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 ICR explores contemporary dynamics of Islamic experience in legal and religious practice, education and science, economic and financial institutions.

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ICR promotes the Malaysian initiative of *Tajdīd Hadārī* or Civilisational Renewal, with its component principles: 1.
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CONTENTS

Editorial Mohammad Hashim Kamali	189–192
Articles	
Development of the Implementation of <i>Hudud</i> in Brunei <i>Tun Abdul Hamid Mohamad</i>	193–203
A Quantitative Study of the Role Shariah Boards and Bank Ownership Structures Play in Enhancing the Financial Performance of Islamic Banks: A Case Study of Pakistan <i>Qaiser Abbas, Sheila Ainon Yussof and M Naeem Anjum</i>	204–224
Strengthening Indonesia's Islamic Financial Inclusion: An Analytic Network Process Approach Mohammad Mahbubi Ali, Abrista Devi, Hamzah Bustomi, Hafas Furqani and Muhammad Rizky Prima Sakti	225–251
Determinants of Corporate <i>Waqf</i> Contribution from the Perspective of Muslims in Malaysia Muhammad Fakhrurrazi Ahmad	252–276
Forgiveness and Restorative Justice in Islam and the West: A Comparative Analysis Ramizah Wan Muhammad	277–297
Industrial Revolution 4.0: Risks, Sustainability, and Implications for OIC States Ildus Rafikov and Riaz Ansary	298–324
The Regulatory Challenges Facing Islamic Banking: An Empirical Analysis from Ilorin, Nigeria <i>Hakeemat Ijaiya</i>	325–336
Viewpoints	
The Pandemic and Post-Lockdown Impact on Nature Shahino Mah Abdullah	337–340
COVID-19: Reshaping the Future Direction of Islamic Finance <i>Mohammad Mahbubi Ali</i>	341–344

Halal Park 2.0: Organising Halal Production and Supply Networks <i>Marco Tieman and Barbara Ruiz-Bejarano</i>	345–349
Significant Speeches, Events and Developments	
Webinar: Book Discussion: <i>Maqasid al-Shariah: Antara Nas dan</i> Maslahah, Satu Pendekatan Sistem (9 April 2020) Apnizan Abdullah	350
Webinar: Pandemic and the Movement Control Order in the Islamic History (16 April 2020) <i>Mohammad Mahbubi Ali</i>	351
Webinar: Contagious Disease: Islamic and Malaysian Perspectives (23 April 2020) Muhammad Fakhrurrazi Ahmad	351-352
Webinar: The Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Islamic Banking (30 April 2020) <i>Mohammad Mahbubi Ali</i>	352–353
Webinar: Kesan PKP Terhadap Kontrak Pekerjaan dan Perbankan di Malaysia (Impact of the MCO on Work and Banking Contracts in Malaysia) (14 May 2020) <i>Apnizan Abdullah</i>	353
Webinar: How Fintech Reshapes the Future of Islamic Finance Post COVID-19 (4 June 2020) <i>Mohammad Mahbubi Ali</i>	353–354
Webinar: The US Racial Unrest: Muslims, Social Justice, and Beyond (9 June 2020) Wan Naim Wan Mansor	354–355
Webinar: Health Security & Public Participation Post COVID-19 (17 June 2020) Ahlis Fatoni	355

Webinar: COVID-19 from the Perspective of Islamic Theology and Spirituality (9 July 2020) Muhammad Fakhrurrazi Ahmad	356
Forum: Rukun Negara: Revisiting Its Role, Pillars of National Unity (IAIS Malaysia, 28 July 2020) <i>Wan Naim Wan Mansor</i>	356–357
Online Research Camp for Academic and Policy Research (11 August 2020) Mohammad Mahbubi Ali	357–358
Kemerdekaan dan Aspirasi Belia Negara 2020: Hubungan Agama dan Ideologi Negara di Nusantara: Generasi Muda Pewaris Legasi Tanah Air (International Forum: Independence and National Youth Aspiration 2020: The Relationship between Religion and National Ideology in the Nusantara: The Younger Generation as Heirs to the Legacy of the Homeland) (IAIS Malaysia, 27 August 2020) <i>Ahmad Badri Abdullah</i>	358–359
Webinar: Managing Shariah Non-Compliant Risk in Financial Institutions (3 September 2020) Mohammad Mahbubi Ali	359
Forum: The 'Social Contract' and the Future of Nation-Building in Malaysia (IAIS Malaysia, 17 September 2020) <i>Wan Naim Wan Mansor</i>	359–360
Webinar: COVID-19: An Issue in Religion and Science (22 October 2020) Ahmad Badri Abdullah	360–361
Online Islamic Finance Talk Series: Sense and Sustainability: Islamic Finance for a More Humanistic Economy (26 October 2020) Ahmad Badri Abdullah	361

