Jawi Script in Hadith Literatures in Malaysia: Issues and Challenges

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Abstract. Jawi script is the Malay community identity and had played a very important role in civilization and knowledge significantly in the spread of Islamic knowledge in the ASEAN region. Malaysian Islamic studies nowadays are divided into several niches such as aqidah (Theology), tafsir (Quranic Interpretation), hadith (Prophetic Traditions), tasawwuf (Sufism) and fiqh (Islamic Jurispundence). This research is focusing on the role of the Jawi’s script in the spread of the hadith studies and literatures from the 19th century to the 21st century in Malaysia. Information about Jawi literature development, hadith studies and current issues of Jawi script in Malaysia was gathered using qualitative method. Research result shows in 19th century, all hadith literatures were written in Jawi script and then in dual script (Jawi and Rumi) in 20th century. Finally, in 21st century, Jawi script has since been replaced by a Latin alphabet called Rumi. Current changes had caused Jawi script transformation and its significant influence in the development, studies and Hadith script writings in Malaysia. Malaysians nowadays are Jawi illiterate. Actions are taken by the Malaysian government to promote Jawi script in younger generations to preserve it as Malay literature identity forever.

Keywords: Jawi Script, Hadith Literatures, Malaysia

1. Introduction

Long before the twentieth centuries, Malaysia was known as Tanah Melayu which mean a place or land where the Malay people lives. It is also known as the Golden Continents by the ancient Indian civilization (Suvarnadvipta) and Chersonesus Aurea in Ptolemy’s world map. Its strategic location has made Tanah Melayu an ideal meeting point for the Chinese merchants from the east and Indian merchants from the west as well as merchants from all over the world since the first century. As a result a new international contact was formed between Malays and the internationals. At this point of time, Malays had already have a writing system such as rencong words used by Malays from Acheh, Kawi words used by the Malays of Bugis and Winggi words used by the Javanese Malays. Throughout the years Tanah melayu had received so many foreign merchants from all over the world. This has given a great impact to the local culture and their way of lives resulting many them embraced Hindu and Buddha from India. They had also adapted the writing systems from India such as Palawa, Brahmi and Devanagari.

Merchants from the Middle East started to come to Tanah Melayu in the eleventh century. The Arabs had brought together with them their writings and Islam religion. Around the thirteen century Islam started to spread in Tanah Melayu and caused a major impact to the Malays lifestyle. It has not just changed their beliefs, but also their writing systems in the Malay world. After the arrival of Islam and the Arab merchants, writing systems had changed drastically. Local people no longer use the Indian script that they had been using for a period of time. Less people are familiar with script. Its usage is no longer practical and unsuitable for the preaching of Islam. A new scripting system based on the Arabic characters and wordings were invented. It is called the Jawi script and had become an important medium in understanding Islam and the Holy Quran after the arrival of Islam to Tanah Melayu.
2. **Jawi Script’s History**

According to R.J Wilkinson dictionary, the word ‘Jawi’ in the Malay language is used to describe a tree called ‘jejawi’ and it is also know a type of rice. Based on the history of the Malay language the word ‘Jawi’ 杰華 (جاو ) originated from the Arabic word ‘Jawah’ جو . In Arabic the adjective word of Jawah or Jawi refers to all nations of the South East Asia. It also include all Malays covering from Champa, Patani, Aceh, Jawa, Minangkabau, Mandailing, Sunda, Bugis, Banjar, Lombok, Filipina and all other regions practicing Islam and Malay language.

The word جو (al-jaww) also means wind. During the old days people from outside of Tanah Melayu used to called it as the Land Under The Winds. All of the classical Arabic alphabet has been absorbed into Jawi script to spell Malay words and some of Arabic words that has been used especially in Islamic terms. Initially all those Arabic words could not accomodate all of Malay unique sounds and phonic. With the intelligence and creativity of the Islamic scholars at that time, they managed to accomodate the Arabic alphabets into the Malay-Jawi script writing system by combining all twenty nine Arabic letters with six new non-Arabic letters that they had invented. Those six new Jawi letters are گا (ga), پا (pa), گا (ga), گا (va), نگا (nga) and نیا (nya) that represents some common phonic sounds of Malay language. These new letters adopt the basic Arabic letters with some additional dot symbols together with the original letter like گ (گ) و ف (ف) and ی (ی).

The Jawi script writing system has gone through a systematic evolution through times due to current requirements. Initially the Jawi system had adopt the Arabic language system as below:

- with the use of lines like ات (i-tu) جک (ji-ka) and اک (a-ku)
- still influenced by the Arabic scripting system but without any lines like حک ات (known as the “Lineless Arabic” scripting system.
- added some vocal characters like ا (a), و (u) and (i). More Malay phonic had influenced the Malay language spelling system by adding the vowel to the first syllable like مات (ma-t), يوم (bu-m) and قول (pu-l).
• This new Malay Jawi system managed to resolve most of the demography if not all thus creating another evolution to the Jawi spelling system by adding additional vowel between two syllables like ت (ma-ti) ب (bu-mi) and ل (pu-la).

