

Reflection of Knowledge Dissemination in Malay-Islamic World: A Review

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Abstract

This article reviewed reflection of knowledge dissemination on Islamic historiography and how it influenced Islamic thought among the local Malay community. The analysis yielded four themes namely reflection on the means of dissemination of knowledge, Reflection on dissemination of knowledge in Science, Mathematics and Chemistry in the Malay World. This study provides a guide for historians and practitioners in the Malay-Islamic realms. Future research should focus on the development of reflection on knowledge dissemination by other ethnic groups to provide a rich insight into various discourses on reflection.

Keywords: Islamic Historiography, Islamic History, Malay World, knowledge dissemination, reflection

1. Introduction

The history of Islam began to be studied by the Malays as far back as the arrival of Islam in the Malay world through stories that appear in al-Quran in the 7th century AD. This is because about two-thirds of the content of the Qur'an contain other historical jurisprudence and guidelines which serve as a guide in realms like science, medicine, mathematics and chemistry. The content varies from stories of heroism of Islamic warriors, the war, governing legislations, prophet hood of Muhammad (s.a.w) and his migration which in turn may influence the thinking of the Malay community. One could write some reflections basing on Islamic historiography works and their influence in Malay civilization in order to ascertain their meanings and gist. Hence, few reflections can be found on the means of dissemination of knowledge in the Malay World, dissemination of knowledge in Science, Mathematics and Chemistry.

2. Reflection on the Means of Dissemination of Knowledge in the Malay World

Reflection on knowledge dissemination by the missionaries who have brought Islam to the Malay world enables readers to determine the effects of Islamic values as to generate universal principles. Writers of Islamic historiography originated from Arab, India and China consistently demonstrate the importance of universal principles in their narrative. According to Andrei Artemenko (2013) in his work Inclusion of Islamic Factor into Topology of modern Western Identity, and Jones, M. (2010), "Limits to" thinking space relationally, they stated that knowledge disseminated to any society if it is full of meaning.

"...Disclosure of social scope, functional purpose of a human as member of society, hint at possibility of social laws similar to physical ones all these create "ideology of subject", which cannot be separated from ideology of masses (party, class, religious community or nation). Society acquires the meaning of "integral" and is presented as incarnation of Reason, which requires integration of individual into social processes of modern epoch, creates concept about totality of social relations..." (p. 46).

This is because universal principles and values are core business for the development of spirit and mind for survival of the Malays. Hanipah Hussin (2010), however, argues that during an inception of the guiding principles, the inclusion of reflection on matters like *integrity, responsibility, compassion and forgiveness* is vague. According to Majid Hajibee, (2013) in his article on a concrete approach to the formation of Islamic historiography,

"...Historiography is an abstract and subjective issue. A historian contemplates how and for what purpose chooses a historical narrative and writes it according to the targets..." and "...every abstract matter based

on special concrete and objective conditions. In other words, there is direct relation between social, political and economic conditions of society which ideas formed in it... ” (p. 137)

Reviews of Social and political developments on Islamic lands, show how significant the interaction between Nations and the needs of the community. In short, the role of historical context cannot be ignored.

From this perspective, perhaps the use of concrete approach helps to identify and determine the typology of Islamic historiography. The dissemination of knowledge can be traced back to the rise of Malacca, a well-known center of Islamic expansion in the mid-15th century and other trading ports like Aceh and Riau. The scholars came to spread Islam in Malacca and brought along a number of works on religion, history and moral values which were translated to Malay in order to facilitate understanding for teaching and reflecting purposes among the Malays. In this approach, writing and attitude to history discuss on social context and process of developments. Concepts are relative and evolving.

In Aceh, the dissemination of knowledge was possible because the ruler, Sultan Iskandar Muda, encouraged a saga reading as the main activity for the Malay community in the 17th century. The works of the scholars of Islam have left little influence in the religious studies and history (Hamid, p. 35). In short, the goals of the scholars and traders were to spread Islam and also read stories while waiting for the change of monsoons before leaving for other destinations.

In the 18th century and the 19th, the tradition of reading historical work was brought to Riau. The effect of this tradition has formed a cluster with various knowledge as expressed by Arba'iyah Mohd Noor (2011) based on De Eredia Godingo (1997) works,

...The majority of the Malay are cheerful, roguish, and very wanton; ingenious and intelligent, but negligent and careless about studies and arts; they spend their time amusing themselves, and so, as a rule, few literature, mathematicians, or astrologers are to be found amongst them... , p. 35.

