

Sharing, Preserving, and Transforming the Past: Brunei's Islamic Model of Cultural Dialogue and Development

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ABSTRACT: *Brunei Darussalam is a unique political entity in Southeast Asia. It obviously maintains the structure and form of a traditional political system. It also claims affinity and origin in Islam, Malay, and Monarchy. The Sultan has been leader and ruler for the country and Muslims. In Brunei, the ruler is also the head of Islam. The official version of religious practices is derived from the Shāfi'ī school, even though adoption of other opinions is permitted, especially if public welfare requires such an undertaking. This paper exposes on Brunei's experience in upholding Islam and keeping close to its cultural heritage that facilitates its smooth moving forward to take part in globalized world. In Brunei, like the most parts of the Malay world, Islam transforms religion without political dislocation and dynastic change. This could not happen without the quality of the new religion and peace it propagates. The manifestation of Islam in Brunei represents the many important points and sublime values. Propelled this strong foundation and deep cultural embrace, Islam as manifested in Brunei facilitates the outward-looking character the country opted since the beginning of the 20th century.*

KEY WORDS: *Brunei Darussalam, Islam, Malay, Monarchy, Shāfi'ī school, custom, modern state, and globalization.*

INTRODUCTION

Empowered by its religious and cultural legacy, Brunei has actively and optimistically extended hands to the world. The development of Islam in the country with all its manifestation paved the way for an open and positivist approach to friendship and cooperation. Indeed, the coming of the British in 1906 can be considered an important watershed in Brunei's

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lofty heart – being open to the world, but with principle. If it has succeeded in molding the resilience of culture and dynamism of Islam, the path to initiate communication with the world is made smoother. As I have argued elsewhere, Brunei’s choice of particular school of thought and legal system cannot be seen as hindrance to tolerance and universalism. The choice, indeed, paves the way for more confident outward-looking approach and cooperation among world communities. More particularly, the experience and the fact of life in the country have born the moderate way of religious living and believing.

Further, for many students of Islam in the Malay world, the “Islamic Declaration of Cultural Diversity of 2004”,¹ and other comparable documents produced by the UNESCO (United Nations for Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) in the beginning of this century, serve no surprise. They, indeed, confirm the way the Muslim population of Southeast Asia has applied Islam in diverse cultures and traditions. The Declaration’s reference to cultural dialogue, diversity, mutual respect, globalization, and tolerance has become part and parcel of Islamic Brunei.

The deep-rooting of Islam in Brunei, and the latter’s strong link to Islam and its heritage, can be seen in the strength of its polity-sultanate. The strength of the new religion during the formation of the sultanate can be traced to the popularity and effectiveness of the common maxim *Cuius Regio Eius Religio* (Ruler’s religion determines people’s choice of religion). This was accompanied by a range of conventions and institutions which greatly facilitated the smooth and pervasive translation of Islam to, and at the same time transformation of, the Malay world. Despite the major change of the religious maxim, Brunei, like any other Malay community, did not experience cultural crisis. Why? Substance changed, but symbols stayed. I shall return to this later.

Moreover, the injection of Islamic values and teachings into our culture has facilitated the ongoing outward-looking orientation and the global worldview. Such cultural transformation has amply prepared us, at all time, to enter the cultural dialogue and civilization exchange.

Brunei Darussalam is a unique political entity in Southeast Asia. It obviously maintains the structure and form of a traditional political system. It claims affinity and origin in Islam, Malay, and Monarchy. The Sultan has been leader and ruler for the country and Muslims. In Brunei, the ruler is

¹See *Islamic Declaration on Cultural Diversity*, an official document issued during the Fourth Islamic Conference of Culture Ministers, ISESCO, Algiers, December 2004. Available also at: <http://www.isesco.org.ma/english/culture/culturalDiversity/Cultural%20Diversity.pdf> [accessed in Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei Darussalam: December 12, 2007].

also the head of Islam. The official version of religious practices is derived from the *Shāfi`ī* school, even though adoption of other opinions is permitted, especially if public welfare requires such an undertaking.

In view of the tranquility and stability of religious life in Brunei, it is interesting, of course, to examine the relation between the emphasis on adopting such a definite religious version and the prevailing calm atmosphere. How has it been possible for Brunei to maintain its religious traditions; and, at the same time, move forward as many other Muslim countries? This paper will explore the interplay between Islam and indigenous culture, and how this newly formed tradition facilitated the country and its people to go global.

