

Title : Thinking and Practice's Construction: The Influence of Islam on Early Malay Society

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**THINKING AND PRACTICE'S CONSTRUCTION: THE INFLUENCE OF ISLAM
ON EARLY MALAY SOCIETY**

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1.0. Background

The dynamic of cultural process in the Hindu-Buddhist custom transformation to Islamic cultures considered as a milestone and valuable history among Malay society as the concept of Tawhid introduced and started to be the reference of their activity as a whole (Shuhaimi et al., 2012). However, to delve deeper the extent of Islamic influence toward Malay society, it is essential to expound the Malay thinking and practice before the arrival of Islam to draw out the difference and their shifting paradigm from espousing Hinduism and Buddhism to embrace Islamic values and Tawhid.

Human mind development advances people's possibility to establish and improve their development which includes language, cities, religion, cultures, research, and others (Murphy, 2015). Therefore, any influences toward the human mind are more likely to be embodied and interpreted by their behaviour based on that kind of influence. Malay society reflected the significance of Islamic values that could be examined based on their thinking and behaviour showing a significant different before and after the penetration of Islam into their society. Islamic values encompass various aspects of Malay society, and almost no aspect escaped from Islam's influence.

2.0. Method

Using library research and analysis by narrative and argumentative approach, this research examines the extent of Islam influences Malay society in the sense of their thinking, which includes their perception, assumption, and ideas; behaviour which related to their action and implementation of their thinking as the result of their accumulative thinking and behaviour in constructing the well-known identity.

3.0. The Identity of Malay

Malay Archipelago encompasses peninsula, coastal Borneo to across Sumatra which Malay as the earliest indigenous people reside with various other Austronesian ethnic group such as Javanese, Maori, Sundanese, Bugis and others as Malay Archipelago encompass the whole South East Asia (Embong et al., 2016). Each of ethnic speak several languages which different dialects which enrich the heritage and culture, especially Malay which their dialect is like other Austronesian language family as they are still under one group which reside and as the earliest population within South East Asian. Understanding they stay for a very long era which means Malay ancestors those who established for the first time the systematic government in Nusantara. Sriwijaya as the largest kingdom at that time was dominant before Islam arrive and penetrate its values, ideas, and ideology in Malay society which was predominantly by Hinduism and Buddhism around seventh to fourteenth century, especially in Southeast Asia. (Shuhaimi et al., 2012). It reflects the extensive influence of Sriwijaya as the kingdom which espoused Hinduism and Buddhism mostly.

Malay is considered as a large population with more than 300 million people. Malay means 'running' literally while metaphorically it means 'active' that reflected its activeness on business, dynamic, and others. There are several kinds of Malay such as Malay Javanese, Malay Aceh, Malay Rawa, Malay Kelantan, and others which Malay Kelantan is considered as the Malay origin as they stay in Malay Peninsula around 60.000 years ago and all those types are interrelated genetically (Embong et al., 2016). It means the culture, custom, and norm among Malay Kelantan are quite firm as they prefer to choose their marriage partner to continue their offspring with the same ethnic which is Malay Kelantan. Hence, it is rare to be found among Malay Kelantan the implementation of mix marriages (Embong et al., 2016). Based on the explanation above related to the general identity of Malay and its classification and types, this paper will elaborate about the influence of Islam on Malay thinking and practice with the exhibition of Malay before Islam and after Islam society.

4.0. Malay Thinking Before Islam

As the culture of Hinduism and Buddhism spread at that time among Malay society before Islam, the construction of myth and folk stories are well rooted around their mind as the consideration in taking decision or to interact with each other. It means that the culture and custom of Hinduism which was fulfilled by myth at that time was espoused popularly by Malay society around archipelago as Sriwijaya was predominant kingdom. Shuhaimi et al. (2012) expounded several examples of the Malay thinking condition before Islam. In terms of religion, they subscribed polytheism with different types of God which they believed the spirits, or their souls of ancestors were living among them and protecting them. They were fear with the spirits in nature, statues, or shaman thus they worship them due to their fear. Also, they believed on myth, such as understanding that serving food to the sea will protect them from the anger of Jinn in the sea. In terms of social life, they believed that after the people died, their soul will revive in another body and likewise the souls within their body believed it was their ancestors' souls. Not only moving to people but also to nature, animals, and even to sacred things. Therefore, when one was believed possessed the sacred souls in the past, they will be respected and even worshipped. Additionally, they were very loyal to their leaders as they believed that the voice of leader was similar as the voice of God. It is showed that the legacy of Indian cultures of Hinduism was very strong.

