 'why' is sufficient for our current discussion. To reiterate, Brubaker's framework of nationalism as a form of religion can definitely be applied in the contemporary example of Israel. If religious knowledge is entirely

[43] Sam N. Lehhman-Wilzig & Bernard Susser, *Comparative Jewish Politics*, 9.
[44] Sam N. Lehhman-Wilzig & Bernard Susser, *Comparative Jewish Politics*, 20.
[45] Similarities can be drawn to the Islamic conception of sacred law; the *Sharī'ah* (roughly translated as 'the way to the watering hole').
[46] Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, trans. Seán Hand (The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1990), 4.

removed from the Israeli education system, Wiesel's lamentations will not be of asking the right questions to God, but of questioning His existence altogether.

# *Manuscript Studies*

## Devotional Poetry in Technical Manuscript Terminology: An Introduction to *The Rose Garden of Purity (Golzār-e Ṣafā)*

Amir H. Zekrgoo[1] and Mandana Barkeshli[2]

**Abstract**

*Among the wide variety of Persian manuscript categories, there is a distinctive genre that includes recipes on materials and technics of manuscript production. And within this genre, we come across distinctly interesting works that adopt charming romantic poetry to record subjects that are rather dull, dry, and unattractive to the general audience! One of such historical sources is a sixteenth century manuscript entitled Rose Garden of Purity (Golzār-e Ṣafā) by ʿAlī Ṣayrafī, preserved in Paris Central Library. The subject of this research is the manuscript's impressive Preface in which the poet expresses his sincere devotion to his Creator, and begs for forgiveness – all in melodious poetic language, using technical manuscript terms, colors and pigments as symbols and metaphors. The essay provides an opening remark entitled 'Manuscripts on Manuscript Production' followed by and introduction to the manuscript of 'Golzār-e Ṣafā (Rose Garden of Purity). The little knowledge extracted about ʿAlī Ṣayrafī from the manuscript is shared under 'The Author-cum-Poet.' 'Preface with 12 Couplets' is the focal point of the essay; there the 12 couplets (24 hemistiches) are presented in the original language (Farsi/Persian) along with an English translation that is published here for the first time. A detailed analysis of technical terms used in the Preface, and an elaboration of their symbolic significance, is presented under 'Expression of Devotion in Technical Manuscript Vocabulary.'*

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## Manuscripts on Manuscript Production

Classical Iranian literary sources contain valuable information with respect to materials and techniques related to the art of book-making – including paper, sizing, dyes, and pigments. Some of these writings were composed in the form of mystical poetry, which requires careful research not only into their technical terminology but also their symbolic language.

The period between the ninth AH/fifteenth CE and thirteenth/nineteenth centuries – spanning the reign of the Timurid, Safavid and Qajar dynasties – is remarkable in this regard. Master artisans, who were traditionally occupied with producing artworks and teaching young pupils, began recording their experiences in the form of treatises. The writings of these masters helped to transfer their practical expertise in the arts of the book to their disciples, as well as preserve it for future generations. The majority of such sources were penned by master calligraphers, but in exceptional cases we come across treatises that were written by painters, such as Ṣādiq Beg Afshār's *The Rulebook of Images* (*Qānūn al-Ṣuwar*), dated 1010/1601.[3]

These writings are unique in the sense that they were compiled by artists with first-hand knowledge of material production. As such they open up fresh research avenues that can benefit artists, art historians, conservators and scientists alike. They provide access to the material technologies involved in the production of medieval Persian manuscripts and miniature paintings. On a number of occasions, they have led to valuable explorations that reveal the secrets behind the use of certain materials and techniques.[4]

### *Golzār-e Ṣafā (Rose Garden of Purity)*

One of the prized classical Persian sources on materials and techniques of the art of the book, is *Golzār-e Ṣafā* (*Rose Garden of Purity*). The

[3] Mandana Barkeshli, "Paint palette used by Iranian Masters based on Persian medieval recipes," *Restaurator* 34, no. 2, (2013): 101–33.
[4] Mandana Barkeshli, "PH stability of saffron used in verdigris as an inhibitor in Persian miniature paintings," *Restaurator* 23, (2002): 154–164.

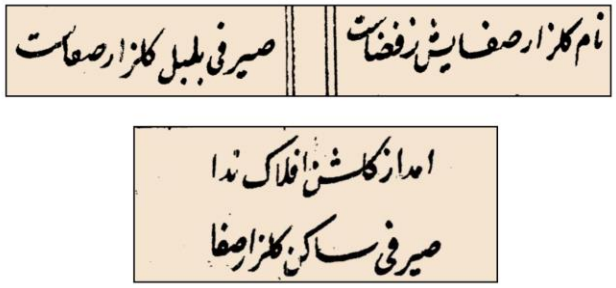
manuscript is remarkable on various grounds. First of all, it contains valuable information with respect to pigments and dyes, as well as related recipes. Secondly, the treatise catches the eyes of scholars of literature because of its 410 rhyming couplets, composed in the *Mathnavī* style of Persian poetry. And finally, the 'romantic' color symbolism of the text, expressed in poetic language, is nothing short of remarkable. The poems expose readers to allegorical expressions of various moods and feelings, represented by different shades of colors – a conceit rooted in Persian mystical literature. Hence, the *Rose Garden of Purity* not only provides details on technical aspects of materials and techniques, but also touches upon feelings that are symbolically associated with color tones. As for the textual history of the *Rose Garden of Purity*, the only known manuscript is preserved in Paris Central Library (no. P.1656); a microfilm version of the same is available in Tehran University's Central Library (no. 3637). The content of the manuscript was edited for the first time in 1349sh/1970 by Mohammad Taqi Danesh-Pazhuh in the Tehran-based journal *Honar va-mardom*.[5]

### *The Author-cum-Poet*

The manuscript is commonly attributed to one ʿAlī Ṣayrafī, but there has been doubts about whether this actually is the author's real name. The real name of the author, as well as the date and the place of his birth or demise, cannot be confirmed with certainty. What we do know, however, is that the *Rose Garden of Purity* was composed in the sixteenth century, a time in which a number of Safavid masters and famous painters were active.

There are two couplets towards the end of the manuscript where the name Ṣayrafī appears two times. In the same couplets the romantic title of the book (*Rose Garden of Purity*) appears three times, where the poet makes a mystical bond between the heavenly garden and the *Rose Garden of Purity*, and introduces himself as the singing bird residing in the latter. (Figure 1)

[5] The edition by Danesh-Pazhuh was later revised twice, once by Najib Mayel Heravi in 1372sh/1993 and again by Hamid Reza Qelich-khani in 1373sh/1994. The main source for all these editions has been the Tehran University Library microfilm.




*Figures 1: The name of the author/poet (Ṣayrafī) appears in the above couplets. There he refers to himself as "the Nightingale of the Rose Garden of Purity," and "Resident of the Rose Garden of Purity"*

The couplets shown in *Figure 1* are presented below followed by their English translation.

نام گلزار صفایش ز فضاست  صیرفی بلبل گلزار صفاست
آمد از گلشن افلاک ندا  صیرفی ساکن گلزار صفا

*From heaven came the name 'Rose Garden of Purity',*
*Ṣayrafī is the nightingale of the Rose Garden of Purity.*
*From the heavenly garden a statement was bestowed,*
*The Rose Garden of Purity is Ṣayrafī's abode.*[6]

The first name ʿAlī is also mentioned but with great ambiguity whether the author is referring to himself or pointing at a third person. Some sources have indicated that ʿAlī was perhaps the name of a close friend of his youth, and that Ṣayrafī devoted his work to him due to his longing during his old age[7] – an opinion that we beg to disagree! In the last page of Golzār-e Ṣafā the name ʿAlī is mentioned in a manner that could be understood as being the author's own name. There he claims that he is blessed with the name ʿAlī who is his guardian (Walī).[8] (Figure 2)

[6] ʿAlī Ṣayrafī, *Golzār-e Ṣafā*, Translation into English by Amir H. Zekrgoo.

[7] Najib Mayel Heravi, "Preface," in *Ketāb-ārāyī dar tamaddon-e Eslāmī* (Book Decoration in Islamic Civilization), ed. Najib Mayel Heravi, Mashhad: Islamic Research Centre of Astān-i Quds-i Raẓavī, 1372sh/1993, 62-63.