It should be stated here that Brunei has been enjoying economic prosperity not only because of its oil revenues, but also because of its ability to move and function as a modern state. Despite, or rather because of, its manifest claim to Islamic traditionalism, Brunei optimistically has joined many international groupings and taken part in many modernization steps. For example, hundreds of school leavers have continued to join universities and colleges in many parts of the world, including the United Kingdom, Egypt, Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore. Many of its government officials have also been sent for advanced training abroad. At the same time, experts in diverse fields have been invited to come and upgrade the knowledge and skills of Brunei civil servants and officers. Consequently, Brunei has become part of the global system through formal channels and other networks. It is, therefore, argued here that its strength for bargaining with external forces has been derived from its straightforward insistence upon traditional Islam. On the other hand, the continuing influx of new ideas and interlocking ties with global systems raise doubt about the permanence and continuity in the interpretation and expression of Islam in the country.

In the following pages, the discussion focuses on Brunei's experience in upholding Islam and keeping close to its cultural heritage that facilitates its smooth moving forward to take part in globalized world. I shall begin with examining the backgrounds to cultural transformation and end with pointing how Islamic Malay culture has guided and prepared Brunei to play regionally and internationally.

BACKGROUNDS TO THE TRANSFORMATION OF ISLAMIC MALAY CULTURE

On the Dynamic Islamic Universalism and Indigenous Resilience.
From the very beginning, Brunei has actively pursued participation in the wider Islamic community. For example, as early as in 1807, the Sultan of

Brunei bought a house in Mecca to accommodate Bruneians, and perhaps also other *Jawis*, i.e. Southeast Asian Muslims, who studied in the holy city. During the mounting pressure posed by the Brookes on Brunei towards the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries, Sultan Hashim appealed in 1903 to the Ottoman ruler for help (Mansurnoor, 1995:77-113). Again, during the early part of the British Residency in Brunei, intensive contacts were made with various religious authorities in the Malay Peninsula. The contact centered on cooperation to develop a version of Mohammedan Law in Brunei. It should be emphasized that many Bruneians continued to go to different parts of the Islamic world for study and to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca annually.

The dynamics of Islamic teaching as unfolded in Southeast Asia shone more fully within the framework of indigenous cultural resilience. The interplay produced Malay-Islamic culture and institutions. Islamic Malay culture emerged through the long historical process of interaction and maturing. The dynamism of interplay between Islam and local culture can be seen in various adages and major historical episodes. This can be seen, for instance, in the popularity of such Malay adages as “*Adat bersendi syara`*, *syara` bermuara pada adat*” and “*Adat bersendi syara`*, *syara` bersendi Kitabullah*”²

By the time of Pigafetta’s visit to Brunei in 1521, Brunei was ruled by Muslim sovereign (Blair & Robertson eds., 1903-1909, 33:211-235). His detailed account of the socio-religious condition, however, leaves us with an idea that the impact of Islam in Brunei was not quite extensive. Perhaps I am expecting too much from a contemporary Italian observer like Pigafetta to depict the development of Islamic urbanism in Brunei.³ For example, he claimed that he was provided with plenty of distilled rice

²Some historical facts are also able to be described as follows: (1) It was Sharif `Ali, according to *Silsilah Raja-raja Brunei* or *SRB*, who is given the major role in introducing more substance and institutions of purely Islamic origin, even though Islam had been endorsed for decades by earlier Sultans, including Sultan Muhammad Shah; (2) Brunei’s great regalia consist of both Islamic and non-Islamic paraphernalia; (3) One of the greatest rulers, Sultan Bolkiah was given an epical and legendary role in popular literature and folktale both as Islamic preacher or *da`i* and Malay adventurer; (4) In the early 16th century, Brunei’s capital was as metropolitan as any capital of the civilized world; and (5) Indeed, during his visit, Pigafetta presented to the Sultan of Brunei, among other things, a vest in the Turkish fashion. This clearly shows that Pigafetta was aware about the influence of Islam and the Ottoman Islamic culture in Brunei court. Yet, he also never failed to note other features which are indigenous enough.

³An interesting note (no.428) provided by Emina H. Blair & James A. Robertson eds. (1903-1909, 33:354-355), quoting Stanley’s comment can further, and perhaps more appropriately, explain this point.

wine; he also described the simple attire of the population and the royal aides who were mostly daughters of the chiefs as well as the presence of women in the central hall.