5.0. Malay Practice Before Islam

As the Malay society before Islam believed to the power of spirits among them which is called by Animism, they practice their belief by worshipping nature, animals, statues, sacred things and even shaman by serving them food and asking help from them for prosperity and protection. Adat or custom was very important as it was hereditary, and people believe and practice it. For example, Pesta Puja Lautan is the way to praise and ask for protection and prosperity to the Jinn in the sea by serving them food which this culture. It is similar as Mandi

Safar when people massively go to beach for bathing in purpose of seeking protection and welfare to the spirits or Jinn. As the Adat was very strong, the people at that time who did not follow those tradition will be excommunicated even punished socially.

Malay practice also can be observed based on the existed art such as Ramayana and Mahabarata stories which were very popular and resonated the society to extract the lessons and to be entertained at the same time. This story sometimes was projected by shadow puppet or in Indonesia it is well-known as Wayang Kulit for entertainment, education and contemplation. Furthermore, the structure of architecture is very typical as we can observe the Hinduism temple exists scattered around Malay Archipelago, specifically in Indonesia, there are lot of Hinduism temples such as Prambanan, Borobudur, and others.

4.0. The Early Islam in Malay Society

In Malay society before Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism were already well rooted before the arrival of Islam. It can see from many monuments and temples in Java and the Malay Peninsula that represent the civilisation during the great kingdom of Sriwijaya and Majapahit era. Even nowadays, we can still find Javanese script in elementary school, which evolutionary transformed from Brahmi descendants and primarily used to write the Javanese language in the past.



Figure 2. Ruined temple in Kedah (*Bujang Valley Alor Setar, Kedah, Malaysia, n.d.*)



Figure 3. Javanese Script in Islamic Art Museum Malaysia (Rahim, 2021)

The building and language are two of many symbolic attributes of civilisation that reflect the societal life during these two religions' influential period. However, the coming of Islam has gradually changed the influence of other religions in the Malay Archipelago. According to Buya Hamka's theory, Islam was first introduced by traders from Arab who traded on the strait of Malacca and established the inhabitation at the west coast of Sumatra. It was supported by the evidence from the note of the Tang Dynasty stated that they found the Arabs' occupancy in the 7th century (Suryanegara, 2016). Although many theories explain the beginning period of Islam differently, it is commonly acknowledged that traders are the ones who brought Islam into the region. Through the economic activity, traders followed by missionaries were able to transfer the Islamic teachings to the local inhabitants and moderately influence the local culture, social structure, and politics during Islamization from the 7th century.

Over the last three decades, Islam accomplishes its most significant development of Malay society, in terms of political life, socio-cultural, and economical, which led to Malay society's situations that subscribe to predominantly Islamic values depict the significant influence and development of Islam. Islam encompasses every single of significance of life in the society and the country (Abbott & Gregorios-Pippas, 2010). The influence of Islam on Malay societies in the Peninsula started since its first penetration in the 9th century into the Malay world gently and passively without bringing confrontation or severe conflicts than colonialism's ideas. The significance spread of Islam started peacefully by the penetration of

Arab and Indian Muslim traders in the 14th century who influenced Muhammad Iskander Shah, the one who discovered Malacca and Sumatra Hindu prince, to embrace Islam. Furthermore, the spread of Islam across the peninsula showed its significance as he led the dissemination by establishing the Malacca Sultanate, which led to the establishment of other Islamic Sultanate in Malaya. As the palace officially declared their embracement of Islam, other subject classes followed as well. Beginning from the 15th century, Islam played an essential role in Malay culture and development due to the intense interaction of Middle East Muslim traders with the locals (Nishio, 2003).