[8] The Arabic term *walī* means 'guardian' and 'friend'. Imam 'Alī, the cousin and

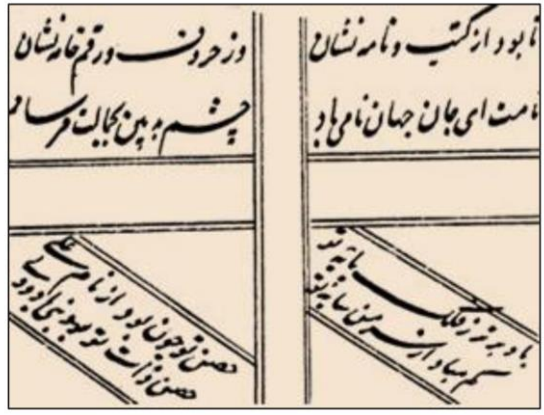


*Figure 2: ʻAlī Ṣayrafī, in the last page of the Golzār-e Ṣafā, expresses his deep satisfaction for having the name ʻAlī, which he praises and claims to be his protector/guardian (walī) alongside the Prophet (nabī).*

The couplets shown in *Figure 2* are presented below along with an English translation.

تا بوَد از کُتُب و نامه نشان — وز حروف و رقمِ خامه نشان
نامت ای جانِ جهان نامی باد — چشم بدبین به جمالت مَرساد
باد برتر ز فلک پایه تو — کم مباد از سرِ من سایه تو
حصن تو چون بوَد از نام علی — حصن ذات تو نبی باد و ولی

*As long as there's a sign of books and letters,*
*And traces of writing, pen, and signatures*
*May your name, O world's heart, rise high,*
*Your beauty may never be touched by evil-eye*
*Higher than the heaven, your position may grow,*
*From over my head may never leave your shadow*
*Protected when you are with the name of ʻAli,*
*Your soul will be shielded by the Prophet and the Walī.*[9]

son-in-law of Prophet Muhammad and the first *Shiʻah* Imam is often addressed as *Walī Allah* (friend of God).

[9] ʻAlī Ṣayrafī, *Golzār-e Ṣafā*.

In the above couplets, the poet has adopted manuscript-related terms, such as *books*, *letters*, *writing*, pen, and *signature*, to convey his message – an intentional practice throughout the manuscript.

**Preface in 12 Couplets**

Ṣayrafī engaged his imagination to create an artistic connection between colors, natural elements and technical terms on the one hand, and love-related moods, feelings and emotions on the other hand. The sun, the moon, the heaven and the earth, trees, stones and gems, and the process of creation are imaginatively tied to book-making technical terms in the *Rose garden of Purity*. Using colours, dyes, tools, and the technical process of colour making as his medium, Ṣayrafī displays the bitter-sweet contrast of emotions in an admirable way. We hope to display these characteristics of *Golzār-e Ṣafā* in another essay.

The subject of this research is the manuscript's impressive *Preface* in which the poet expresses his sincere devotion to his Creator. This is nothing out of the norm, since devotional passages at the beginning of books have been a common trait in Persian literature for many centuries. One can hardly find a single manuscript, regardless of the subject, that does not begin with a vote of praise to the Almighty, the Prophet, his household, and the Imāms. In fact, devotional praise (*madḥ*) was so popular that numerous books of poetry and prose were entirely dedicated to it.[10] Due to its appeal to the heart of the devoted, and the power of evoking religious emotions, this genre gained widespread popularity. The practice was not limited to books and manuscripts; it extended to a wide variety of documents – from lavish royal decrees to modest marriage contracts.[11] The culture is still alive, though with less degree of commitment!

[10] See for example Amir H. Zekrgoo, "Devotional poetry, exceptional calligraphy, charming manuscript: expression of religious emotion in Ḥassan Kāshī's *Haft-Band*", in *Al-Shajarah*: Journal of the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC) 27, Number 2 (2022): 371-95.
https://journals.iium.edu.my/ shajarah/index.php/shaj/article/view/1502.

[11] For praise literature in marriage contracts see: Amir H. Zekrgoo, *The Sacred Art of Marriage – Persian Marriage Certificates of the Qajar Dynasty*, Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia, 2000, 10-11.

The *Preface* of *Golzār-e Ṣafā* is composed in twelve couplets, a symbolic expression of respect to the twelve Imams. (Figure 3)

*Figure 3: Opening pages of Golzār-e Ṣafā, Tehran Central Library, microfilm no. 3637, fol. 56v–72r [1. Preface = fol. 56v, l .1 – 57r, l. 4]*

What follows is the original text (12 couplets of the Preface shown in *Figure 3*) followed by an English translation of the couplets that are published here for the first time. We have tried to maintain the *vazn va qāfiyah* (melodious tempo and rhyme) of the poetry – an essential feature of the original Persian couplets – so as to convey to the reader the aesthetic value of the text. The manuscript-related terms appear in a different color for easy reference.

| | |
|---|---|
| ای مُذَهَّب زتو عنوان سخن | حمد تو لوحهٔ دیوان سخن |
| زینت دفتر دوران از تو | صفحهٔ صبح زر افشان از تو |
| لاجوردی ورق روز به شب | نقره افشان تو کنی از کوکب |
| نور خورشید و شفق شام و سحر | آوری کاغذ رعنا پیکر |
| نامهٔ شام دگرگون سازی | وز شفق کاغذ گلگون سازی |
| صفحهٔ باغ ز تو ژنگاری | ورق لاله ز تو گلناری |
| تو کنی دفتر گلبن رنگین | تو دهی نسخهٔ گلشن تزیین |
| ارغوانی زتو رخسارهٔ یار | زعفرانی ز تو روی من زار |
| من کیم دلشدهٔ نامه سیاه | زرد رخساره زتکثیر گناه |
| بر من نامه سیه لطف نما | مرحمت کن به حق آل عبا |
| اندر آن روز که از مشق گناه | مجرمان را بشود روی سیاه |
| مکن از لطف جمیلم نومید | صفحهٔ روی مرا ساز سفید |

*The illuminated heading of any discourse is Your*[12] *name,*
*Your praise is every speech's adorning frame.*

*The book of ages gets its decoration from You,*
*The gold-sprinkled page of sunrise is created by You.*

*You decorate the lapis lazuli pages of day at night,*
*Adorned with silver-sprinkled stars, pleasant to the sight.*

*With the rays of sun, at the times of dusk and dawn,*
*You present to the spectators a charming page of lawn.*

[12] The words "You" and "Your" have been capitalized throughout the translated version, because they point to God – the ultimate Beloved.

*You transform the book of night [by using a different shade],*
*And paint the rosy page of dawn, with the sun's shiny blade.*

*The page of garden gets its Verdigris hue from You,*
*The colour of pomegranate-blossom on tulip's folio is from You.*

*To the rose bush booklet, You add a colourful hue,*
*The manuscript of rose garden too is decorated by You.*

*You coloured my beloved's cheeks in a deep pinkish shade,*
*And in pale shade of saffron my distressed face You made.*

*Who am I? A heartbroken soul with a black letter of deeds!*
*An ashamed yellow-faced fellow, sinful in the book of creeds.*

*Be kind to me O Lord, with this black book of shame!*
*Have mercy on me, in the Family of the Prophet's name.*

*In that Day, those with sins in their exercise book,*
*Will appear with black face – a horrible shameful look!*

*Don't dishearten me O Lord, from Your merciful grace,*
*Make white again the page of my shameful face.*[13]

**Expression of Devotion in Technical Manuscript Terminology**

In the following table, each of the twelve couplets of the *Preface* is presented in a separate row. In the right column the couplets are presented individually with the technical terms highlighted in red font; an elaboration of the couplets' metaphoric expression and symbolic significance follows. The left column contains technical terms extracted from the respective couplet, along with their meanings.