Moreover, within the same port area, a non-Muslim ruler continued to pose a threat to Brunei. This last statement is also confirmed by a report made by the Portuguese Jorge de Albuquerque, Captain-General of Malacca, to King Joao III three years later.⁴ Despite some negative depiction of the religious life in Brunei, Pigafetta provided information on the application of Islamic teachings and education in Brunei. For example, the Bruneis were strict in having *halal* (allowed) flesh meat; they practiced circumcision and adopted prescribed rules of cleanliness. Furthermore, the *shari`a*-mindedness, to use the Hodgsonian term, of the Bruneis was also confirmed by Jorge de Albuquerque's envoy, Vasco Laurenco, in his visit in 1526. In this occasion, the King of Brunei refused to accept a tapestry of arras which had life size figures of men and women (Nicholl ed., 1975:22-33).⁵

In the wake of a brief occupation of the country by the Spanish forces in 1578, a report known widely as the Boxer codex gives a vivid picture of the coexistence between the Islamic and pre-Islamic institutions and practices at the court.

Here, as in many other Muslim countries, the *khaṭībs* (preachers) taught Islam to the people. In Brunei, the religious bureaucracy has been highly developed and structured. As can be seen in de Sande's account, the *khaṭībs* were prominent (cited by Mansurnoor, 2004). We may surmise that they were most probably members of the religious bureaucracy. The bureaucracy of the time was not necessarily elaborate and well structured as found in the later period. Nevertheless, the foundation of the *jami`* (principal) mosque in the capital required the appointment of religious officials. By the time of the writing of *SRB (Silsilah Raja-raja Brunei)*, sometime before 1735, the mosque in the capital became the central office of the religious establishment. Even the writer of *SRB*, Pehin Datu Imam, came from this circle (Sweeney ed., 1968).

⁴"[...] another ruler who lives on the island of Burneo, and is a lord by himself: he is a heathen, whereas the King of Burneo is a Mauro [read: Muslim] and the people of his land are Mauros also [...]". Nevertheless, Jorge de Albuquerque insisted that the relations between the two realms were cordial as the people from both kingdoms were involved in exchange and trade (Nicholl ed., 1975:21).

⁵The main reason of the refusal, I think, is not the one given by Vasco Laurenco, who held that the King was worried of sorcery worked by the Portuguese envoy through the human-depicted tapestry. Rather, the reason was based on the contemporary Islamic teaching of not keeping living pictures, especially human ones, at one's house. For further information about the phenomenon, see Ismail Faruqi & L. Faruqi (1994:314-316).

Again in 1609, during his refuge in Brunei, Father Antonio Pereira (Nicholl ed., 1975:89-90) reported that he was invited to the palace of the ruler of Brunei in the presence of three higher religious officials (*Alfaquies* and *Caciques*)⁶ for a discussion on religious issues. We may surmise that by this time,⁷ religious officials were well organized and bureaucratized. Apparently the religious officials in Brunei were also active, from quite an early period, in spreading and, more importantly, publishing their teachings (Blair & Robertson eds., 1903-1909, 4:151). On the other hand, the court in the capital often welcomed visiting Christian priests for discussion of religious issues. For example, in December 1587, the Sultan welcomed a Franciscan priest to the palace, where the latter was given a chance to express his religious ideas, even to the extent of “offending” the host (Nicholl ed., 1975:77).⁸

The transformation of Malay culture to the one that has advanced today is phenomenal. Syed M. Naguib al-Attas (1972) argues that the cultural transformation in Islamic Southeast Asia can be compared, in the Pirennean sense, to the formation of “modern” Europe as Islam has become the defining component of the region’s cultural formation, the Malay World. Although Syed M. Naguib al-Attas does not detail his contention, it is well-known that Islam has predominated the development of Malay culture, comparable to the role played by the Roman-Mediterranean values and principles in Western culture. The strength and offer of Islam as religion for the world and humanity, as elaborated in the Islamic Declaration, can be referred to what Ismail Faruqi and L. Faruqi pointed out. Why does Islam prevail in the modern world? Ismail Faruqi and L. Faruqi insist that the open character of Islam can be traced to its concept of freedom, universalism,

⁶*Alfaquies* is probably derived from Arabic *Al-Faqīh*; whereas *Caciques* from *Al-Khaṭīb*. They were higher religious officials known as *imams* (great Muslim leaders) in Brunei. Originally, they consisted of four higher officials (*Pehin Manteri*): *Datu Imam*, *Siraja Khatib*, *Tuan Imam*, and *Udana Khatib*. Later a higher official, entitled *Pehin Datu Seri Maharaja*, was appointed to lead the religious bureaucracy (Pehin Yahya, 1989:14).