The Portuguese captured Malacca in 1511, Muslim Malay society established already a solid position to struggle in fighting against colonialism as the resistance of the power of Christians in monopolising the trade (Looney, 2003). Therefore, Islamic value is rooted strongly within the Malay society as it is nurtured and developed simultaneously with the Malay society, their thinking and practice. Muslim became an identity of Malay society.

5.0. The Impact of Islam on Malay Thinking

Ever since the 12th century where Islam started to enter Malay society, the number of Islam subscriber is steadily increasing throughout the time. This occurrence brought various changes to the lives of Malay people, both on the individual as well as communal levels. Many changes were happening in almost every aspect of their life, starting from their belief in God to how they live their daily lives. This is due to the Islam spread, which also changed the Malay people's perspective from the old animism-based worldview to the Islamic one.

One of the most significant fundamental thinking changes that happened was the shift from polytheism to monotheism. Malay people assert that there is only one God (Allah SWT) that should be worshipped and that the thought of having many Gods is invalid. This leads to another affirmation within Malay's mind that since Allah SWT is the only God, there is, the

causality of events and phenomena taking place around us is of Allah's SWT free action alone ('abdulḥamīd Abū Sulaymān & Lake, 2013). However, it is possible for humans to partake in the cause of things to a certain degree, should Allah SWT permit. They also believe that this world comes to existence for a purpose, not simply sprouting out of nowhere by chance. Following this is the thought of worshipping Allah to be the sole purpose and reason of their presence in this world ('abdulḥamīd Abū Sulaymān & Lake, 2013). Everything they are doing should be done with the thought of worship Allah so that it will be marked as a good deed instead of an everyday happening that has no value spiritually. In other words, even when they do something that is not explicitly spiritual, their actions are not conformed to the obligation that is owed to the communal level but to Allah SWT. Another conviction that dwells within the Malay people's mind is some responsibilities befall upon the doers of things. They trust that humans have the privilege of freedom, albeit it is bound within the limits of one's capacity and circumstances, in making meaningful choices in one's life. Therefore, it is believed that every human will bear the burden of their doings in the world later in the resurrection Day. Interestingly, the worship to Allah is different than worship to spirits as spirits was not attributed by the great name which means they worship to spirits based on fear while the worship to Allah based on Mercy as Allah has the 99 great name or Asmaul Husna.

Malay society also believes in sharing and togetherness in society. Especially during important holidays and life-event, such Hari Raya and Ramadhan which they assemble with their family during iftar and their great family during Hari Raya which can improve their sense of belonging of family. They consider it normal to share joy with other people ranging from relatives to complete strangers by holding an event called the open house or simply sharing foods and necessities ("Malaysia - Daily life and social customs | Britannica," 2019). It can be seen also from their special clothing which cover the aurah of women, it is Baju Kurung, as the part of culture with Islamic value within Malay society.

Looking at the political field, Malay people do not see politics as a field that needs to be separated from their worldview as well. It is proven by the widely accepted notion that state all actions performed during one's service in the parliament is to be accounted for spiritually. Malay society's "*Kerajaan*" system also exists because they believe that status and power are not merely the stipulation of constitutional authority and the constitution itself, but it is also based on cultural and religious tradition (Virginia Matheson Hooker & Norani Othman, 2003). When it comes to social life, Malay people firmly hold on to the conviction of tolerance. It means that when they deal with other religion they did not confront immediately. Thus, they can survive in living among the number of tribes, races, and religion of people that were occupying the Malay region is a plethora in number, but despite all of that, Malay people still live with them in harmony. They do not try to instil their view and belief in other people as they are confident that being considerate to others is also a form of kindness and are encouraged (Rusli, 2019). This becomes more definite during the sacred day of each religion. Even when the streets and media are packed with various greetings and congratulations for the celebrating people, Malay people do not condemn and sometimes even congratulate them. Additionally, they believe that when their intention is to worship to Allah, any of their action will be considered as Ibadah as long as it does not violate the Islamic values and lead to the sin. It reflected the total integration between religion and worldly matters as they believe when they give goodness or doing good, Allah will return it more whether in the world or the hereafter and otherwise for bad action.