[13] Couplets translated into English by Amir H. Zekrgoo.

| Terms / Meaning | Couplets Symbolic use of technical terms |
|---|---|
| مُذَهَّب<br>*(mudhahab)*<br>Illuminated<br><br>لوحهٔ دیوان<br>*(lowḥah-e divān)*<br>Decorated framework of opening page of a book of poetry.<br><br>*Lawḥah* (=tablet) in manuscript terminology is often used for a decorated page of significance which is highly illuminated.<br><br>*Divān/ Diwān:* Book of poetry | Couplet 1:<br><br>*The illuminated heading of any discourse is Your name,*<br>*Your praise is every speech's adorning frame.*<br><br>The practice of beginning every sermon, action, and writing with the name of God is a deeply rooted and widely practiced culture throughout the Muslim world. The preface of almost all Persian manuscripts features a preface comprising praise and thanksgiving to the Almighty. The opening pages of the prefaces are usually the most decorated ones, with illuminations that resemble a beautiful gate that frames the text.<br><br>This tradition has reference to the very first experience of Divine revelation by Prophet Muhammad – the first Qur'anic verse that commanded him to: "*Read, in the name of your Lord"* (Qur'an 96:1). |
| زینت دفتر<br>*(zinat-e daftar)*<br>Book decoration<br><br>صفحهٔ زر افشان<br>*(ṣafḥa-e zar afshān)*<br>Gold sprinkled page | Couplet 2:<br><br>*The book of ages gets its decoration from You,*<br>*The gold-sprinkled page of sunrise is created by You*<br><br>Here, periods of history are compared to pages of beautiful manuscripts. Sunrise (beginning) of each age is equated to a page that is shaped and beautified by the Creator, and sprinkled with the golden rays of sun.<br><br>Gold-sprinkling is a technique used to enrich the surface of papers after dying them. Gold-sprinkled papers are generally used for highly valuable manuscripts such as royal copies. |

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|---|---|
| **لاجوردی**<br>*(lājevardī)*<br>Colour of Lapis lazuli/ Ultramarine<br><br>**ورق**<br>*(varaq)*<br>Page/folio<br><br>**نقره افشان**<br>*(noqreh afshān)*<br>Silver sprinkled | Couplet 3:<br><br>*You decorate the lapis lazuli*<br>*pages of day at night,*<br>*Adorned with silver-sprinkled*<br>*stars, pleasant to the sight.*<br><br>This couplet describes day and night as pages of a manuscript that are painted in deep and light shades of lapis lazuli. The Ultimate Artist adopted silver-sprinkling technique to add stars to the deep-blue evening sky.<br><br>Lapis lazuli is a deep-blue semi-precious stone from which Ultramarine pigment is made. It is a popular colour in Persian art of illumination and miniature painting. Lapis has been used to make artefacts as early as 7570 BCE.<br><br>Silver-sprinkling is a technique used to enrich the surface of papers after dying them. |
| **کاغذ رعنا پیکر**<br>*(kāghaz-e ra'nā peykar)*<br>Page dyed in (multiple) charming colours | Couplet 4:<br><br>*With the rays of sun, at the*<br>*times of dusk and dawn,*<br>*You present to the spectators*<br>*a charming page of lawn.*<br><br>The play of rays of light on the bed of grass at the times of sunrise and sunset is compared to a manuscript page that the Artist-Creator has dyed in multiple colour tones. |

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|---|---|
| نامهٔ شام<br>*(nāmeh-e shām)*<br>Book of night<br><br>کاغذ گلگون<br>*(kāghaz-e golgūn)*<br>Rosy paper/page | Couplet 5:<br><br>*You transform the book of night*<br>*[by using a different shade],*<br>*And paint the rosy page of dawn,*<br>*with the sun's shinny blade.*<br><br>Night and day are compared to pages dyed in various shades. In order to give dawn a dramatic touch, the Artist adds a rosy stroke borrowed from sun's morning rays. |
| صفحهٔ باغ<br>*(ṣafḥe-e bāgh)*<br>Page of garden<br><br>ژنکاری / زنگاری<br>*(zangārī)*<br>Verdigris<br><br>گلناری<br>*(golnārī*[14]*)*<br>Bright red: colour of pomegranate blossom/flower<br><br>ورق لاله<br>*(varaq-e lāleh)*<br>Folio of tulip | Couplet 6:<br><br>*The page of garden gets its*<br>*Verdigris hue from You,*<br>*The colour of pomegranate-blossom*<br>*on tulip's folio is from You.*<br><br>Garden is compared to a page that is painted green with Verdigris pigment. On the green background, tulips are painted with bright red colours resembling pomegranate flowers.<br><br>Verdigris or *zangār* is a substance typically produced by treating copper or copper-alloys with vinegar. The term specifically refers to copper acetate, which is broadly applied to any green or blue corrosion product of copper. Verdigris pigment has destructive effect on paper; it has damaged many artworks, especially in India and Europe. Persian artisans had discovered that adding saffron to the pigment will put an end to its corrosive effect.[15] |

[14] The compound word *golnārī* is a short form of *gol+anār+ī,* which literally means 'similar to pomegranate flower.'

[15] See Mandana Barkeshli, "PH stability of saffron used in verdigris as an inhibitor in Persian miniature paintings," in *Restaurator* 23.

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|---|---|
| **دفتر گلبن**<br>*(daftar-e golbon)*<br>Rose bush booklet<br><br>**نسخهٔ گلشن**<br>*(noskheh-e golshan)*<br>Manuscript of rose garden | Couplet 7:<br><br>*To the rose bush booklet, You add a colourful hue,*<br>*The manuscript of rose garden too is decorated by You*<br><br>*A garden with flowers is portrayed as a rose-bush booklet,* while the colourful rose garden is likened to a highly decorated manuscript. |
| **ارغوانی**<br>*(arghavānī)*<br>Deep-pink /purplish *Arghavānī* comes from *Arghavān* (Judas-tree) that produces beautiful flowers in various shades of pink and purple.<br><br>**زعفرانی**<br>*(za'farānī)*<br>(Saffron-like) is a bright yellow colour produced by soaking saffron in hot water**.** | Couplet 8:<br><br>*You coloured my beloved's cheeks*<br>*in a deep pinkish shade,*<br>*And in pale shade of saffron, my distressed face You made!*<br><br>The hues red (rosy) and yellow (saffron) are symbolically adopted to exhibit the contrast between the condition (wellbeing) of a 'lover' and the subject of love – the 'beloved'. While the former suffers the painful yearning for the beloved, the latter is full of life, enjoying her beauty and charm.<br><br>*Arghavānī* (pink or rosy), in Persian love poetry is often used to describe the beautiful face of the beloved.<br>*Za'farānī* (saffron-like = yellow) on the other hand, represents the colour of the face of lovers who are in constant pain of longing and separation. |

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| **نامه سیاه**<br>*(nāmeh sīyāh)*<br>Black book/letter | Couplet 9:<br><br>*Who am I? A heartbroken soul*<br>*with a black letter of deeds!*<br>*Shameful yellow-faced fellow,*<br>*sinful in the book of creeds.*<br><br>'Black letter' is a metaphor for a transcript of deeds that testifies to one's failure. Having a black letter of deeds in the Day of Judgement, will bring embarrassment to the holder, and turns the colour of his face to yellow – a symbol of shame, pain and distress. |
| **نامه سیه**<br>*(nāmeh sīyah)*<br>Black book/letter | Couplet 10:<br><br>*Be kind to me O Lord,*<br>*with this black book of shame!*<br>*Have mercy on me,*<br>*in the Family of the Prophet's name.*<br><br>Those who fail the test of life, and are presented with their 'black book of shame,' deserve severe punishment. They can only be saved if God extends His mercy to them!<br><br>The poet humbly presents himself as an ashamed sinner; he accepts his failure and expresses regret. He then asks for God's forgiveness by resorting to mediation of the holy Prophet and his esteemed family. |
| **مشق**<br>*(mashq)*<br>Exercise (in calligraphy exercise book) | Couplet 11:<br><br>*In that Day, those with sins in*<br>*their exercise book,*<br>*Will appear with black face –*<br>*a horrible shameful look!* |

| | |
|---|---|
| | Life is compared to an exercise book in which all deeds are registered by angels! Each person will be presented with his/her book in the Day of Judgement. This document of recorded actions will cause the holders pride or embarrassment. Naturally the sinners (the holders of the 'black book of shame') will appear with a darkened remorseful face. |
| صفحهٔ سفید<br>*(ṣafḥe-e sefīd)*<br>White page | Couplet 12:<br><br>*Don't dishearten me O Lord*<br>*from Your merciful grace,*<br>*Make white again the page of my*<br>*shameful face.*<br><br>In the last couplet, the poet begs the Lord for forgiveness, in the hope that his darkened shameful face will be lightened like a clean white page by the transforming touch of God's grace. |

## Conclusion

An outstanding value of Persian poetry, as compared to the poetries in other languages, is that it flows like a stream in and out of books that were compiled in almost all fields of knowledge. This statement is more accurate in the historical books and less applicable to the contemporary literature. Regardless of the subject matter – be it astronomy, psychology, religion, philosophy, or simply instructions for paper dying, paint-mixing and book-making – Persian poems add two distinct flavours to the background text: "religious devotion" and "romantic spirit." Understanding Persian poetry, to a large extent, depends on having some knowledge of symbolic terms and metaphoric expressions in a certain context. A wonderful example is the twelve-couplet preface of the sixteenth century manuscript of *Golzār-e Ṣafā – The Rose Garden of Purity.* There, ʿAlī Ṣayrafī, the

author-cum-poet, creatively employs technical terms used in manuscript production to express his religious conviction in a lyrical language. What follows is a summary of the selected terms and their symbolic connotations.