With this latest enhancement and evolution, the Jawi scripting system is now perfect and had played important roles such as the medium to spread Islam, language development and Malay culture enhancements.

3. Hadith Literatures in Malaysia

The history of the Jawi literature is closely related to the arrival of Islam to the Malay Archipelago. With the existence of the Jawi literature system, Islamic scholars had written many Islamic scripts during that time. In the 12th century until 18th century, most of the Islamic scripts written were about aqidah, tasawwuf and translations from the Arabic Islamic scripts. Only after that there were Jawi scripts written about tafsir, hadith and figh. As a second most reliable source of Islamic reference after the Holy Quran, Islamic scholars continues to study hadith and it was used as a supporting argument and dalil in any Islamic studies discussions. However, the usage of hadith in Jawi scripts in 19th century was merely insignificant and generally used. This is due to the fact that the current trend at that time did not put the hadith as the main subject matter among most of the Islamic scholar. There was no argument, research about sanad (long chain of narrators), matan (text of the hadith), status or the hadith level in script writing. The first hadith literature that was written in Malay Language and Jawi script was by Tok Wan Ali Kutan entitled al-Jauhar al-Mawhub in the year of 1888, and it is a translation of Lubab al Hadith by Imam al-Suyuti. At this time the usage of Jawi literature was already very wide for example it had been used as the language medium in all aspect of life such as trading, official letters among Malay state leaders as well the English rulers, religious scripts and letters and so forth.

During the 20th century Tanah Melayu was under the English colonization era until the year of 1914. However Jawi literature continued to live and develop rapidly as people began to realize the importance to preserve the identity of the Malay human race and to get the independence from the English colonization. Subsequently the hadith studies had spread widely and began to gain interest among Malays. The in depth studies were widely conducted in traditional/informal education systems such as private tutor at home, mosque and pondok (small hut) as well as formal education system such as Malay schools. Malay language and Jawi script was formally adopted as official post in the government sector and was officially implemented in public school. There had been so many hadith scripts in hadith studies like Ulum Hadith. The writing of hadith in Jawi’s script has been produced by Malay scholars such as Syeikh Uthman Jalaludin with book entitled Mata’l al-Anwar wa Majami’ al-Azhar, (1353H), Mohamed Idris al-Marbawi with Kitab Idangan Guru Sahih al-Bukhari wa Muslim (1358H), Bulugh al-Maram and Bahr al-Madhi. Haji Yaakub bin Hj. Ahmad wrote about Mustalah Hadith in his book Risalah Kecil Mengenai Mustalah Hadith, Haji Abdul Rahman bin Nik Abdullah with Hadis al-Ahkam that used as a textbook in secondary schools in Malaysia in the 1960s. This effort continued by Mustafa bin Abdul Rahman with book Hadith Empat Puluh, Terjemahan Mukhtasar Ibn Abu Jamrah (1968), Pedoman Hadith Junjungan Rasulullah SAW (1953) and Sabda Utusan Ilahi (1951). Meanwhile, Syeikh Abdul Halim al-Hadi wrote kitab Ilham al-Bari and Tajdhib Atraf al-Hadith (1938).

After the Malaysian independence in 1957, the importance of Jawi literature began to fade and was taken over by Latin alphabet called ‘Rumi’ literature. There were so many competitions where there were so many
English school set up by the English colonizer that brought up the Rumi literature as priority. In 1963 the Malaysian Parliament had approved an act called Bahasa Kebangsaan 1963 that ruled out Rumi literature as the official post thus eliminating the Jawi literatures accept in Islamic subject in school. The Islamic scholars are among the most affected that they had to write their Islamic scripts in dual literature (Jawi and Rumi) to meet the current audience needs. Dato’ Hj. Mohd Nor bin Ismail dan Syeikh Abdullah Basmeih had produced four books. They are Muqaddimah Mastika Hadith Rasulullah SAW, Mastika Hadis Rasulullah SAW Jilid Pertama, Kedua and Ketiga in 1973. These books are about the hadith of Islamic pillars to guide Muslims with their current issues and problems at that point of time. Drs. Abdul Ghani Azmi had written a book about the danger of khurafat and bid‘ah (refers to any innovations in Islam religious matters) and the spread of fabricated hadiths among Malaysian communities like Himpunan Hadith Maudhu’ dan Yang Sangat Dhaif, Himpunan Hadith-Hadith Dhaif dan Amalan Bi’ dah Bulan Muharam, Rejab, Sya’ban dan Ramadhan.