6.0. Islam and its Influences on Malay Practice and Behaviour

Fascinating is to understand the influence of Islam on Malay practice and behaviour. While given as the term *foundation*, religion has become one of the salient aspects in civilising ancient tribes. The establishment of tribes, by religion, will by then contribute to the making

and shaping of behaviours, norms, and ethics of the civils. Islam, as the religion of *samawi* that comes from God himself has provided a number of sources, which are Qur'an, Hadith, Ijma as referring as the result of discussion by the scholars, and Qiyas; the result of comparison between what is happening in the past and the contemporary issue (Ismailee, 2019). For Muslims, these sources are the fundamental factors to live in the world because every single thing has been written on it, and God himself is the one who leads it. It brought all the knowledge, even from the past to the future. Given so, people have to depend on what has been delivered by the Qur'an, Hadith, Ijma, and Qiyas because peace and valuable life could be boosted more by following the guidance which has been written on these sources.

In understanding Malay, it is a common belief that Malay culture has always been describing the values of religious belief, which refers to the Islamic values. The famous slogans "Malay World, Muslim World" and "No Islam, not Malay" has also been well-known thing among Malays (Almudra, 2008). This slogan somehow represents how Islam has genuinely shaped and managed the Malay identity since a long time ago. According to Solihin (2017), from an etymological perspective, Malay culture is known as a civilisation derived from the Arabic word *adab*, which literally means ethics or behaviour. So many other terms are also derived from Arabic words. For example, the blessing which is Malays is *barakat*, is taken from the word "barakah", value, or in Malay is *darajat* is also taken from the Arabic word "darajah", it is also on "khabar", "lafazh", "zhalim", and "maqalah". These *loan languages* are somehow representing how Islamic value and the Arabic style has been shaping Malay. Hence, it is true that religion plays an essential role in shaping the views and character of the Malay thinking and practice. In other words, culture includes beliefs or religions that shape the cultural appearance of society.

SL	Transliteration	
أبجد	<i>Abjad</i>	Abjad (a
فلسفة	<i>Falsafah</i>	Falsafah
أرناب	<i>Arnab</i>	Arnab (r
بدن	<i>Badan</i>	Badan (l
غيب	<i>Ghayb</i>	Ghaib (i
جسد	<i>Jasad</i>	Jasad (b
كلمة	<i>Kalimah</i>	Kalimah
خبر	<i>Khabar</i>	Khabar (

Figure 1. Some Arabic loanwords in Malay (Mansor, 2017)

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Behaviour is described as the factors that create culture, and it is generally perceived as standard practices and customs locally. The change of civils is constantly given an agreement identified with the hypothesis of information and science, the country's advancement and progress in socio-political and framework, and others. Once things change the civils, they are civilised. The extent of a culture incorporates every human movement, like correspondence, conduct, convictions, and earnestness. Knowing this, Islam has influenced a plethora of actors in maintaining the culture and behaviour of Malay.

Malay culture, which generally started from Islam, has confronted other social impacts. Malay culture is presently confronted with difficulties from outside impacts. Notwithstanding, we should see that whatever the difficulties or rivalry from the impact of different societies, Islamic culture stays unblemished. The inquiry is how to keep a culture dependent on strict personality. As has been characterised that the spirit of culture comes from religion. Hence, Muslim conduct mirrored the personality of religion in all parts of life. Islamic culture does not address the embodiment of conviction yet is cursorily perceived as restricted to social customs in the public eye which led to the misinterpretation of whether social custom or religious command. Nevertheless, knowing that these aspects have played a role in establishing Malay's behaviour, it is evident that Islam has influenced Malays' customs, norms, and behaviour.