A rose garden is compared to an illuminated page (*mudhahab*). Praising God Almighty at the beginning of every conversation is compared to a highly decorated opening page of a book of poetry (*lawḥah-e divan*). Each period of history (*dawrān*) is compared to a booklet (*daftar*). The sunrise is compared to a gold sprinkled page (*ṣafḥa-e zar afshān*). Day and night are each folios (*varaq*) in the book of time. The countless stars in the deep blue sky at night is equated to a page that is coloured with Lapis lazuli (*lājevard*) and then silver sprinkled (*noqreh afshān*). The dramatic change of sky colour from dawn to dusk is likened to a manuscript page that is dyed in multiple charming colours (*kāghaz-e ra'nā peykar*). The early morning sky with reddish rays of the sun is exhibited as rose-like paper (*kāghaz-e golgūn*). Garden is presented as a page (*ṣafḥe-e bāgh*) that is painted in green Verdigris shade (*zangārī*). The red tulip (*lāleh*) is compared to a folio (*varaq-e lāleh*) that has the colour of pomegranate blossom/flower (*golnārī*). A garden with flowers is portrayed as a rose-bush booklet (*daftar-e golbon*), while a rose garden is likened to an illuminated manuscript (*noskheh-e golshan*). The rosy face of the beloved is portrayed as the colour of the flower of Judas tree (*arghavānī*), while the pale face of the suffering lover is compared to the colour of dye extracted from saffron (*za'farānī*). The record of one's sinful acts is symbolically presented as black book/letter (*nāmeh sīyāh/sīyah*) in which is registered the persons 'exercise of sins' (*mashq-e gonāh*). Portraying someone's face as a 'white page' (*ṣafḥe-e sefīd*) denotes the person's clean conscience, while a black face/page (*rūy-e siyāh*) symbolizes embarrassment due to wrong conducts.

# *Book Reviews*

**Rached Ghannouchi and Andrew F. March, *On Muslim Democracy: Essays and Dialogues.* Oxford University Press, New York City, 2023. 248 pp. ISBN 9780197666876.**

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The compatibility of Islam and democracy is an old theme. The concept *of Shura* or, consultation, for example, is often invoked by many as one of the finest examples of democratic dialogue on how a leader could be elected after the demise of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). The Messenger of Islam himself is often seen as a democrat. After all, he often made decisions through deliberate consultations.

Then again, how could the Prophet (ﷺ) not have made any decisions in any way or form that is democratic when he led eighty out of a total of eighty-seven military expeditions during his role as the Messenger of Islam. Why then the need to explain time and again that Islam is compatible to democracy? Why can't it be taken as an article of faith for the lack of a better word?

One of the answers might well revolve on "freedom." While Rashid Ghanouchi, the leader of the En-Nahda Party in Tunisia who is now placed under detention, is completely devoid of any physical and other freedom, it is not without any sense of irony that "freedom," is what he is most concerned with among ten other essays that have been collated by Andrew F. March.

Placed as the first essay, Rashid Ghanouchi was adamant that Islam is not against freedom and, in turn, any central tenets of Western civilizations. Just as there is "no compulsion in Islam," the very essence of Islamic jurisprudence or "Shariah," cannot contain any items that are coercive in nature. This is all good and well. Islam permits vox populi to reign supreme. But it is also just as vital to remember that democracy is not strictly the disarticulation of the

interest of the majority. If anything, there must be no tyranny of the minority too.

Elsewhere, Rashid Ghanouchi recalls his meeting with Algerian philosopher of history Malik Ben Nabi in the 1960s. Rashid Ghanouchi ennobled Malik Ben Nabi as the successor to Ibn Khaldun, whom the West often referred to as the Father of Sociology; assuming that the German sociologist Max Weber is not given that title to begin with.

But in his encounter with Malik Ben Nabi, when Rachid Ghanouchi was merely in his early twenties, the latter explained that Malik Ben Nabi was quick to correct him that "Islam was not a civilization." If anything else, "Islam was a revelation." Rachid Ghanouchi has no struggle and dilemma with the statement of Malik Ben Nabi. Rather Rashid Ghanouchi affirmed that precisely because Islam is a revelation the argument that Islam and democracy can co-exist peacefully and harmoniously is all the more compelling. Why?

Rashid Ghanouchi used the example of a family gathered around Iftar during Ramadan. While all the senses of the family members will predispose them to break the fast—to free themselves from the pangs of hunger and thirst—they nevertheless can exercise the necessary self-restraint to manage their vicissitudes of freedom. Islam and democracy can co-exist, in other words, since the closer a person is to God, the more he or she can exercise the measured ability to control all the wild urges of freedom.

On Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood, Rachid Ghanouchi has passing references to them. This was after all a book that was written well before the events of October 7$^{th}$ 2023. Rashid Ghanouchi did not take any attitude that was critical against the two. Rather Rashid Ghanouchi argued that Islamic political movements, being what they are, as long as they understand the concept of freedom, can find their correct expression and organizational rationality. Instead of trying to overthrow the tyrants and what not, they can eke out a political space to allow the regal authorities, Sheikhs and what not to co-exist.

In the light of the war of dogs that had been unleashed against Hamas by Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), with a battered eye

and a nodding approval from the West, it is anyone's wonder if Rashid Ghanouchi may still hold such a benevolent view?

In all, this is a book that is worth a careful reading, if not entirely deserving of a serious and systemic rumination. That being said, the threat facing political Islam is not just internal but geopolitically too. The existential issue facing political Islam has been outstripped by events of October 7th 2023.

The rise of Russia and China or the alliance that they have stitched together in the Treaty of Unlimited Cooperation on February 3rd 2022, has become a key axis against the West not merely the axis of resistance formed by Hamas, Hizbullah and Houthis in the current war in the Middle East and Iran.

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**Ziauddin Sardar, ed. *Emerging Epistemologies: The Changing Fabric of Knowledge in Postnormal Times*. London. IIIT and The Centre for Postnormal Policy and Future Studies, London, 2022. 184 pp. ISBN: 978-1-64205-659-4 (hardback); 978-1-56564-602-5 (paperback); 978-1-56564-012-2 (ebook).**

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Ziauddin Sardar's recently edited book is a collection of articles by several authors on the interesting theme of emerging epistemologies brought about by what he terms "the changing fabric of knowledge in postnormal times." It is this theme that gave the book its catchy title. The book comprises six chapters. The first three chapters were respectively authored by Ziauddin Sardar, Christopher Jones, and Liam Mayo. Colin Tudge and Shamim Miah authored the last two chapters. Mayo and Miah co-authored the fourth chapter.

Preceding the chapters is a lengthy introduction by Sardar its editor, which he titled "Beyond the Epistemologies of Conquest and Desire." And succeeding the chapters is a likewise lengthy Afterword

by Anwar Ibrahim, the tenth and present Prime Minister of Malaysia, who is a public intellectual and a scholar in his own right. The Afterword is titled "The Journey for Epistemological Justice," a title that is pregnant with philosophical meanings, not to mention the range of conceptual issues with which it is loaded. By itself the Afterword is already a significant contribution to the book. But together, the Introduction and the Afterword may be seen as helping to enhance to a greater degree the quality and significance of the book. Undoubtedly, judging by the kind of issues they raise and discuss, the two articles are the two most attractive parts of the book.