Online Roundtable Discussion: The Role of Civil Societies and Faith-
based Organisations in Global Nuclear Disarmament
(12 November 2020)
Wan Naim Wan Mansor362

Book Review

Syed Farid Alatas and Abdolreza Alami, The Civilisational and Cultural363–367Heritage of Iran and the Malay World: A Cultural DiscourseAlexander Wain

BOOK REVIEW

Syed Farid Alatas and Abdolreza Alami (eds.) - The Civilisational and Cultural Heritage of Iran and the Malay World: A Cultural Discourse

(Petaling Jaya and Kuala Lumpur: Gerakbudaya Enterprise and the Cultural Centre, Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2018), ix + 187 pp. ISBN: 978-967-0311-21-0

by Alexander Wain, Associate Research Fellow, International Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies (IAIS) Malaysia.

This slender volume emerged out of an eponymous conference held 11-12 February 2017 at University Malaya (Malaysia). Organised by its host in collaboration with the Embassy of Iran in Kuala Lumpur, the National University of Singapore, and the University of Nottingham Teaching Centre (Malaysia), it sought to sketch the historical depth of Iranian-Malay cultural interaction as a basis for redefining contemporary interstate relations. As succinctly outlined by the Iranian ambassador to Malaysia, Marzieh Afkham, in her keynote address (reproduced as Chapter 1, pp. 1-4): "by holding [up] the light of historical relationships, we want to build a better future for current and future generations" (p. 3). In tune with this aim, the contributions within this volume universally stress the importance of shared cultural heritage (as opposed to short-term economic or strategic gain) for constructing durable diplomatic relationships. As A. M. Sabeghi argues in Chapter 10 ('Cultural Discourse between Iran and the Malay World: Why and How?' pp. 119-123), "the importance of culture in... enhancing interstate relations" should never be underestimated (p. 121).

In purely academic terms, however, the current volume provides a welcome contrast (even corrective) to recent studies emphasising historical Malay Muslim connectivity with the Arab world. Over the past few decades, notable scholars like Syed Naquib al-Attas have sought to attribute (especially early) Malay Islamisation solely to Arab intervention. Such a conclusion, however, ignores the extended periods of Persianate influence characteristic of Southeast Asia's early Islamic history. By re-focussing the reader's attention on these, the present volume more than justifies its existence within the wider scholarly canon.

Of the book's thirteen substantive chapters, the vast majority (ten) are historical or literary in tone, pertaining to matters surrounding the Malay world's initial Islamisation (thirteenth to seventeenth centuries). In Chapter 2 ('Persian Loanwords in Malay: An Analysis of Spelling and Meaning,' pp. 5-13), Muhammad Bukhari Lubis outlines the body of philological evidence supporting "early" (seemingly thirteenth- to fourteenth-century) Persianate influence among the Malays. Providing a helpful list of Persian loanwords in Malay (taken from earlier surveys by A. Bausani and R. Jones), Lubis draws our attention to their specificity: the vast majority relate to either trade (pasar, syahbandar, saudagar) or the trappings of power (shah, istana, lasykar, mohor, takhta). While this observation is certainly important. Lubis is reluctant to pursue the discussion further, to ask how, when, and why such borrowings took place. Did they, for example, arrive directly from Persia or via an intermediary? Given the Malay elite were instrumental in establishing Islam across the region, does their penchant for Persian royal terms indicate a Persian role in conversion? By failing to address these issues, Lubis unhappily reduces his article to little more than a descriptive overview.

In Chapter 3 ('The Persian and Arabian Musical and Cultural Impact on the Early Global Trade-Routes to *Lautan Melayu* [Malay Sea],' pp. 15-38), Hilarian Larry Francis presents a fascinating exploration of the "interconnectedness of the Persian musical and cultural tradition right across the southern Arabian Peninsula to the *Lautan Melayu*" (p. 15). His aim is to challenge prevailing assumptions that the Malay *gambus* (a lute developed over the fourteenth to fifteenth centuries) originates with the near-identical Arabic *ud*. The *ud*, he notes, is characteristically made up of two separate pieces of wood, while the *gambus* uses a single piece. In this respect, the *gambus* is more akin to the Persian *barbat* or *rabab*, another near-identical form of lute that predates the *ud*. Indeed, Francis observes, early Malay texts often refer to the lute as a *barbat*, but never as an *ud*. Finally, Francis considers the mechanism(s) underlying the transmission of this instrument, identifying as likely disseminators either merchants who used it for entertainment or Sufis who required it for religious rituals.