Alcoholic beverages and gambling are prohibited in any shape or form is affirmed by the Malay Society. The reason for that is not merely to forsake mundane pleasures for the sake of salvation but to curtail and lessen the disunity and nurture harmony in society (Esposito & Society, 1987). Those behaviour influenced by Islam was to maintain peace and warm which in their daily life was common to spread salam that can be released the tension among Muslim societies.

In terms of culture, as they have beliefs in gaining reward and praise the Ramadan and celebrate Hari Raya, it came into practice to realise that thinking and belief. When Ramadhan came, the vibes was always different and people were pursuing in gaining more reward. During Hari Raya, the great family were gathered in purpose of strengthening the bond or silaturahmi and ask for forgiveness as the symbol of sin eradication and achievement after Ramadhan.

6.1. The Result of Thinking and Practice of Malay Society

Malay behaviour encompasses all aspects of human life comprehensively as the result of their thinking and practice and related it to Islamic values as its influence. Nurcholish Madjid stated in his book (Madjid, 2008) that humans are inclined to believe in something that historically links to the religions. Religion provides systematic values for people to explain what is good and evil. These values functions as a moral compass that drive people to govern their behaviour in conducting life activities based on guiding principles. Through specific periods, the accumulation of collective individuals' actions transforms the ritual into a tradition, culture, and civilisation. John Gardner, Ministry of Health, Education, and Prosperity of America said that "No nation can achieve greatness unless it believes in something, and unless that something has moral dimensions to sustain a great civilisation" (Madjid, 2008, p.27). In short, religion mainly plays a fundamental aspect in human practice and thinking.

Besides, religious values will shape the way people view the world. The adoption of values by many generates the culture in which at the same time becoming their identity. People's points of view often translated into viability, framed by religious standards, and affected many aspects of life, including the language, rite, food, attire, and behaviour. In anthropology studies, many scholars stated that worldview has a significant function in the course of life. According to Clifford Geertz, worldview works at once as a model of reality and a model for actions. It gives a logical framework to explain everything that satisfies the question of people in the life experiences. Technically, worldview consists of concepts in the human mind. These concepts are the answers that help people to reach an understanding of many fundamental questions in life. For example, the question of ultimate reality, human nature and its relationship with the world, the purpose of life, and the question of life after death (hereafter) are fundamentally essential concepts that determine people's life. Once these concepts present in the human mind, they will establish the paradigm that determines the way people understand and interpret the world and life (Ismunanto, 2019).

Historically, the influence of Islam on political affairs began with the establishment of the Islamic Kingdom or Sultanate. Many Hindu Kings converted to Islam by changing their names and marked the development of Islamic political authority. Although they converted to Islam, the people still recognised them as the actual authority called the Sultan. For example, The Samudra Pasai Kingdom in the North Sumatra (13th century), Mataram Sultanate (16th century), and Demak Sultanate (15th century) in Java. The conversion, according to J.C. van Leur, was occurred due to political motives. Many mayors and Kings converted because they were threatened by catholic and protestant imperialism from the Portuguese, Dutch, and British (Suryanegara, 2016). Ricklefs also explained this in his book, stating that Malay Rulers have two options: First, they can join the imperialist which means sharing the power and follow their religion, or secondly, strengthening the power by gaining more support from people, which

also means the adoption of the majority's religion (M.C Ricklefs, 1991). Besides, the change of religion, at the same time, was also the prove and acknowledgement from the political elites that Islam had a significant influence on the social stratum, especially among ordinary people. With its egalitarian principles, Islam was considered by the people as a religion that liberating them, particularly from stratification of social structure or caste formed by Hindu society. In other words, the dissemination of Islam was not started when the monarch became the proselyte, but it spread among Malay folks in the first place.

Furthermore, the intensity of Islam spread initiated along with this phenomenon. The progress was ranging widely, influencing many aspects. The inculcation of religious teachings, for instance, was delivered in the form of Malay written or Jawi alphabet and later becoming the common parlance in the Malay Archipelago.