Apparently driven by an intellectual desire to convey to the whole world the important message that humanity is now living in "postnormal times," and yet it is still stubbornly clinging to the colonial epistemology, Sardar aptly titled his Introduction "Beyond the Epistemologies of Conquest and Desire." It is a title that is loaded with messages about the past, at least in the realm of knowledge, beyond which the human mind should now attempt to focus its attention on the understanding of the emerging present. The modern West, the dominant world civilisation in the last two centuries, especially when it colonised the greater part of the world, is known to cultivate variants of epistemology that certainly fitted what Sardar labels the "conquest and desire" epistemology. Interestingly, the label has two connotations, one political and the other psychological. In the political sense, the colonial West needed to create its "conquest and desire" epistemology to academically justify its desire to conquer and perpetuate its dominance over the rest of the world in all domains of civilisation. The dominance is physical in nature – mainly military, economic, and technological – which was made possible by their subjugation and control of the forces of nature. Sardar is right in reminding us of the sins of capitalism, the major one being "destruction of the environment," a theme of study and research that is becoming increasingly popular in recent decades. Capitalism breeds on the unlimited reservoir of human physical desires. Conquest of nature empowered by capitalism that bankrolls the scientific and technological enterprise needed for the conquest makes possible the fulfilment of those physical desires. Modern epistemologies of science and technology could only be fully

understood if they were treated in this political or civilisational context. These epistemologies still hold sway until today, although alternatives are emerging as pointed out by Sardar.

The political dimension of the "conquest and desire" epistemology necessarily raises the issue of its psychological dimension. After all, man's physical desires are rooted in his soul or inner self. The problematic issue here is, however, while in many other civilisations the domination of external nature is sought to be moderated by man's domination of his inner animal nature for the sake of harmony between man and nature, in the modern West the freedom of human physical desires is left unrestrained thereby resulting in excessive demands on nature, hence committing injustice against it. From the philosophical and religious perspectives, full freedom is not for the lower self to enjoy since the latter is limited by nature. Rather, it is spiritual freedom that is absolute in nature, but this metaphysical principle, as observed in many civilisations, including that of Islam, has proved to be consequential on human treatments of the natural world. These issues are not without epistemological implications. The mainstream epistemology in modern and contemporary psychology, which rationalises unlimited freedom of physical but not of spiritual desires, is still a major source of justification for the "conquest and desire" epistemology as politically understood. I have taken the liberty to expand my response to Sardar's interesting notion of conquest and desire epistemology for two reasons. First, though he touches on almost all the important aspects of "conquest and desire" epistemologies, he did not include a discussion of their underlying psychological epistemology in the way I have done, which is necessary for a deeper understanding of the problems confronting the contemporary human civilisation. Second, the reductionistic psychological epistemology in question would serve as a good reminder of the prevalence of epistemological injustice in the contemporary realm of knowledge, and hence the need to formulate an intellectual response in support of Anwar Ibrahim's quest for epistemological justice.

The idea of epistemological injustice is amply demonstrated in all the articles preceding the Anwar's Afterword. In writing the Afterword Anwar took full advantage of the overview of the modern

and contemporary epistemological discourse that the other articles together offered him. He argues that the struggle against dominant epistemologies is none other than a quest for epistemological justice. His struggle in question takes the form of "epistemological reform," which he argues, "is the new banner we have to rally behind" (p. 168). We may observe an interesting parallel here. Anwar is well-known for his lifelong political struggle for social justice. His political struggle was to lead him to its *reformasi* phase playing the fateful role as an opposition leader that, against all odds, eventually brought him into power. Now, he is writing about his past "epistemological" struggle that leads him to where he is presently, arguing for the need of "epistemological reform" in the pursuit of epistemological justice. Anwar devoted several pages of his Afterword to highlighting important episodes in his life that shaped his epistemological path. In a way, Anwar was kind enough to share with readers these important highlights in what may be termed his "intellectual autobiography."

Viewed as a whole, this is a welcome book. Let me give a few reasons why I think it is an important book. First, simply by virtue of the special importance of epistemology in our time. A critical and more fruitful discourse on epistemology is urgently needed now, and this book indeed provides such a discourse. Second, the book discusses the issue of modern history of knowledge that is dominated by epistemologies of "conquest and desire," which paradoxically generated both knowledge and anti-knowledge; this is also the history that witnessed a changing landscape of knowledge production that was not previously seen in modern times. Third, the book provides a good discussion of the present state of knowledge as summarised in Sardar's description of "emergent knowledge," which he identifies as having three components, namely [1] objective knowledge; [2] toxic knowledge (useless and harmful knowledge taught by tradition); and [3] all varieties of ignorance that masquerade as knowledge. Sardar defines toxic knowledge as "a complex, evolving entity that combines true and toxic knowledge that is shrouded by the smog of ignorance." And fourth, the book discusses the important topic of the implications of Artificial Intelligence (AI) for our human future.

The book is also significant by virtue of the aims that it seeks to realise. I see its aims as follows: [1] to explore the changing nature of knowledge production; [2] to explore how emerging epistemologies are transforming our perceptions of the present and the future; and [3] to discuss their overall implications for society. In the light of the welcoming features of the book's contents contributed by authors who are all seen to be familiar with one or more aspects of modern and contemporary epistemological thought, and the book's stated aims, I would encourage Muslims to read, debate, and critique it. There are many issues that need to be debated. The most outstanding issues raised by this book are two: [1] how can we navigate our way out of the crisis generated by the epistemologies of "conquest and desire" that was discussed at length by Sardar? Sardar helped us to better understand the issue, but he did not provide an answer or answers to the crisis; and [2] what is exactly meant by "epistemological justice" and "epistemological reform" that, as argued by Anwar, should now be "the new banner we have to rally behind"? These are, no doubt, interesting notions but also complex issues, but their theoretical meanings and their practical realisations need to be articulated by many intelligent minds before we are to see new promising lights of epistemological justice.

The editor and contributors of the book are to be congratulated for this fine publication!

## *Keynote Events and Speeches*

# A FEAST OF CIVILIZATIONS: THE LIFE AND MIND OF TOSHIHKKO IZUTSU[1]

*Anwar Ibrahim*[2]

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

It is with profound gratitude and a deep sense of honour that I am here today at Keio University, a beacon of knowledge and innovation in Japan. Today, we celebrate the life and contributions of an extraordinary scholar whose work has transcended the boundaries of culture and intellect and left an indelible mark on the global academic, intellectual and philosophical landscape.

In fact, Toshihiko Izutsu's contributions to the world of the intellect, theology and philosophy have been so immense, expansive and multifarious that it is a travesty to attempt to single out his most significant contributions. That's because his works are so seamlessly interconnected that it's almost impossible to segregate or compartmentalise them without appearing to have taken an arbitrary position.

Nevertheless, with that caveat lodged, there has to be a point of beginning. Allow me to begin with Izutsu's remarkable achievement of translating the Quran into Japanese. This is a feat of unparalleled distinction and a testament to his profound linguistic skills, the depth of his erudition and intellect, and without a doubt, the tenacity of his commitment.

This task would have proved incredibly daunting due to the Quran's complex linguistic, theological, philosophical, spiritual, and

[1] An oration delivered by the Honourable Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim Prime Minister of Malaysia at Keio University, Japan on 24 May 2024.

[2] Anwar Ibrahim is a veteran politician and public intellectual in Asia and a world leading advocate of inter-civilizational dialogue.

mystical dimensions. For Muslims, the Quran is not merely a text but a divine revelation, and the highest form of revelation at that. It contains layers of meaning that are deeply rooted in the historical and cultural milieu of seventh-century Arabia, and yet not constrained by limitations of time or place. In the light of this, Izutsu's approach to translation involved more than converting Arabic words into Japanese. Here, it would be useful to recall the late German philosopher and culture critic, Walter Benjamin, and his legendary observation on translation:

> "True translation is transparent, it does not obscure the original, does not stand in its light, but rather allows pure language, as if strengthened by its own medium, to shine even more fully on the original."