The continuity of the Islamic script writings in hadith was continued by the Malay academician in higher education institutions in the universities until the 21st century. Hadith studies had been made as the compulsory subject for all Islamic Studies courses in the University of Malaya, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, International Islamic University of Malaysia, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia and followed by other private Islamic Colleges that has been acknowledged by the Malaysian government. University students who have hadith studies in their course subject must produce a final year project, thesis and book about hadith or new findings in Bachelors’ Degree, Masters and Doctorate of Philosophy. From that there are also many other activities like conferences, workshops and specific colloquium related to hadith studies in the effort to gather findings of Islamic scholars to elevate the hadith knowledge. Among the contemporary hadith scholars in Malaysia are Dr. Abdul Hayei Abdul Sukor, Associate Professor Dr. Fauzi Deraman, Professor Jawiah Dakir, Associate Professor Dr. Udah@Budah Mohsin, Associate Professor Dr. Muhammed Abu Layth al-Khayr Abadi, Dr. Habeeb Rahman Ibramsa and many others. They have all produced numerous books and researches to benefit the Muslims in Malaysia in this 21st century and their books are written in Rumi literature.

4. Issues and Challenges

The hadith writing in Malaysia had gone through a transformational process that changes through time. In the 19th century hadith studies were only taught informally and traditionally in mosque and pondok. Meanwhile hadith literatures were fully written in Jawi script as dalil of proof to support the arguments in those scripts without highlighting the sanad, takhrij (analysis and tracking of hadith) and the status of the hadiths. In the 20th century the hadith subject status has been upgraded by including it as a syllabus in secondary Islamic school in Malaysia. Thus the feedback and result in the Islamic script writing mainly in the hadiths area had been very positive and Jawi script again had become the knowledge medium among Malays.

However towards the end of the 20th century, the Jawi script began to fade away as it was gradually replaced by the Rumi script that have a very strong influence from the West thus causing the hadith literatures written in both Jawi and Rumi to meet the current changes. Robust changes in the education curriculum system bring up the Rumi literature as the official language and Jawi literature is forgotten. Jawi literature remains among Muslims and mostly Malays in their study medium of Islamic studies. Unlike the old times all races are Jawi literate. However, because of the modern world, Malaysians are more interested to master Rumi in pursuing a career progression and daily affairs. Jawi script is facing a serious issue among
Malays in Malaysia. It is now in a very critical stage where not many people know about Jawi alphabet yet again able to read or write in Jawi literature. Younger generations nowadays no longer fluent in Jawi literature compare to earlier days where everybody were Jawi literate regardless of their age category. This is due to the lack of awareness to preserve Jawi script as one of the Malay heritage and identity.

Now in the 21st century hadith studies had become more popular among Islamic scholars in Malaysian Universities. More and more hadith literatures are written by Islamic academicians to help current issues faced by the Muslims in Malaysia but most of the scripts are written in Rumi letters and not in Jawi letters. However, nowadays the Malaysian government had taken a few initiatives to preserve this Jawi script in Malaysia by organizing Jawi writing clinics in IKIM radio channel, Jawi writing contests, Jawi literature conferences and exhibitions, enforce Jawi writing in Islamic subjects in school, a Jawi section in daily newspapers, free Jawi newspapers, Jawi writing on signboards, billboards, business premises as well as funding any research or development on Jawi applications, games, coursewares, websites or setting a Jawi international centres. They began teaching and learning the Jawi literature since the early aged of primary school. This is meant to nurture the love towards Jawi script as one of the Malay heritage. We see people from different race not even Malaysian but around the world who have mastered the Jawi literature due to the unique literature itself. This can be seen among international students from other parts of the world that come to study in Malaysia’s universities.

5. Conclusion

Hadith script writing in Jawi literature in Malaysia had undergone three phases, namely, first phase (19th century) all hadith scripts are written in Jawi, the second phase (20th century) hadith scripts are written in Jawi and Rumi, the third phase (21st century) hadith scripts are written in Rumi literature. Rumi had taken place and replace Jawi literature in the 20th century education system. However more people had begun to realize the importance to preserve the Jawi literature to restore Jawi script as the heritage and identity for Malays. There are a few measures can be done to by Malaysian like we could have a lot of social activities to promote Jawi literature to attract more people to have interest towards Jawi literature and its uniqueness. Teaching and learning techniques can be improvise in a more creative and interactive ways using modern and latest technology in order to nurture the interest among younger generations towards Jawi literature. It is high hope that not only the Malaysian government but also the social community to gather their effort towards preserving the Jawi literature so that it will continue and remain as one on the unique literature that resembles the Malay culture in Malaysia.

6. References