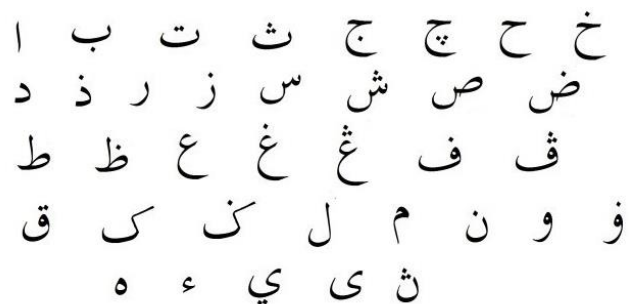


Figure 4. Jawi Alphabet (August 30 et al., 2019).

Moreover, the educational activity was vastly outspread, supported by the establishment of many madrasa and mosques. These places were central for instruction and worship and the starting points for any movement, especially during the colonisation period. Royalties and Ulama joined and fought together against the invaders from Europe, which brought the idea of Gold, Glory, and Gospel. From this, it proves that Islam had successfully altered Malay thinking and practice and maintained its domination of the region for a long time. The strong commitment from its followers enables religious principles translated into laws and

orders. Consequently, the Islamic doctrines shape the Malay society in their thinking and practice. For example, in rules and law, many have been enacted based on Sharia and still implemented in some parts of regional territory such as Aceh. Islam is not merely a religion that only promulgates to do ritual things and separate worldly life, but it is an authentic and good way of life that holistically covers worldly life and the afterlife.

6. Conclusion

Malay society is a large population who resides in the most of Southeast Asia included as one of Austronesian groups. Before Islam spread within Malay world, the influence of Hinduism and Buddhism was very significant as Sriwijaya, the Hinduist kingdom occupied most of Southeast Asia which inculcated its cultures, norms, and customs within Malay society. Malays believed that spirits could give them prosperity and protect them from any undesirable incidents which the latter is more significant. Hence, they believed that the spirits existed within nature, sacred things, human, or animals which was worth to be worshipped. It led to their practice in worshipping them with full of submission as they were fear and avoid disturbing them. It means that their submission was based on fear and recognising the manner of weakness of human being. They had many Gods which they are considered as Polytheism society with many different Gods. Socially, Malays thought that the leaders should get the best service and respect from them which made them were very loyal to their leader and followed what the leader said with consideration as a voice of God. Additionally, they believed in soul transmigration, meaning that the people who were believed possessed by the sacred soul of their ancestor will be more respected as after people died, their soul will move to another body in as their next life. Practically, in the sense of Adat and art, the Malay practice before Islam were very prominent such as Mandi Safar and Pesta Puja Pantai as the means to serve the Jinn in the sea, asking them for protection by giving food and bathing during certain period.

Furthermore, in terms of art, Ramayana and Mahabarata stories were quite popular which was reflected and projected in many means of stories, such as Wayang Kulit or shadow puppet and architecture with a unique pattern showed the strong Hinduism culture.

After Islam spread within Malay society due to the subtle way of dissemination by Indian and Arab traders, gradually it changed Malay thinking and practice which was completely different than before. Their thinking became united as they espoused monotheism or the belief to one God which is Allah and followed Rasulullah Muhammad SAW. Before Islam, their purpose of life was to serve the spirits and soul of ancestor while after Islam it changed to serve Allah swt and the belief of the day of resurrection, the hereafter, *mizan*, and *yaumul hisab*. It means they have taqwa, fear of Allah and considered *syirk* as the biggest unforgivable sins to believe but Allah. They believed that human have a willingness and freedom, however it could not violate the decision from Allah as He is *Hakim* and the Ruler of the world. In social life, they believed in tolerance as they lived with many religions, ethnics, and differences in a harmony. Moreover, the belief that Allah will return our action even the most trivial one, they keep their manner to ensure whether it aligns to the will of Allah to look for His mercy. Malay society after Islam does not worship due to fear, but they love Him and recognize His mercy which is different than their submission to the souls. As Islamic culture was very strong, many loan languages from Arabic used, custom such as Ramadhan and Hari Raya, those practice were leading to serve Allah swt and to preserve peace and His mercy.

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