I believe that it is in this vein that Izutsu was able to capture the essence and semantic nuances of the original text, leaning on an intimate understanding of both the Arabic language, the Islamic tradition as well as other Semitic and cognate linguistic cousins. The task enjoined nothing less than profound empathy and adulation for the original, so as to ensure fidelity not only to the letter but also the spirit of the Quran.

By translating the Quran into Japanese, Izutsu made the sacred text accessible to Japanese-speaking readers, and in the process, foster greater cross-cultural understanding. This work exemplifies his commitment to bridging cultural and linguistic divides, enabling a deeper appreciation of Islamic thought within the Japanese context. His efforts have significantly contributed to the field of Islamic studies, showcasing the universal relevance and unfathomable depth of the Quran.

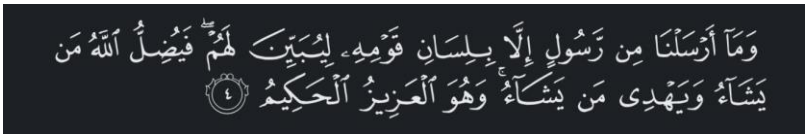
In *God and Man in the Quran*, Izutsu attempts an eclectic exploration of the semantic structure of the Quranic weltanschauung. Izutsu's main argument centres on the premise that the Quran creates a weltanschauung that is *sui generis* through the medium of language, yielding an intrinsic fabric of meaning with semantic structures that could be used to explicate man's relationship with God. For Izutsu, failure to perceive and comprehend the semantic structures would render it impossible to grasp the Islamic *weltanschauung*.

Forging this Islamic world view, this weltanschauung, is an undertaking that ought to be seen also in the light of his other Quranic studies, namely *The Ethical Religious Concepts in the Quran.* Izutsu maintains that through the Quran, God enjoins man to act in an ethical way infused within the Islamic moral code, articulated coterminously with explicit devotion to his religious duties. In other words, ethics, morality, and religion are inseparable.

Set against the tribal norms, law, and culture of seventh-century Arabia, Islam therefore came as a religion of revolutionary magnitude, introducing the most acute, dire and sweeping religious reforms. For example, in the domain of social security, Islam introduced the *zakat* policy which constitutes a system of codified almsgiving, seen as the precursor to universal government welfare. Likewise, changes were made to the family structure, including on women's rights, to a society that was largely male-dominated and the women treated as chattels. Even more drastic would be the denunciation of aristocratic privileges in favour of a formula that leans towards the creation of a more egalitarian society.

Emblematic of Izutsu's monumental and significant Quranic studies is his mastery of semantic analysis, with an exposition of the structure and usage of words, through an approach that is both deep and innovative. Being a polyglot par excellence fortified him with the wherewithal to study various religious texts in their original forms, simultaneously.

In Izutsu's reckoning, the Quran speaks to us in linguistic binaries which are diagonally opposed and underscore the relationship between God and man, such as, for example, the binary nexus between "to guide" (*hadāya*) and "to lead astray" (*dalala*). Under the divine imperative, these words, and many other binary opposites, define the existential conditions under which God's creations subsist or exist. And if I might humbly add to Izutsu's exposition, it bears pointing out that language or *lisān* – literally the tongue – in the Quranic semantic paradigm is key to the institution of prophecy, as made clear in Verse 4 of Sūrah Ibrāhīm:


وَمَآ أَرۡسَلۡنَا مِن رَّسُولٍ إِلَّا بِلِسَانِ قَوۡمِهِۦ لِيُبَيِّنَ لَهُمۡۖ فَيُضِلُّ ٱللَّهُ مَن
يَشَآءُ وَيَهۡدِي مَن يَشَآءُۚ وَهُوَ ٱلۡعَزِيزُ ٱلۡحَكِيمُ ٤

> "We have not sent a messenger except in the language of his people to clarify the message for them. Then Allah leaves whoever He wills to stray and guides whoever He wills. And He is the Almighty, All-Wise."
>
> "…to stray and guides whoever" that is the classic binary of opposites as mentioned earlier, manifesting a semantic schematic so brilliantly expounded by Izutsu.

This leads to the question of free will and choice in the ethical and moral dimensions of man's actions for the aforementioned passage makes it clear that to be guided or to be astray is entirely up to God's will. Izutsu delves into this conundrum by setting it against the backdrop of the balance and tension between belief (*imān*) and unbelief (*kufur*). Going beyond the confines of legality and ethics, Izutsu posits a broader cosmic balance that postulates that free will remains subservient to the Divine will and that this subservience is a manifestation of man's alignment with his Creator.

Izutsu's contributions extend far beyond Islamic studies. His work in comparative philosophy, drawing connections between Islamic thought and other global traditions, has highlighted the universal human quest for meaning and understanding. By engaging with diverse philosophical and religious perspectives, Izutsu has shown us that the study of one culture or tradition can illuminate the broader human experience, revealing the common threads that bind us all.

Central to Izutsu's approach is his doctrine of empathy in the study of religions. By advocating for an empathetic perspective and urging scholars to understand religious texts from within their own conceptual frameworks, Izutsu paved the way for a more nuanced and respectful approach to cross-cultural dialogue.

Relating this in practical terms to the world today, without empathy, prejudice and distrust among followers of different faiths fester and, if unchecked, leads on to hostility and phobias. Coupled

with other factors such as politics and ethnocentrism, this lack of empathy gives rise, for example, to Islamophobia.

This empathetic lens is particularly relevant in multicultural societies like Malaysia, where diverse religious and cultural communities coexist. The empathetic approach calls not just for tolerance but understanding and compassion, so crucial for the fostering of a harmonious and peaceful society. Empathy demands that we listen, learn and understand another religion from the standpoint of those who profess that faith.

Unfortunately, we are confronted with insidious challenges such as religious scholars and opportunistic politicians who sow the seeds of suspicion and discord. The ramifications can be seen in the emergence of elitist groups that reject religion all together, waving the banner of secularism instead.

In the United States and Europe, this is manifested in the morbid and insidious actions against people who overtly practice their religion, particularly Muslims, denying them their right to observe the strictures as enjoined by their religion. Politicians seize on these opportunities by condoning the discrimination and atrocities committed against minorities in their countries.

I believe in Japan while there is greater empathy in the approach towards the study of Buddhism and Christianity, as demonstrated by the level and frequency of dialogues, it seems that it is somewhat lacking in the case of the approach towards Islam. Which is why I commend this university and express my profound appreciation for inviting me to give this oration. In my humble view, if we are to stay true to the precepts and noble examples of Izutsu, there should be greater dialogue as well between Muslims on the one hand and Buddhists and Christians on the other.

Malaysia just hosted the inaugural international conference of religious leaders early this month[3] where religious and intellectual figures from around the world participated, to forge greater religious understanding and cross-cultural dialogues.

[3] The International Conference of Religious Leaders co-organised by the Mecca-based World Muslim League and JAKIM (Department of Islamic Development Malaysia), the Prime Minister's Departmen was held in Kuala Lumpur on 7-8 May 2024.

True to the pursuit as advocated by Izutsu, empathy is self-evident in Islam as enjoined in the concept of *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (mercy to all creations) and the message of peace. As ordained in the Quran and the Sunnah, it is incumbent on Muslims to be empathetic towards other religions so as to promote and preserve societal harmony. But empathy needs to be reciprocal.

Just as it is so crucial for Muslims to understand and have compassion for other religions, likewise it is imperative that Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, and others have that same empathy for Islam. Hence, it is incumbent on religious leaders across the broad spectrum of faiths to preach the message of empathy if the fruits of such an approach are to be reaped in practical terms. Translating ideas into realities in a world fraught with challenges will be a real testament to the teachings of Izutsu.

In a world where populism and right wing ethnic or religious extremism prevail, the calls for empathy may not be the easiest and most convenient approach particularly for politicians who want to get reelected. We are seeing this across the world particularly in Europe and the United States, which is why the imperative for cross-cultural dialogue is more pressing than ever.

In this regard, Izutsu's *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts*, exemplifies such a pursuit and commitment. By examining the metaphysical and mystical thought systems of Sufism and Taoism, Izutsu discovered shared features and patterns despite their lack of historical connection. This work underscores the potential for trans-historical dialogue, opening new doors in the study of comparative philosophy and mysticism.

