



Mirrors for Kings, Maps for Empires: Islam and the Making of Malay Political Philosophy

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 18 June 2025
Accepted 12 October 2025
Published 7 November 2025

Keywords:

Governance
Hikayats
Islam
Malay Archipelago
Politics

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.24191/jcis.v11i2.11>

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the profound influence of Islam on the Malay world, particularly in the realms of religion (*dīn*), education (*ta'lim*), politics (*siyāsah*), literature (*adab*), and traditional practices. It delves into the historical introduction of *Islam* to the Malays, highlighting the impact of Sufi sects and Arab scholars on the Islamization (*aslama/islāmiyyah*) process. The paper also discusses the role of Arabic script and Jawi literature (*adab Jāwī*) in Islamic education (*ta'lim islāmī*), emphasizing their significance in shaping Malay culture and worldview. Furthermore, it examines the intersection of Malay politics and Islamic political theory (*al-naẓariyyah al-siyāsiyyah al-islāmiyyah*), tracing the evolution of political structures and governance influenced by Islamic principles (*uṣūl islāmiyyah*). The paper also explores the significance of the *Tāj al-Salāṭīn* in shaping Islamic political concepts in the Malay Archipelago, highlighting the fusion of religion (*dīn*) and state (*dawlah*) in Malay political philosophy. Additionally, it delves into the role of scholars (*ulamā'*) and intellectuals (*mufakkirūn*) in shaping Islamic governance and emphasizes the importance of knowledge (*ilm*) and wisdom (*ḥikmah*) in political leadership.

INTRODUCTION

This essay argues that classical Malay *ḥikāyat* such as the *Tāj al-Salāṭīn*, *Sulālāt al-Salāṭīn*, and *Ḥikāyat Iskandar Dhū al-Qarnayn*—all of which provide an intriguing blend of Islamic political theory (*al-naẓariyyah al-siyāsiyyah al-islāmiyyah*) and native Malay traditions—reveal the manner in which *Islam* reformulated Malay worldviews of kingship, rule, and legitimacy through *Sufi* ethics, *Jawi* literature, and *adab*. This work highlights the pervasive influence of *Islam* in the Malay world, particularly on religion (*dīn*), schools (*madrassa*), politics (*siyāsah*), literature (*adab*), and customary tradition (*ādah*). It discusses the historical spread of *Islam* among the Malays, including *Sufi ṭarīqāt* and the contribution of Arab scholars in the Islamization process.

This paper also mentions the adoption of the Arabic script and Jawi literature in *ta'lim islāmī* and its potential in educating the Malay worldview and *ādah*. Second, it explores the overlap of Malay-world *siyāsah* and *al-naẓariyyah al-siyāsiyyah al-islāmiyyah*, tracing the evolution of political institutions under Islamic thought. Furthermore, it considers the development of Malay historiography and *adab*, particularly in relation to “Mirrors for Princes” (*mir'āt al-umarā'*) literature and its influence on the Malay *dawlah*. This article also sheds light on the development of traditional Malay *siyāsah* under Islamic influences, cultivating the idea of the Sufi king (*al-malik al-ṣūfī*) and the infusion of

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Islamic notions of *akhlāq* into political thought. It also highlights the role of ‘ulamā’ and *mufakkirūn* as formative powers of Islamic *ḥukm* and stresses the importance of ‘ilm and *ḥikmah* as foundations of rule.

The article features the adoption of the *Tāj al-Salāṭīn* as an influence on *al-fikr al-siyāsī al-islāmī* in the Malay Archipelago, demonstrating the blurring of *dīn* and *dawlah* in Malay philosophy concerning royalty. It also considers the impact of the *Sufi* tradition of the *al-insān al-kāmil* (“the perfect man”) and Meccan-centered Islamic thought on Malay philosophy concerning *siyāsah* and justice-based governance (*ḥukm ‘adl*) according to *uṣūl islāmiyyah*. Finally, the paper engages with scholarship such as Burhanuddin (2017) and Meerangani (2019, 2020), which explain the significance of *Sufi ṭarīqāt* and intellectual patronage in the development of Islamic *siyāsah* in the Malay Archipelago. Studying classical exemplars such as the *Tāj al-Salāṭīn* and the *Hikāyat Iskandar Zulkarnain* provides an enriched paradigm for interpreting the development of the Sufi king (*al-malik al-ṣūfī*) typology—one that identifies the nature of Malay rulers along a spectrum of both *dīn* and *siyāsah*. Therefore, this research advances existing *tārīkhī* arguments by combining textual criticism with Islamic political thought in the context of *siyāsah*, offering a new approach to understanding the evolution of Islamic leadership in the Malay world.

METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative, interpretive study founded on historical and textual analysis. It interprets classical Malay-Islamic texts such as the *Tāj al-Salāṭīn*, *Sulālat al-Salāṭīn*, and *Hikāyat Iskandar Zulkarnain*, for Islamic political theory (*al-naẓariyyah al-siyāsiyyah al-islāmiyyah*), Sufi ethics, and theories of monarchy (*mulk, salṭanah*). These have been examined in relation to their socio-historical contexts for understanding infusions of Islamic leadership principles—*adab*, *tawḥīd*, and *khalīfah*—into Malay political theory (*al-fikr al-siyāsī al-Malayū*).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Islam and the Malay World

The spread of *Islam* to the Malays, particularly the *Sunnī Shāfi‘ī* school, was initiated from the Coromandel Coast and Malabar. They were succeeded by *Arab shuyūkh* of the *Ḥaḍramī Sayyid* family, of the tribe of *Ḥaḍramawt* (Winsteadt, 1925). Because of its vast extent under its dominion and strategic position, the Malay Archipelago has witnessed the spread of *Islam* for a very long period. *Sufis*, and particularly the *‘Alawiyyīn* branch, were a profound agency of that Islamization process. Though Malay *ḥikāyāt* invoke that, modern scholars also credit the *‘Alawiyyīn* for their part (Burhanuddin, 2017).

‘Alāwiyyah and *Qādiriyyah* are the two *ṭarīqah* (Sufi schools) that dominated and spread rapidly among the people of the Malay race. *‘Alāwiyyah* is led by Shaykh Abd Allah. The *Qādiriyyah ṭarīqah* is the most powerful school of thought here, although there is also a group of *‘Alawiyyīn* (*Ṭarīqah ‘Alāwiyyah*) described as the chief driver of Islamization processes here (Sham, 2018). As that school of *taṣawwuf* does not avoid or prohibit total commitment to *‘ādah* (local custom), that made it popular among the people. *Ta‘līm* either fell under the *sultan* or under the *masjid*, in an attempt to create good relations between *Sufi shuyūkh* and the *sultan*. They either became *mu‘allimūn* and *qāḍī* (judges). As there was likely opportunity for *Sayyids* to gain the attention of the *malik* and stimulate his interest in what they brought, the *manzilah* (rank) of those scholars and spiritual guides ascended toward *siyāsah* (governance). The royal patronage of those involved in *dīnī* and *adabī* (cultural-literary) works has undergone change over time (Meerangani, 2019).

The *madhhab al-taṣawwuf* warmly embraced them. Royal support for *dīnī*, *adabī*, and *thaqāfī* (cultural) events has developed over the years. As supportive institutions of the *aḥkām* class, *marākiz al-dirāsah al-dīniyyah* (religious study centers) were established, where lessons could be given by *shuyūkh* (Harris, 2015). As can be noted from these customs, these events replicate practices since the *‘Abbāsīd* dynasty and took place more frequently during the time of *al-Rashīd* and *al-Ma‘mūn* as

khalīfah. For example, the ruling *sultans* and other leaders at the time beautifully supported and invested in establishing *marākiz al-ma'lūmāt* (centers of information), *madāris* (schools), *maktabāt* (libraries), and *dīwān al-tarjamah* (translation bookkeeping) (Abdul Rahman, 2016).

The Malay people did not use Arabic books prior to the adoption of the *Jawi* script, and it is through this innovation that *Kitab Melayu* or *Ṣufi Malay* books were composed. These books are study guides (*mufīdāt*) used at these study centers. This school of thought of the centers is based on the *ḥalāqah* practice of listening directly in face-to-face sessions with the *shaykh*. This history, and this description of Malay society and the islands, relied heavily on *Jawi* literature. These books also contain the worldview and *ta'līm* of the Malay people of the Malay Archipelago (Badaruddin, 2012). After the Mongol conquest of *Baghdād* in 1258, *Sufis* of various races gained access to the Malay Archipelago. They have now mostly been accredited in the Malay world for *da'wah* (propagation) purposes, as well as for *da'wah ilā al-Islām* (conversion to *Islam*) (Ricklefs, 2001). The people also possessed elements of Gnostic mysticism and belonged to the *Shāfi'ī* madhhab.

As noted earlier, even *Sufis* had their presence up to the Melaka palace, where they counselled the *sultan* regarding *Islam* (Winstead, 1950). Persians from Samarkand were the initial *Sufis* who arrived. To these *Sufis*, they found a cosmopolitan and open-minded Malay society. They were also accompanied by *fiqh al-idārī* (administrative law), *ṭibb* (medical knowledge), and other sciences. These were the initial *Sufis* who introduced the Malays to the world of medicine and *'ilm al-ṣaydalāh* (pharmacology). Under the guidance of one *mawlānā*, students pursued the study of the *'ulūm al-ḥaḍārāh* (sciences of civilization) after initially memorizing the *Qur'ān* and *ḥadīth* (Meerangani, 2020).