Remaining in the fifteenth century, Chapter 14 ('Zheng He's Voyages and Ma Huan's Account on [sic] Malacca,' pp. 167-174), by Elham Sadat Mirzania, introduces readers to the famed voyages of Zheng He (conducted 1405-1433) and the possible role they played in Islamisation. While Mirzania manages to steer clear of the now debunked *Kronik Tionghua* of Semarang and Cirebon, she roots herself in outdated claims that early Javanese-Malay mosque architecture descends from a Chinese prototype introduced by Zheng He. While several early (but post-Zheng He) regional mosques do display Chinese decorative influences, recent research by H. Njoto convincingly establishes their structural forms as

continuations of pre-Islamic Southeast Asian typologies. Mirzania concludes by contrasting Zheng He's (relatively) peaceful voyages with later patterns of European colonial aggression; with Iran's current geo-political situation evidently in mind, Mirzania rightly argues that if "people can respect the tradition, culture and civilisation of other nations, there might be less conflict and misunderstanding between countries" (pp. 173-4).

Chapter 4 ('The Role and Contribution of Iranian Scholars to the Islamic Intellectual Tradition in Indonesia from the Past to the Present, 'pp. 39-57) kicks off a series of three articles exploring the nexus between pre-modern Persian thought (political, mystical, theological) and Malay Muslim culture. Contributed by Husain Herivanto, it draws particular attention to possible instances of Shi'a practice within both Javanese and Malay Islam, including the buka luwur (changing of the curtains) ceremony associated with the grave of Java's Sunan Kudus (also known as Ja'far Sadiq) and the Ashura celebrations evident throughout the region, including in Aceh. Since the history and form of such practices is not well understood, Herivanto's attempt to detail them here is laudable. Nevertheless, several supposed instances of past Shi'a practice provided by him are tenuous. Many would consider it eccentric, for example, to claim that ninth-century Perlak (north Sumatra) was a Shi'a kingdom, or that Hamza al-Fansuri (d. 1527 or c. 1600) and Shams al-Din al-Sumatrani (d. 1630) were Shi'a scholars. Over the modern period, Herivanto briefly examines the impact of Iranian-funded educational institutions, research centres, and book publishing concerns in Indonesia.

Continuing the theme of intellectual connectivity, Chapter 5 ('Sufism: The Way of Intercultural Dialogue between Iran and the Malay World,' pp. 59-64), by Mahmoodreza Esfandiar and Faezah Rahman, helpfully lists the principle Persian mystical works cited by Malay scholars Hamza al-Fansuri, Shams al-Din al-Sumatrani, Nur al-Din al-Raniri (d. 1658), and 'Abd al-Samad al-Palimbani (d. 1789). In Chapter 9 ('An Introduction to Hamzah Fansuri's *Sharabul-'Ashiqin, Asrarul 'Arifin* and *al-Muntahi*: A Translation Project in Progress,' pp. 107-118), Amir H. Zekrgoo and Leyla H. Tajer perform a similar operation regarding Hamza al-Fansuri's three most important mystical works. Sorely missing from both chapters, however, is an enumeration of context—of how and why these Persian texts were used, and what that tells us about the Malay world over the relevant period. Nevertheless, both articles constitute valuable reference points; the second is also a preparatory study for a much larger translation project that will be eagerly awaited by many.

By far the most thoroughly discussed topic in this volume is *Taj al-Salatin* (Crown for Princes), a Persian-influenced ethical work written in (or translated into) Malay around 1603 by Bukhari al-Jauhari. Produced in Aceh, it delineates

the characteristics, duties, and responsibilities of the ideal ruler. Syed Farid Alatas initiates discussion of this topic in Chapter 7 ('The Persian Roots of Malay Political Theory: *Taj al-Salatin*,' pp. 79-92) by overviewing the text's well-established roots in the Persian *nasihat al-muluk* (advice for kings) genre. Alatas characterises the text (as others have before him) as inherently anti-feudal. Pre-modern Malay society, he argues, was heavily feudalistic in nature, being characterised by servile attitudes towards (often corrupt) authority figures. *Taj al-Salatin* therefore constitutes a valuable and unique opposing humanistic tradition designed to limit royal power. Surviving feudalistic tendencies within Malaysia's modern electorate could be limited by its continued consideration among political theorists.