In the study of comparative religion, detractors would tend to look for points of divergence while advocates would seek points of commonality. The latter approach can only be done with empathy. In his *Sufism and Taoism*, Izutsu calls it "sympathetic intention." Izutsu's exploration of the epistemological paradigm and ontological structures in the works of Ibn 'Arabi and the Taoist thinkers, Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu revealed profound similarities. Both Sufism and Taoism are based on concepts such as the Absolute Man and the Perfect Man, showing that different cultures can arrive at profound truths at the metaphysical levels through their unique journeys. This comparative analysis highlights the universal aspects of human

spirituality and the shared quest for understanding the ultimate reality.

Now, what really is 'reality'? At this juncture, it would be instructive to quote from the great book itself:

> "According to Ibn 'Arabi, however, that kind of 'reality' is not reality in the true sense of the word. In other terms, such a thing is not Being (wujud) as it really is. Living as we do in this phenomenal world, *Being in its metaphysical reality is no less imperceptible to us than phenomenal things are in their phenomenal reality to a man who is asleep and dreaming of them."*

As for concept of the Perfect Man, Izutsu says:

> "All men are naturally endowed with the same ontological 'comprehensiveness' but not all men are equally conscious of the 'comprehensiveness' in themselves. They are variously conscious of it, ranging from the highest degree of lucidity which comes very close to that of the Divine Consciousness of the Names and Attributes, down to the lowest which is practically the same as complete opaqueness. *And only at the highest degree of lucidity can the human mind play the role of a 'polished mirror'. Only at the highest degree of lucidity can Man be the Perfect Man.* This is the gist of the whole problem."

As we pay tribute to Toshihiko Izutsu, let us also reflect on the urgent need for civilizational dialogue in our increasingly fragmented world. The rise of obscurantism, bigotry, and intolerance threatens to divide societies and undermine global peace. By promoting empathy, understanding, and respect, we can counter the forces of division and build bridges across cultures, religions, and nations.

By fostering a more informed and compassionate global community that looks beyond immediate differences to recognise our shared humanity, we can create a world where cooperation and mutual respect prevail. This dialogue is not about erasing our unique identities but about celebrating them as part of a rich, diverse, and interconnected human experience.

Keio University's rich history of promoting innovative and impactful scholarship provides the perfect backdrop for celebrating and carrying forward Izutsu's legacy. By nurturing scholars who push the boundaries of knowledge and contribute to the betterment of society, Keio University continues to honour the vision of its founder and the ideals that inspired Izutsu's ground-breaking work.

As we consider the current global landscape, Izutsu's emphasis on empathy and dialogue becomes even more crucial. In a world fraught with division and misunderstanding, Izutsu's approach offers not only a way to bridge cultural gaps but also provides the antidote for society to ameliorate the unbridled pursuit of material gain and wealth. In a world lacking in compassion and humanity, bereft of focus on values, and where intellectual pursuit is the exception rather than the rule, society becomes deprived of a moral compass and the upshot is disillusionment, cynicism, scepticism, and angst.

As we honour Toshihiko Izutsu's life and contributions, let us be inspired by his unwavering commitment to intellectual rigour, crosscultural understanding, the power of language and empathy and most significantly perhaps the primacy of ethics and morality. Let us carry forward his legacy by seeking knowledge that unites us, engaging in meaningful dialogue across boundaries, and working tirelessly to build a world where understanding and empathy triumph over division and intolerance. Izutsu's life and mind were indeed a feast of civilizations, an example of how the harmonious blending of diverse intellectual traditions can enrich our understanding of ourselves and each other.

As we celebrate his legacy and continue to explore the contributions of scholars like him, let us remember that pursuing knowledge is not an end but a means to build a more just, compassionate, and united world. Let us honour Izutsu's memory by embracing his spirit of empathy, by seeking to understand before seeking to be understood, and by striving to create a future where the light of wisdom and compassion dispels the darkness of ignorance and hatred.

Thank you.

# SILK ROAD, ISLAM, AND CONFUCIANISM[1]

*Osman Bakar*[2]

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me first express my sincere appreciation to Mr. Samuel Lee and his Malaysian Friends of the Silk Road Club for the kind invitation extended to me to deliver the keynote speech at the Silk Road and Asian Civilisation Forum 2024 this afternoon. The organisers would like me to speak on the topic "Silk Road, Islam, and Confucianism." As a student of history and civilisations, I consider this invitation as indeed a great honour for me that I will never forget. Thank you!

My understanding is that today's Forum is mainly concerned with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) launched in 2013 by President Xi Jinping of China. In other words, with the New Silk Road. Before giving my views on a few things about the New Silk Road, let us revisit the Old Silk Road, which I believe can provide useful lessons to the prime mover of the New Silk Road, namely China, and members of the BRI community.

The history of the Silk Road, or Silk Routes as some historians prefer to call it, is one of the most impactful periods in human history spanning nearly sixteen centuries, from the second century BCE until the fifteenth century CE. It was the opening of trade to the outside world by the Han dynasty in China in 130 BCE that opened the official curtain of the Silk Road history. This Silk Road history may

[1] This keynote speech was delivered at "The Silk Road and Asian Civilisation Forum 2024" at the Shangri-La Hotel, Kuala Lumpur on 28th March 2024. The Forum's guests included Yang Amat Berhormat Dato' Sri Haji Fadillah bin Haji Yusof, Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia; His Excellency Liu Jianchao, Minister of the International Development, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC); His Excellency Ouyang Yujing, Ambassador of China to Malaysia; and Mr Samuel Lee, Chairman of Malaysia Friends of Silk Road Club

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be regarded as the history of the encounters of the greatest human civilisations before modern times. It is a period of history that witnessed the birth of two great religions and civilisations of the world, namely Christianity and Islam. In the context of our present discussion, it is not the history of the individual religions and civilisations sharing the approximately 6,437 kilometre or 4,000 milelong Silk Road that mainly interests us. Rather, it is the inter-civilisational encounters that went into the shaping of the Silk Road history in question.

Only about 100 years after the opening of the Silk Road an Abrahamic prophet, Jesus Christ, was born in West Asia which Europe and America call the Middle East. Christianity, the religion founded on the teachings of Christ, was identified with a large civilisation, territorially speaking, and a powerful one as well, especially as it existed in the name of the Byzantine Roman Empire, which adopted Christianity as its official religion. Thanks to geographical proximity and even some territorial overlapping between the Byzantine Empire and West Asia, the material and cultural resources of the former, particularly at the heights of its prosperity, greatly impacted the fortunes of the Silk Road. The Silk Road trade flourished as a result.

In 610 CE there appeared another Abrahamic prophet, this time again in West Asia or more precisely the city of Mecca, Arabia. This is Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, whom the Quran claims to be the last in the long line of prophets in human history. The date 610 CE is of symbolic significance, not least from the point of view of the Silk Road history. The date is right in the middle of this historical period that we are presently viewing. Eight centuries of the Silk Road history had passed when Islam appeared on the world scene, and in another eight centuries that followed, Islam was a major civilisational partner in the shaping of the destiny of the Silk Road.

Middleness, the Quranic *wasatiyyah*, appeared to be the trademark of Islam and its new civilisation. Not only, temporally speaking, was Islam in the middle of the Silk Road period of history, but spatially or geographically speaking as well, the lands of Islam came to occupy a middle position between the Far East, of which China is the major component, and the West. But more importantly is

Islam's idea of middleness or the middle path that is understood in moral, cultural, and civilisational terms. Islam refers to itself as the middle community or *ummatan wasatan* in Quranic terminology. When the Quran was yet to be completely revealed it already referred to the Muhammadan community as the middle community. It was in the light of these different senses of middleness that Islam played its role in global affairs as the civilisational bridge between the East and the West. This role was a kind of destiny for Islamic civilisation.

It is well-known that Islam played an important historical role as a civilisational bridge between China and Europe. This is especially true in the field of knowledge and the Silk Road played an instrumental role in the transmission of knowledge from China to Europe via Islam. As a young religion and civilisation with a plentiful spiritual and intellectual energy to spend, Islam brought freshness, innovations, and renewals to many different aspects of what I call the "Silk Road civilisation." A case in point was the renewal or the creation of new centres of knowledge and learning along the Silk routes. A good example was the ancient city of Merv (Marwu in Arabic and Persian), which is situated in present-day Turkmenistan.