In addition, by marrying Persian *Sufis* of noble descent to noble Malay women, these women indirectly exerted influence by marrying into or affiliating with *ashrāf* (nobles) from the Malay world. They built *madāris*, and that became the core of their *waṣāyah* (guardianship) and *himāyah* (protection). *Sufi* preachers in the Malay Archipelago tried to integrate with the *'ādah* (local customs and traditions). In this way, they encouraged the *da'wah* of *Islam* through peaceful and gradual means across the *Jazīrat al-Malāyū* (Malay Islands). The Malays' exposure to various cultures and cosmopolitan life did not threaten their native nature. The influences of Buddhism, Hinduism, and animism shaped the culture of this region. This became a bridge allowing for cultural coexistence and consideration of native belief systems. Muslim preachers and *Sufis* did not denounce these *'ādāt* (cultural practices) as a means of reconciliation (*muṣālaḥah*) with local populations but used them as an appendix in the *da'wah ilā al-Islām*. These aspects of *islāmī thaqāfah* (Islamic culture) were later integrated into local practice by the *dā'ī* (preacher) (Sham, 2018).

The arrival of *Islam* in the Malay world radically changed most spheres of daily life, the most important of which was political thought (*al-fikr al-siyāsī*). The ways in which *Islam* shaped Malay *siyāsah* have been limited by Western Orientalist scholars. In the Malay *sultanate*, there existed an administrative and governance system in the hands of Malay *mamlakah*. Malay histories are often told through the lens of colonizing powers. In this research, an effort is made to study *siyāsah al-Malayū* through three of the most renowned Malay *ḥikāyāt*. The influence of *Islam* on Malay political regimes is emphasized through these texts. This study seeks to verify (*ta'kīd*) new observations regarding *Islam's* influence on *siyāsah* in the Malay world. As established in the *adab al-kutub*, the coming of *Islam* to Malaya brought immense change to daily life, especially in the realm of politics (Abdul Halim, 2016).

Arabic and the Malay-World Religious Education

The adoption of Arabic as the primary script of the Malay world through *Jawi* profoundly influenced religious education (*ta'līm*). The *Jawi* script enabled Malay scholars to access *'ulūm al-dīnīyyah* (religious sciences), and to compose kitab literature that adapted Arabic-Islamic knowledge into Malay forms. Through this development, *adab* and *ta'līm* in the Malay world gained distinctive character (Abdullah, 2020). Educational institutions such as *madāris* (schools) and *masājid* (mosques) became the central hubs for transmitting knowledge (*'ilm*). These institutions emphasized *tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (Qur'ānic exegesis), *'ulūm al-ḥadīth* (sciences of prophetic traditions), *'ilm al-kalām* (theology), and

fiqh (jurisprudence), all taught in a manner accessible to Malay audiences (Burhanuddin, 2017). Malay teachers employed *ḥalāqah* (study circles), where students sat around the *shaykh* for oral instruction and commentary (Harris, 2015).

The Jawi script became a vital tool for bridging Arabic and Malay, producing a rich corpus of kitab Jawi that localized Islamic learning. These texts transmitted complex subjects such as *‘ilm al-naḥw* (Arabic grammar), *‘ilm al-manṭiq* (logic), and *‘ilm al-‘aqidah* (creed) into accessible Malay idioms. In this way, Malay scholars forged a unique intellectual synthesis that embedded Islamic thought deeply within local culture (Meerangani, 2020). The process of knowledge transmission also elevated the role of the *‘ulamā’*. They acted not only as teachers but also as custodians of *‘ilm*, responsible for maintaining continuity of *islāmī ta‘līm* across generations (Abdul Rahman, 2016). Patronage from sultans supported the flourishing of these institutions, ensuring that *madāris* and *masājid* remained centers of both *‘ilm* and *‘ibādah* (worship) (Sham, 2018). Thus, the integration of Arabic through Jawi established a foundation for the Malay world’s intellectual culture. It shaped the contours of *ta‘līm*, enabled the preservation of *adab*, and facilitated the transmission of *islāmī siyāsah* (Islamic political thought) into Malay institutions of learning (Badaruddin, 2012).

Influences of Islam on Malay Culture

The arrival of *Islam* redefined the basis of Malay kingship. The *sultan* was no longer seen merely as a secular ruler but also as *ḡill Allāh fī al-arḍ* (the shadow of God on earth). This conception reflects the influence of *fiqh al-siyāsah* (Islamic jurisprudence on governance) and *adab al-mulūk* (mirrors for princes literature), which merged with indigenous understandings of power (Abdul Rahman, 2017; Burhanuddin, 2017). Texts such as the *Tāj al-Salāṭīn* and the *Sulālat al-Salāṭīn* illustrate this synthesis. They framed Malay kingship within Islamic cosmology, embedding the ruler’s legitimacy in the preservation of *‘adl* (justice), *shūrā* (consultation), and *‘ibādah* (worship) (Sham, 2018). The king was positioned as both a political leader and a religious protector of *dīn* and *dawlah* (Harris, 2015). Malay political thought was therefore characterized by a unique blending of *islāmī siyāsah* with local customs (*‘adah*). Concepts such as *daulah*, *ḥukm*, and *amānah* (trust) were incorporated into narratives of Malay sovereignty. The *sultan* was entrusted to act as *khalīfah*, embodying both worldly and spiritual responsibilities (Meerangani, 2020).