These insights are also supported by Muller (1884),

The Malays are the most cunning, the most ingenious and the politest people of the whole East...Their language, Bahasa Malayu...the Malays are accustomed to study it, trying their utmost to enlarge their knowledge of it and to learn Arabic; even some among them the Persian language too, and those who are more studious still strive to obtain knowledge of the Sanskrit... ’

This passage shows that the Malays are wise, skillful, intelligent and erudite. Works about the Malays were stored in the *annals* of the royal palace like *Alexander*, *Bustan al-Salatin*, *Malay History*, *Story of Aceh*, *Hikayat Hang Tuah* and others. The works were influential enough in that century. Watson (1979) states the Malay language and knowledge flourished in the Malay community in this region.

The influence of Arabic scripts in Malay language was also significant. Arba'iyah Mohd Noor, (2011, p. 53) states that *Malay-jawi* was based on the Arabic alphabet together with some extra letters in the manner of Persian letters. The jawi (based on Arabic) was formed according to the rules of Persian letters. As a result, they managed to adapt, integrate, organize and form the letters of the Arab-Malay or Malay-Jawi, and this greatly enriched Malay vocabulary and led to the Malay civilization.

3. Reflection on Dissemination of Knowledge in Science

The Malay community has an in-depth knowledge of the recovery effort, pain and illness. Before the advent of modern medicine, the Malays rely heavily on traditional Malay medicine. Koharuddin Mohd Mohd Balwi (2008) states that when modern medicine fails to cure illness or pain, the Malays revert to traditional medicine. Few themes of reflections on science exist.

3.1 The Book of Malay's Medicine

Few books about medicine among the Malays can be found. According to Mohd Taib Osman (1988) the famous Malay medical book is *Taj-ul-Muluk* or known as *Malay Mujarrabat*, containing 500 pages that relates to 147 items or clauses. Zhari Ismail and Norhayati Ismail (1995) also support that there is a Malay medical books that has been translated into English in 1886 under the title of *This is The Medical Book of Malayan Medicine*, which is now owned by the Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain. A. Samad Ahmad (1988) states that there is an old, handwritten manuscript titled *Physician Knowledge migration* dated 1288 by Muhammad Saleh bin Ahmad Penambang who supports treatment using prayers, verses from the Quran, hadith, amulets and charms as well as diagrams and chants for patients with common and unusual diseases.

3.2 The Cause of Pain or Illness

The cause of pain or illness is also covered in the reflections. According to Hashim Awang AR (1990) the naturalistic view fever as caused by environmental factors such as cold disturbance, warm wind and other disorders that trigger an imbalance of a body system while others view that some illnesses may be caused by mysterious and spiritual means. He also notes that most books of Malay medicine assert that that human was created from four elements; elements of earth, water, fire and wind whereby each element has its own behavior.

The disruption of the body system is also attributed to food intake. Some food is also classified as hot, cold, windy and vicious whereby an acquisition of any kind of excessive food tends to disrupt the balance of the body elements. Moreover, according to Aishah Haji Muhammad (1998), food is classified as hot and cold. Hot food is fatty, salty, bitter and spicy while cold food consists of fruits and vegetables that have features such as watery, slimy, sticky, and tangy.

He further asserts that the Malay community also categorizes food as itchy like seafood and eggs which can be detrimental to patients suffering from rashes, ordinary wounds and wounds resulting from giving birth. The Malays believe that certain ingredients in the food contribute to the slow healing process of such diseases. In short, the balance of the four elements in human and food intake determine a person's health.

3.3 Activity and Healing Techniques

Many authors reflect on the activity and healing techniques. According to Aishah Haji Muhammad (1998), the plants which have medicinal value among the Malays are families of angiosperms, leguminosea, rubiacioae, eupphoorbiacoae, rutcaea and lauraceau. Zhari Ismail and Norhayati Ismail (1995) state the availability of a cure or antidote for poisoning for example there are several types of materials induce vomiting (emetics) used by Malay and modern Western practitioners or physician now. Koharuddin Mohd Mohd Balwi (2008) also asserts that other methods include drug-addiction treatment, circumcision surgery, restore broken bone. The Malay community has its own healing techniques and ways of healing that involves the process of diagnosis and treatment and surgical techniques.