Merv was a cosmopolitan city. In pre-Islamic times it was a major centre of Buddhist learning as well as an important Nestorian Christian centre of learning. Given the long Iranian cultural influence in this ancient city, there was also the significant presence of Zoroastrianism. Under Islam the city was rebuilt, first by the Umayyad Caliph in the ninth century CE and later by the Abbasid Caliph in the twelfth century CE. But it was under the Abbasids that Merv became transformed into one of the most advanced centres of Islamic science and culture in the world while tolerating and even patronising cosmopolitanism. Pre-Islamic cosmopolitanism in Merv gave way to an Islamic cosmopolitanism that was new in spirit and form. Islamic cosmopolitanism of the era helped the flourishing of the Silk Road and the various civilisational activities that went with it, especially cross-cultural knowledge activities, trade, and other sectors of economic life. There is an important lesson that the New Silk Road may learn from this and other similar episodes in Silk Road history. This important lesson is that relevant knowledge is

essential to civilisational renewal and so is enlightened cosmopolitanism.

The idea of Islam learning from the Chinese civilisation entered the Muslim consciousness very early in its history. The Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) told his followers to seek knowledge even to China. His words, as is usually the case, seemed to have an almost immediate impact on his followers. Not long after the Prophet's death, the fist Muslim diplomatic-cum-trade delegation arrived in China. They were warmly welcomed by officials of the Tang dynasty. They were permitted to stay in China if they wished. Some of them, in fact, stayed and married with the locals. Unfortunately, we know very little about the early encounters between Islam and the Chinese civilisation, particularly between Islam and Confucianism, which is the main shaper of traditional Chinese thought and civilisation. But we do know much more about their latter encounters from the late Ming period onwards.

We also know something about what Islam as a young civilisation had learned from the much older Chinese civilisation. In the first several centuries of its existence, Islam learned from China scientific knowledge in several fields, particularly astronomy and alchemy. In the field of technology, Islam learned the arts of paper and gunpowder-making. Islam succeeded in further developing and advancing the sciences of alchemy and astronomy and the technology of paper and gunpowder-making that it had inherited from China without ever thinking of patenting them. Significantly and fortunately for the world, Islam shared with Europe the knowledge that it had improved, and to a certain extent with China as well, thereby a kind of returning the latter's civilisational favours it had received in earlier centuries. Islam's sharing of scientific knowledge with both Europe and China is a pertinent illustration of its classical role as the civilisational bridge between the Far East and the West.

As far as Southeast Asia is concerned, it was the maritime Silk Road that had a greater impact on its region. To all appearances, it was the voyages of Zheng He in the early fifteenth century that greatly boosted the significance of the Maritime Silk Road. Zheng He is a well-known historical figure in both China and Southeast Asia, especially in the Malay-speaking world. Contemporary China and

contemporary Muslims in the Malay-speaking countries may not have the same appreciation of Zheng He, but there is convergence of views on many things about Zheng He. The important thing for us all today, in China and in Southeast Asia, is that Zheng He may serve as an important cultural bridge between the two sides, especially for our times.

Let me now share my views on the civilisational dimension of the New Silk Road, the BRI. BRI is now more than a decade old. Its physical infrastructure is massive and costly. It is facing many challenges. In my view, BRI needs a cultural or civilisational dimension to match its huge infrastructure. Thus, a corresponding new civilisational initiative is called for. To be sure, China has made some interesting and significant moves in the cultural direction, particularly in initiating dialogues. But these moves appear to lack focus in content and a clear sense of direction. In my view, central to the new civilisational initiative would be an ongoing inter-civilisational dialogue in general and between Islam and Confucianism in particular given their respective dominant influence in China and many members of the BRI community. This inter-civilisational dialogue can move forward from where the UN sponsored Alliance of Civilisations had left off. A point to note is that the large demographic presence of ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia would mean that the scholars of Confucianism participating in the dialogue could come from both China and Southeast Asia.

I wish to conclude my speech with the following remarks. There are two good reasons why Muslims, particularly the scholars of Islam, need to be engaged with the New Silk Road discourse. One is historical, and the other is philosophical. As for the historical reason, the Old Silk Road is the main source of inspiration of the New Silk Road. But then the history of Islam and its civilisation was closely intertwined with the Old Silk Road history. Contemporary Islam needs to revisit that history, especially its civilisational aspect. For them, revisiting the Old Silk Road would be revisiting an important part of their own history.

As for the philosophical reason, there is a need for an ongoing civilisational dialogue between Islam and Confucianism pertaining to the New Silk Road initiative. The dialogue should focus on the

civilisational partnership between Islam and Confucianism in the light of the United Nations Agenda on the Alliance of Civilisations, on shared values between Islamic and Chinese civilisations, and on how the New Silk Road would help contribute to the realisation of a new world order based on a common global ethic.

Close to the heart of the present Malaysian Prime Minister, YAB Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim, is the idea of the Asian Renaissance and the idea of the dialogical community. The well-known Chinese scholar of Confucianism, Dr. Tu Weiming reminded us that the idea of the dialogical community was first introduced by Confucious more than 2,500 years ago. But good for the world, the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) reaffirmed the universal value of dialogue when he turned his city of Medina into a dialogical community more than fourteen centuries ago. I believe we need to include both Dato' Seri Anwar's idea of the Asian Renaissance and the idea of the dialogical community as emphasised by Confucius and the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) in our discourse on the New Silk Road.

Thank you!

## *Acknowledgement*

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# TRANSLITERATION TABLE

## CONSONANTS

Ar=Arabic, Pr=Persian, OT=Ottoman Turkish, Ur=Urdu

| | Ar | Pr | OT | UR | | Ar | Pr | OT | UR | | Ar | Pr | OT | UR |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ء | ʾ | ʾ | ʾ | ʾ | ز | z | z | z | z | گ | – | g | g | g |
| ب | b | b | b | b | ڑ | – | – | – | ṛ | ل | l | l | l | l |
| پ | – | p | p | p | ژ | – | zh | j | zh | م | m | m | m | m |
| ت | t | t | t | t | س | s | s | s | s | ن | n | n | n | n |
| ٹ | – | – | – | ṭ | ش | sh | sh | ş | sh | ہ | h | h | h[1] | h[1] |
| ث | th | th | th | th | ص | ṣ | ṣ | ṣ | ṣ | و | w | v/u | v | v/u |
| ج | j | j | c | j | ض | ḍ | ẓ | ż | ż | ی | y | y | y | y |
| چ | – | ch | çh | ch | ط | ṭ | ṭ | ṭ | ṭ | ۃ | -ah | | | -a[2] |
| ح | ḥ | ḥ | ḥ | ḥ | ظ | ẓ | ẓ | ẓ | ẓ | ال | al[3] | | | |
| خ | kh | kh | kh | kh | ع | ʿ | ʿ | ʿ | ʿ | | | | | |
| د | d | d | d | d | غ | gh | gh | ğ | gh | | | | | |
| ڈ | – | – | – | d | ف | f | f | f | f | | | | | |
| ذ | dh | dh | dh | dh | ق | q | q | k | q | | | | | |
| ر | r | r | r | r | ك | k | k/g | k/ñ | k | | | | | |

[1] – when not final
[2] – at in construct state
[3] – (article) al - or 1-

## VOWELS

| | | Arabic and Persian | Urdu | Ottoman Turkish |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Long | ا | ā | ā | ā |
| | آ | Ā | Ā | – |
| | و | ū | ū | ū |
| | ي | ī | ī | ī |
| Doubled | ي | iyy (final form ī) | iy (final form ī) | iyy (final form ī) |
| | و | uww (final form ū)<br>uvv (for Persian) | uv | uvv |
| Diphthongs | و | au or aw | au | ev |
| | ى | ai or ay | ay | ey |
| Short | ـَ | a | a | a or e |
| | ـُ | u | u | u or ü<br>o or ö |
| | ـِ | i | i | i |

## URDU ASPIRATED SOUNDS

For aspirated sounds not used in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish add h after the letter and underline both the letters e.g. جھ jh گھ gh

For Ottoman Turkish, modern Turkish orthography may be used.

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