The role of the *‘ulamā’* in this context was crucial. They served as advisers, legitimizing the authority of rulers through *fatāwā* (legal rulings) and *naṣīḥah* (counsel). Their involvement reflects the principles of *al-fikr al-siyāsī al-islāmī* (Islamic political thought), where political power is tied to moral guidance and divine accountability (Abdul Halim, 2016). This framework shaped the governance of Malay polities such as Melaka, Aceh, and Johor. In these *sultanate*, Islamic law and *‘urf* (customary practice) coexisted, producing a flexible yet principled model of governance. Over time, this model influenced Malay historical consciousness, recorded in *ḥikāyāt* and *babad* literature, where rulers were portrayed as guardians of both *dīn* and *siyāsah* (Winsteadt, 1925; Abdul Rahman, 2016). The infusion of Islam into the Malay world also reconfigured the role of *adab* in political and historical writing. Classical Malay texts such as the *Tāj al-Salāṭīn*, *Sulālat al-Salāṭīn*, and *Ḥikāyat Iskandar Zulkarnain* functioned not only as narratives of kingship but also as guides to proper conduct, ethics, and governance (*siyāsah*). These works demonstrate how Islamic moral philosophy was absorbed into Malay historiography (Abdul Rahman, 2016).

Malay *ḥikāyāt* frequently combined elements of *sīrah* (biography), *akḥbār* (reports), and *naṣīḥah* (advice), echoing the traditions of *adab al-mulūk* and *mir ‘āt al-umarā’* (mirrors for princes). Through these genres, Malay rulers were situated within a cosmological order shaped by *tawḥīd* (divine unity), *‘adl* (justice), and *amānah* (trust). This reflects the convergence of Islamic *adab* with local narrative traditions (Harris, 2015). The *Tāj al-Salāṭīn*, in particular, reveals the didactic function of *adab*. It outlines the moral and spiritual qualities required of a ruler, portraying the king as a servant of God responsible for ensuring harmony between *dīn* and *dawlah*. Its emphasis on *akhlāq* (ethics) and *ḥikmah* (wisdom) demonstrates how Islamic philosophy shaped the Malay understanding of political legitimacy (Burhanuddin, 2017). Malay historiography thus evolved as a fusion of Islamic *‘ilm al-tārīkh* (science of history) and indigenous storytelling. The *ḥikāyāt* preserved genealogies, chronicled dynasties, and provided normative lessons for governance. By embedding Islamic values in historical writing, Malay

scholars reinforced the idea that just rule was both a worldly and spiritual obligation (Meerangani, 2020; Sham, 2018).

Malay Historiography and the Literary Links

Malay political philosophy-building and Islamic history writing demonstrate deeper philosophical inquiry, such as Muhammad Jamil Bayyuhum's analysis of the philosophy of history concerning the Ottoman past, as elaborated by Muhammad Alif Fitri and Ermy Azziaty (2022). There are three forms of scientific corpus authored by Islamic scholars. The first is religious and practical sciences, i.e., the science of *fiqh*, written based on the Islamic system. These books exist in both original and adapted forms and continue to serve as references. The second is histories and stories, and the third comprises *adabiyyāt* and *cerita-cerita panji* works (Abdul Malik et al., 1998). An actual discussion of Malay politics is impossible without considering Malay literature. Early Malay political thought, both past and present, can be traced through these texts. Though Orientalists dismissed them as myths rather than historical documentation, historians must critically examine these works to understand how Malaysian history unfolded (Saadon, 2019). These texts speak of Malay politics and, more directly, the institution of the Malay *sultanate* and Islamic political thought in the Malay world. They served three functions: to counsel kings, to imbue Islamic values into monarchs, and to encourage the Malays to obey the *sultan*. The didactic content of such works often reminded rulers to prioritize the people's welfare and to avoid tyranny (Othman, 2005).

The *Sulālat al-Salāṭīn* is the earliest historical record of the Malacca Malay *sultanate*. It is a valuable source for studying Malay traditions, Malay kingship, and the misconduct of rulers. It provided a format for later Malay historical works (Hafizali, 2017). Among the "Mirrors for Princes" texts, the *Tāj al-Salāṭīn* and the *Bustān al-Salāṭīn* stand out. These works examined justice, sovereignty, and reminded monarchs and courtiers of their duty to uphold Islamic law. Collectively, Malay histories and "Mirrors for Princes" literature supplement our understanding of Malay statecraft by providing a broad overview of rule, moral values, and their societal implications. Together, they form a rich corpus for analyzing the depth and sophistication of Malay political thought and its evolution (Sulkafle, 2024). The *adab* (code of conduct) of rulers is exemplified in two Malay works: the *Tāj al-Salāṭīn* (*Mahkota Raja-Raja*) and the *Ḥikāyat Iskandar Zulkarnayn*. The *Tāj al-Salāṭīn* by Bukhārī al-Jauharī, a 17th–19th century handbook for Malay kings, outlined procedures of government and emphasized the ruler's dual role as political and religious leader (Hamdan, 2019). The *Ḥikāyat Iskandar Zulkarnayn*, meanwhile, narrates the epic of Alexander the Great (*Iskandar Zulkarnayn*) as a warrior-king in Malay literature. Both works highlight justice, knowledge, religion, generosity, and ruler–subject relations as central components of *adab*.