3.4 Specialist in Malay's Medicine

Ismail and Norhayati Zhari Ismail (1995) states that there are certain figures that is highly respected within the Malay community for wisdom in treating fever and illness such as a healer, shaman, midwife and others. In addition, Mohd Taib Osman (1988) states that the task is not only limited to the shaman healing activities but also includes prevention tips to avoid someone from contracting pain, fever or sickness. Koharuddin Mohd Mohd Balwi (2008) also states that midwives are the title given to those who know how to treat the physical healing of diseases either using herbal medicinal substances from flora and fauna. Shaman is a prominent medical clairvoyant who deals with spiritual beings while tok Mudin is a skilled medical figures who perform circumcision rituals for boys. When modern medicine fails in overcoming pain and illnesses, the Malays would divert their attention back to the traditional medicine which has its benefit and efficacy.

4. Reflection on Dissemination of Knowledge in Mathematics

In mathematics realms, reflection covers the prominent mathematicians and their fields of expertise. Koharuddin Mohd Mohd Balwi (2008) states that the achievements of the Malays in many fields of mathematics pioneered by the religious leaders who are teachers in educational institutions called hut in Malaysia. Mat Rofa Ismail (1996) states that the knowledge of *falakh* (a branch of mathematics) becomes the biggest legacy left by the old Malay writers. Many Malay scholars write about areas of mathematics like al-Hind, algebra, geometry, and astronomy in the history of logarithms development.

Mat Rofa Ismail (1996) indicates that the prolific figure in mathematics is Shaykh Ahmad 'Abdul Latif al-Khatib. (Raudat fi al-Hussab a'mal al-mathematicians, al Nukhbah al-bahiyyah, al-Jawahir al-Naqiyyah), Sheikh 'Abdul Rahman Muhammad al-Fatani (Minhaj al-Qawim to learn arithmetic and taqwim) and Shaykh Ahmad al-Fatani (Mathematics and Astronomy).

Various fields of mathematics are described in the scriptures of the Malays in the historical development of Malay civilization and are still kept and read to this day. Koharuddin Mohd Mohd Balwi (2008) states that knowledge on mathematics is important in areas algebra which is used in calculating zakat, lease, wills and others related to *fiqh* and religious rules. Astronomy is used to determine the beginning of Ramadan (fasting month) and Shawwal (Eid day) according to an Islamic calendar, the path of the sun, including the computation time and others as well as knowledge of geometry and trigonometry which is used to calculate and determine the direction of the Qiblah, the co-ordinates of a city and others. Moreover, according to Asmah Haji Omar (1986), prior to the introduction of the decimal concept, the Malays just know how to add, subtract, multiply, divide. He

also asserts that the concept of fractions is also available in Malay before such foreign penetration of a quarter and three quarters of expression and there is also a specific term in the gauge measurement of liquid and grains according to the mold like *secupak* (equivalent to half a kilogram) rice, *segantang* (equivalent to a kilogram) rice. In short, mathematics has been studied and learned by the Malay community because of its importance in their daily lives.

5. Reflection on Dissemination of Knowledge in Chemistry (Metal Foundry)

Reflection also covers the areas of chemistry which is useful for daily tasks. According to Mohd Taib Osman (1988), the Malay community inherits the know-how on smelting techniques from previous generation. He also stated that the tradition in the past requires the placing of certain items like gold or silver pots, trays, bowls, to portray a symbol of royalty and power. In addition, Wan Ramli Wan Daud (1995) states that the Malays had a mastery on producing metal material through melting and casting techniques. Thus, the skills of the Malays in chemistry are closely related to the needs for the daily use and also as a symbol of the Sultanate government.

6. Conclusion

The spread of Islam in the Malay world has brought major changes in the Malay community when their acts and tradition are in alignment with Islamic principles and values. The review yielded four themes namely reflection on the means of dissemination of knowledge and, reflection on dissemination of knowledge in Science, Mathematics and Chemistry in the Malay World. The Malay community have their own books in many areas which are still accepted by the present generation. This study provides a guide for historians and practitioners in the Malay-Islamic realms. Future research should focus on development of reflection on knowledge dissemination by other ethnic groups to provide a rich insight into various discourses on reflection.

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