Taj al-Salatan is next taken up in Chapter 11 ('Mirroring the Mirrors of Princes: Persian *Adab* Humanism and *Tajus Salatin*,' pp. 125-148). Written by Azhar Ibrahim, this contribution covers much the same ground as Alatas, while more firmly tying *Taj al-Salatin*'s universal ethical humanism into pre-Islamic Persian thought. In consequence, it effectively 'secularises' the text by differentiating it from traditional Arab scholasticism and its dependency on Islamic theology. As Ibrahim notes, this marks *Taj al-Salatin* out as unique within the Malay literary canon. The final article on *Taj al-Salatin* is Chapter 13 ('The Influence of [the] *Siyasat Name* [of] Nizham al-Mulk on Tajussalatin by Bukhari al-Jauhari,' pp. 155-166). Written by Bastian Zulyeno, this entry draws numerous parallels between *Taj al-Salatin* and the *Siyasat Name* of Nizham al-Mulk (d. 1092), a key *nasihat al-muluk* text. For example, Zulyeno traces ten of the illustrative parables within *Taj al-Salatin* to *Siyasat Name*. Although also not original, this observation refines our understanding of pre-modern Persianate influence in the Malay world.

Chapter 6 ('Justice and the Social Thought of Syed Hussein Alatas and Ali Shariati,' pp. 65-77) begins a discussion of more contemporary issues. Contributed by Teo Kee Len, it arguably constitutes the most conceptually sophisticated article in the book. Framing justice "as an instrument of power in the process of social struggle" (p. 65), Teo contrasts Syed Hussein Alatas's vision of social justice with Ali Shariati's. While both authors defined social justice in very Islamic terms, as "political freedom, economic fairness and cultural rejuvenation" (p. 74), they envisioned its attainment differently: Hussein Alatas championed a quietist approach centred on reforming existing power structures, while Shariati favoured overturning the old order. Unfortunately, Teo does not articulate why these two scholars held such differing views, or why Hussein Alatas was politically side lined in Malaysia while Shariati became central to Iran's Islamic Revolution. Nevertheless, Teo's article is an interesting and worthwhile analysis of two significant twentieth-century Muslim thinkers. Hamideh Molaei contributes Chapter 8 ('Us and Us? The Representation of Iran in Malaysian Popular News Media and Vice Versa through an Intercultural Approach,' pp. 93-105). Examining "how the dichotomisation of us/them in western media is different from the us/us approach amongst Iran and Malaysia as two significant Islamic countries" (p. 97), Molaei analyses depictions of Iran in two English-language Malaysian media outlets, *New Straits Times* and *The Star*, in addition to how Malaysia is represented by Iran's official Islamic Republic News Agency. With her sample ranging over a one-month period (22 Dec 2016-22 Jan 2017), Molaei extracts some interesting results: while two thirds (66.7 per cent) of Iran-themed articles in *New Straits Times* were positive, only half that number (33.3 per cent) were in *The Star*. Significantly, therefore, *New Straits Times* sourced its articles itself, while *The Star* relied on Reuters, a Western organisation suffuse with Western values. While these results must remain provisional in the absence of a larger sample size, they confirm suggestions that nations with shared cultural values tend to represent each other more positively.

In Chapter 12 ('Art Economy and Globalisation: A Study of the Market Condition of Iranian Art in Malaysia,' pp. 149-153), Neda Zoghi provides an interesting exploration of how the international art market can promote Iranian culture. Since the establishment of Christie's Dubai in 2004, international interest in contemporary Iranian art has blossomed, especially in Malaysia. Although sales have declined with the re-imposition of sanctions, Iranian artists and Malaysian collectors continue to express interest in one another. Zoghi explores how, since 2013, one of Southeast Asia's largest visual arts markets, Art Expo Malaysia, has transformed Malaysia into an important marketplace for Iranian art. With Malaysia's Contemporary Arts and Islamic Arts Museums both expressing interest in exhibiting Iranian art, contemporary Malaysia constitutes a unique opportunity to broaden Iranian international cultural visibility.

Although in many respects rudimentary, *The Civilisational and Cultural Heritage of Iran and the Malay World* is a laudable attempt to address a muchneglected historical issue, while also relating it to the contemporary world. The proselytising role Persianate peoples played in the dissemination of Islam through the Malay world is a poorly understood yet crucial topic for students of the region. It is to be hoped that this volume will prompt a re-examination of that important subject.