The *Tāj al-Salāṭīn* formulates 24 principles for kings, stressing justice, knowledge, loyalty, liberality, and harmony between rulers and subjects (Hamdan, 2019). The *Ḥikāyat Iskandar Zulkarnayn* portrays Raja Iskandar as a just and wise king who embodied these traits, embraced learning, promoted justice, and spread *Islam*. He is presented as a fictionalized exemplar of the very ideals set out in the *Tāj al-Salāṭīn*. Both works illustrate how classical Malay literature positioned rulers as moral figures and defenders of religion, legitimizing their authority through *adab* (Hamdan, 2019). Before the arrival of *Islam*, Malay rulers legitimized power through the concept of *dewarāja*, or divine kingship. The term fuses *deva* (god) and *rāja* (king), reflecting the belief that rulers were divine or semi-divine heirs of the gods. Lord Indera, the celestial king of Mount Mahameru, was central to this cosmology (Abdul Rahman, 2017). The *Majapahit* and *Śrīvijaya* empires, through contact with Khmer culture, adopted this belief. Combined with animism and Hinduism, the *dewarāja* cult presented the king as omnipotent and above the law (Abdul Rahman, 2017).

With the coming of *Islam* in the 13th century, the notion of *dewarāja* was replaced with the concept of *khalīfah*. At its root lies *tawḥīd* (monotheism), articulated in the *shahādah*. *Allāh Subḥānahu wa Ta'ālā* is without partner, indivisible, and unique (Obid, 2012; Hashim, 1990). In Islamic governance, the *khalīfah* is the supreme head of the political order, guardian of *shariah*, and protector of justice, but his authority is bounded by divine law. The highest office belongs only to God, while obedience to the ruler depends on his obedience to God (Skyianen, 2017). This political transformation saw the Hindu-

Buddhist conception of kingship replaced by the *sultan*. The entry of *Islam* in the 12th–13th centuries initiated a redefinition of rulership, grounded in *tawhīd* and communal responsibility (Chamber-Loir, 2020; Syawaluddin, 2019). Malay rulers linked their genealogy to Iskandar Zulkarnain, elevating their prestige and legitimacy (Kemari, 1999). Narratives describe Iskandar's conquests, his marriage alliance with Raja Kida Hindi's daughter Shahrul Bariah, and the resulting genealogy of Malay kings (Faddad, 2017). Titles such as *zill Allāh fī al-ālam*, *zill Allāh fī al-arḍ*, *khalīfat al-mu'minīn*, and *al-sulṭān* reinforced the sacral authority of Malay kingship (Che Pa, 2019).

Islamic political philosophy reframed Malay sovereignty around *dīn* and *dawlah*. The ruler was entrusted with '*ādālah* (justice), implementation of *Shariah*, and preservation of ruler–subject relations. As *khalīfah*, the king embodied *wilāyah* (trusteeship), not absolute power (al-Mawardi, 1996; Rosenthal, 1958). The Malay conception of power thus reflected *tawhīd*, where authority is sacred trust (*amānah*) and responsibility (*taklīf*), not privilege (al-Fārābī, 1985; Nasr, 2002). This principle made justice (*ādālah*), public welfare (*maṣlahah*), and prevention of *ẓulm* (injustice) the ruler's duty (Crone, 2004; Hourani, 1991). Classical texts such as the *Tāj al-Salāṭīn* and *Sulālat al-Salāṭīn* emphasized '*ilm* (knowledge), *ḥikmah* (wisdom), and *adab* as essential for kingship (Braginsky, 2004; Milner, 2002). They also highlighted *bay'ah* (oath of allegiance), which established a conditional contract between ruler and people: loyalty in exchange for justice and adherence to *shariah* (al-Ghazali, 2005; Kamali, 1997).

Consultation (*mashwarah/shūrā*) was another principle of governance, grounded in Qur'ān 42:38. Malay rulers were expected to consult '*ulamā'*, '*ḥukamā'*, and elders through the *majlis* (council) (Hooker, 1972; Ibrahim, 1997). The ruler's authority was thus participatory, not absolute, aligning governance with *adab*, *taqwā*, and service (*khidmah*) to God and society. Islamic governance in the Malay world distinguished between *ḥaqq Allāh* (rights of God) and *ḥaqq al-'ibād* (rights of people). A just ruler safeguarded both, as neglect of either violated divine trust. The chronicles stressed that kingship (*mulk*) must be exercised with humility and justice, lest divine punishment (*'iqāb*) descend. History was seen as moral lesson, with the rise and fall of kingdoms serving as *āyāt* (signs) of *sunan Allāh*. Thus, the ruler was not a divine figure but a *khalīfah* accountable to God. Sovereignty (*siyādah*) was framed as responsibility, not privilege. Legitimate rule was measured by service to God and the ummah, ethical conduct, and adherence to *tawhīd* (Wan Mohd Nor, 1995; Osman Bakar, 2016).

Malay Traditional Political Practices based on Malay Hikayat

The geographical and climatic conditions of the Malay Archipelago also acted as intermediaries for the development of intra-regional trade by inclining the regions towards sea trade. The trend of trade since the thirteenth century has been one such determinant factor. With their active participation in the long-distance trade, thirteenth-century Malay Archipelago existed alongside the formation of states and the expansion of trade. As previously discussed, Islam was an important factor in Malay politics and culture in the early stages of the Islamization of the Malay world; it underwent rapid Islamization alongside their mounting political control (Burhanudin, 2017). The people of the Malay world identified themselves as subjects of a specific *rājā'*, whom they considered to be the representative of the state (*karāja'an*) and ruling it. The first task of interpreting Islam in the Malay Archipelago was so within this *rājā'* – centered political culture.

The *Sejarah Melayu*, for example, one of the most popular Malay classical literatures, clearly demonstrates this. The work is highly applicable to Islamic political narratives in pre-colonial Malay Archipelago, although it is termed historical literature. Considering the time during which it was written, after Islam had already become securely established as a social and political influence, the *Sejarah Melayu* presents a close picture of the meeting between Islam and Malay politics and culture based on the nature of its contents, which exhibit a very intimate familiarity with Islam. Malay rulers had politically based religious legitimacy to build a heroic figure that would be required in building the *rājā'*-centered rule in Islamized society. This would be aimed at granting religious legitimacy to the royal figure by focusing on the supernatural nature of the ruler (Burhanudin, 2017).

The book also vividly depicts a new mode of life that would build an equal and just nation. The narratives also come close to a very hierarchical structure, as though any Malays who loved and admired

the king were part of the Malay world that was under Malay sultan rule. Since the future that comes about through people's stories is still only subject to interpretation and not yet realized at that point, the monarch is "an image of hope" which is indistinct, alone, and gasping at the moment in time. The tale was written to reveal the grandeur and greatness of the king. The sultan is "an image of hope" in the minds of people, carefully constructed by the one who edited, retold, or recorded the history of Malay civilization so that the small stories that are separated from the work proper shall become apparent and travel through the Malay world (Anuarnorarai, 2005).

If a Malay chronicler of history is an artist, then his writing is "as a creation of historical imagination," and his writing is a literary art; indeed, he employs the privilege of his verse deliberately for the good of civilization outside the palace walls. It instilled a great spirit in the poets, intellectuals, thinkers, religious people, origin and Sufism scholars, activists, humanitarians, historians, artists, and common people who are dispersed and grouped in the Malay world, disseminating the influence of building a new axis that "miracle, mutation, violence, and revolution" told in the tale (Anuarnorarai, 2005). Politics and literature are two interlinked disciplines. Success in these two spheres is a product of human and life interaction. Literary works mirror the author's optimism, perception, emotion, and sensitivity as well as provide entertainment, social critique, and education. In other words, one uses literature to articulate their philosophies, agendas, visions, and political opinions. Authors lack a political platform through which they can utter their opinions because they are common citizens (Ya, 2015). Malay politics are interested in the fact that there is an independent state with a king, citizens, law, and boundaries of its own. If the king governs, owns the jurisdiction over the kingdom, and is followed by the people, then the state has shown sovereignty.

The sovereignty of the Malay king is not only to the Malays but to all other races under his jurisdiction, to all the subjects of the colony, and to their lands. A sovereign king is entitled to deal with all the affairs of their administration in whatever manner they wish to without being subject to directions or external interference (Harun, 2021). The king who is seated on the throne and invested with the authority of exercising national government is the pivotal figure who constitutes the kernel or the core of Malay politics. A king ought to ascend to power and sit on the throne in order to be divinely invested in exercising jurisdiction over the government of the country. In order to make it really accepted by the palace and by the people that the legitimacy of a newly emergent king is really accepted, the crowning ceremony of a king is an unavoidable ceremony of power succession in the palace. It is well maintained and respected with the coronation crown. There were norms and laws that existed to maintain the power of rulers and also to limit or control kings. They wished that the legitimacy of a king emerging to seize power is actually endorsed by both the palace and the people; coronating a king is a very dignified ceremony of power transfer in the palace. It is well preserved and honored with the coronation crown. The passing of laws and conventions did, on the one hand, help in upholding the powers of monarchs but also, on the other, prevented or suppressed any move on their part to divert from the initial reason for which they were put into power (Harun, 2021).

The Sufi doctrine of the "perfect man" (al-insān al-kāmil), which was the most prominent Sufi theory in the evolution of Islam during the era of the Acehnese kingdom, also provided legitimacy for the aforementioned *rājā* politics theory. The works of prominent Sufi '*ulamā*', i.e., Ibn 'Arabī and al-Jīlī, are claimed to have been involved in the Islamic discourses in the Malay Archipelago during the Islamization period. It is to these scholars that Sufi theory of the perfect man is attributed. Moreover, the concept of the ideal man was analogous to that of *rājā*-centered politics, both of which reinforced the notion of omnipotent rulers and led to the creation of the concept of the "Sufi king" (al-*rājā* al-*Ṣūfī*). Here, the king was defined in Sufi terms and was thought to have "fully realized his essential oneness with Divine Being" (Burhanudin, 2017). The works of Malay Muslim thinkers in history began with a unique discourse on the worth and priority of knowledge. This clearly shows that he acknowledges the importance of knowledge as the goal of a government. It is obvious that the sultānate has an extremely superior culture and heritage of knowledge. It stressed that kings and scholars must be friends; it is evident that he was treading in the footsteps of knowledge. Scholars were particularly adamant that the ruling class must not have enmity and haughtiness with scholars and '*ulamā*'. Since the king and other government leaders do not wish to see their kingdom ruined by God, he commanded them to follow the '*ulamā*' al-*āmilīn*, the *awliyā*', and the *anbiyā*' community of prophets. As al-

Ghazālī (2002) warns in *Naṣīḥat al-Mulūk*, "People who oppose them are like having opposed *anbiyā'*." Even the recruitment of government officials like judges, qāḍīs, governors/mayors, and ministers (*wuzarā'* and *umarā'*) should be from a scholarly background. He underscored that a qāḍī should have knowledge about the opinions of earlier scholars, particularly for judges and qāḍīs, which is the subject of this book (Harris, 2016).

Malay political philosophy depended on the Islamic moral code. He could therefore never cease explaining matters of morality whenever he was explaining matters of political leadership. How such a virtuous leader can come to be is a critical concern which political scholars and intellectuals themselves do not take note of. We hear lots of discussion regarding integrity in leadership and public service and good governance today, yet we lose our direction because we do not learn about the inner lives of individuals. Reject dualistic descriptions of matter and spirit. They are regarded as interdependent and influence one another. Islamic political thought subscribes to the notion that spirit is superior to earthly wealth, as opposed to the perceptions of most Western philosophers who downplay its value. Missing this element will hugely impact individuals' happiness and living standards worldwide (Harris, 2016). Demand for an Islam based upon Shariah started resonating in the seventeenth century, and this *rājā'*-centric politics has unfolded unchecked ever since, with the expanding Middle Eastern network, especially with Makkah and Madīnah. It is known that exchanges with the Middle East were buttressed. It was achieved through the creation of an "*ulamā'* network," which established Makkah as a key contender in the intellectual arena of the Malay Archipelago at that time. Makkah functioned as the academy of the three most powerful '*ulamā'* of the era: Yūsuf al-Maqaṣṣarī (1627–1699), 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Sinkīlī (1615–1693), and Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī (1608–1688). Together with the Meccan-centered Islamic philosophy of neo-Sufism, they formed the "*halaqah al-Jāwī'*" within the Malay Archipelago. '*ulamā'*' whom they were taught their Islamic education and who also propagated further neo-Sufism, an Islamic philosophy centered in Makkah today (Burhanudin, 2017).

Political philosophy among Malays places high regard on righteous government that is carrying out their responsibility for the people. The king or ruler governs as a *khalīfah*, as the Messenger of God, and not because of birth. His foremost concern is the moral restraints and justice ordained by Islam; should these assumptions be overlooked, the state and government will be endangered. A despotic or iron-fisted governing body which is indifferent to the welfare of individuals is detested by individuals. The final word and strongest governing authority on legal issues is Shariah. Any legislation that is self-attributed to contradicting the Shariah is not acceptable. Islamic states have been implementing this ideology since the days of the Prophet, and they have placed it in their priority agenda. Shariah, on the other hand, implies more than law or *ḥakam*; it encompasses all of the teachings of the sunnahs and the Qur'ān on belief, worship, morality, and *mu'āmalāt* as well. Therefore, the use of Shariah in its general meaning involves the use of Islam in its comprehensive meaning to all of life. But such a term cannot be limited to legislation affairs because the phrase has been used habitually in statehood matters. *Shūrā* is one of the most significant principles and concepts of the Islamic political structure. *Shūrā* is the sign of justice and wise leadership (Harris, 2016). *Shūrā* has the power to transform a country into the wise and knowledgeable rule rather than under greed and passion. Meeting and *Shūrā* are interchangeable terms, widely used alike to refer to "meetings."

The *Tāj al-Salāṭīn* has been praised as having had a deep impact on Malay thought and as being at the forefront of developing the Islamic political tradition for Malays. One of the most significant Islamic political treatises of the Malay Archipelago, written in Aceh, possibly in 1603, was the *Tāj al-Salāṭīn*. Bukhārī al-Jawharī wrote it. The following passage is especially aimed at giving the rulers religious instruction: "To explain the etiquette of the ruler (*rājā'*"), courtiers (*menterī and ḥulubalang*), all dignitaries (*orang besar-besar*), the subjects (*ra'īyat*), and all concerning the kingdom," *Tāj al-Salāṭīn* begins its treatise with the introduction "Here is the great book." Not merely did this book function in Aceh as a guide, but elsewhere as well; for example, it was a source of inspiration for the writing of a political literary work (Burhanudin, 2017). The initiatives of al-Ghazālī, *Naṣīḥat al-Mulūk*, demonstrate the necessity to render the book part of the Malay world's *rājā'*-centered politics and, ultimately, the Malay Archipelago of the seventeenth century. Despite the fact that the *Naṣīḥat al-Mulūk*'s Malay translation dates from 1700, it is possible to assert that the book had already played a significant role in *rājā'*-centered politics. *Naṣīḥat al-Mulūk* took from *Tāj al-Salāṭīn*. The lectures providing the ruler

with "practical advice on the right behavior" were given in both works. The *Tāj al-Salāṭīn* was to fill the gap for placing Islam in the top position of the Malay archipelago's politics, which was *rājā*-centered (Burhanudin, 2017). Malay political thinking is against the premise that, unlike secular political regimes, there must be dualism between religion and the state or between morality and politics. Secularist thinking regards reason and revelation, the world and the hereafter, and religion and state as opposites to one another that can never be reconciled. The position of Imām al-Ghazālī is that to command the felicity of the world is a prerequisite for commanding the felicity of religion (*niẓām al-dīn bi-niẓām al-dunyā*). This is proof that Islam never discriminates between religion and the world or the afterlife. Islam is so concerned with the proper administration of the world, or life, more particularly issues related to statehood and affairs of the public (al-Ghazālī in Harris, 2016).

The Concept of the "Sufi King" in Malay Political Thought

One of the greatest influences of *Islam* upon Malay political theory was the creation of the template for the *Ṣūfī king* (*al-rājā' al-ṣūfī*)—a ruler whose authority was grounded in *Islamic metaphysics* and the *Sufi* ideal of the *al-insān al-kāmil* (Perfect Man). This philosophical vision positioned the king as *khalīfah* (vicegerent of God) on earth. Crucially, it was not confined to literary imagination but was embodied in practice by rulers such as Sultan Iskandar Muda of Aceh (r. 1607–1636), Sultan Alā'uddīn Ri'āyat Shāh al-Qaḥḥār of Melaka (r. 1477–1488), and Sultan 'Abd al-Jalīlul Jalāluddīn of Brunei (r. 1649–1652). These *sulāṭīn* absorbed *Sufi* morality, cultivated friendships with eminent '*ulamā*', and embodied spiritual as well as political leadership. Sultān Iskandar Muda, for example, patronized Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī's teachings at the Acehnese court, fostering a political theology grounded in divine justice and knowledge (Burhanudin, 2017).

Sultan Alā'uddīn's close ties with *Sufi* guides and adherence to *Islamic* law further demonstrate the blurring between statecraft and piety (Che Pa, n.d.; Osman, 2007). Likewise, Sultan 'Abd al-Jalīlul Jalāluddīn's use of honorifics such as *ẓill Allāh fī al-arḍ* ("Shadow of God on Earth") illustrates how Brunei's monarchy asserted cosmological authority during moments of *Sufi* renewal (Anchong, n.d.). The *Sufi king* thus functioned as a legitimating model where spiritual charisma (*karāmah*), patronage of knowledge, and compliance with *shariah* were central to political authority. This form of political theology deliberately avoided the secular dichotomy between religion and worldly affairs, echoing Imām al-Ghazālī's maxim that "the well-being of religion depends upon the well-being of the world" (*niẓām al-dīn bi-niẓām al-dunyā*) (Harris, 2016). The synthesis of *adab*, metaphysics, and jurisprudence in this model became the dominant template of Malay political thought and remained influential well into the nineteenth century.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this article provides a comprehensive exploration of the profound influence of Islam on various facets of Malay culture, including religion, education, politics, literature, and traditional practices. It delves into the historical introduction of Islam to the Malays, highlighting the impact of Sufi sects and Arab scholars on the Islamization process. The document also discusses the role of Arabic script and Jawi literature in Islamic education, emphasizing their significance in shaping Malay culture and worldview. Furthermore, it examines the intersection of Malay politics and Islamic political theory, tracing the evolution of political structures and governance influenced by Islamic principles. The text also explores the significance of the "*Taj us-Salatin*" in shaping Islamic political concepts in the Malay Archipelago, highlighting the fusion of religion and state in Malay political philosophy. Additionally, it delves into the role of scholars and intellectuals in shaping Islamic governance and emphasizes the importance of knowledge and wisdom in political leadership.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to acknowledge the moral support provided by Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Shah Alam, Selangor, and the Faculty of Art and Design, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia, throughout the course of this research.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors agree that this research was conducted in the absence of any self-benefits, commercial or financial conflicts and declare the absence of conflicting interests with the funders.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

The author confirms sole responsibility for the following contributions to this work: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Resources, Data curation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Visualization, and Project administration.

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