⁷The ruler of Brunei at the time was no other than the great Sultan Muhammad Hassan.

⁸Following the great example of Sultan Sharif `Ali, Sultan Muhammad Hassan, and Sultan Kamaluddin are assigned an important place in *SRB (Silsilah Raja-raja Brunei)* as rulers who were particular in ascertaining the *shari`a* (Islamic law) and maintaining the sound *adat* (custom). Yet, as *Hukum Qanun Brunei* shows the law as promulgated in it has multiple references, Islamic law (*shari`a*) form only one of many others. The *Qanun* digest contains diverse legal traditions such as indigenous customs, the ruler’s prerogatives, Islamic law, and some Indic elements. Some of the surviving religious texts written Pehin Datu Imam Haji `Abd al-Mokti bin Nassar show the innovative ways how to instill the Islamic values and teachings through locally popular practices and beliefs (Mansurnoor, 2007). I shall return later to him and his interesting culture friendly approach to teaching Islam.

equality, and rationality (Faruqi & Faruqi, 1994:188-190).

Modern scholars have been perplexed by the complexity of Islam in history. Should Islam and Muslims/culture be dealt separately? Is it not more appropriate to study Islam in the context of scriptural or great and local traditions? Why not, as Marshall Hodgson does, distinguish Islam as written norms from its historical manifestation (*Islamicate*) and also from its political and administrative entities (*Islamdom*)? Indeed, the spread and endorsement of Islam in Nusantara (Southeast Asian archipelago) always involved two competing dynamism of accommodation and conflict. When dealing with the process of Islamization and culture development among the Malays, Mohd Taib Osman suggests as follows:

Local elements tended to be added to the ever expanding Islamic civilization, and Islamic elements themselves were prone to be given new meanings and functions. It was inescapable that such situations should arise as Islam imposed itself on already established belief systems (Taib Osman, 1980).

Besides, Nusantara has always been an open and confident entity *vis-a-vis* any culture and civilization. Built on its great legacy two major centers, Srivijaya and Majapahit, had emerged before the spread of Islam in the region. Malay-Islamic culture and community undoubtedly carried on various facets of the life-ways and tradition of the two while absorbing the new Islamic values and principles. Indeed, the evolving Malay culture absorbed and worked out the best of the old and the new. Obviously the process of maturing never ends.

The process of Islamization and cultural accommodation in Nusantara, Brunei included, cannot fail to be conditioned by at least three phenomena: (1) interplay between Islamization and local culture, tradition and custom led to diverse responses and reactions; (2) pre-Islamic belief system continued to be functional during the process of Islamization; and (3) the diversity and multiplicity of the system of value and source of knowledge such as indigenous, Indic, Sinic, and later European posed a major challenge to Islamization.⁹

⁹Add notes are also able to be described here. First, ***on the Cultural Reaction to Islamization***: (1) Cultural forms were formally given Islamic symbols and increasingly also substance, *jampi*/pawing, in Islamic formula; (2) Local myths and legends gave way to Islamic values; and (3) Since the late 18th century, Islamic revivalism led to increasing purification. Second, ***on the Islamic Vision and Local Tradition***: (1) *Raja-Sultan* as Muslim ruler surrounded by *Wazirs*; (2) Religious writings from *Hukum Qanun Brunei* to *Kisah Nabi Bercukur*; and (3) Ruler/Sultan played an important role in spreading Islam thus benefiting from its spread.

The tolerance and openness of Muslims in implementing Islamic principles at the local level can be seen in the diversity and multiplicity of practices and symbols. Indeed, the popular practices which had bridged the simple citizens to identify with Islam – certain medication, visits to historical mosques, and tombs of known figures – continued to prosper. For example, intellectual treatises and works of statecraft had their own audience, while the peasants and urban workers enjoy popular religious stories and talks. These letters, while subscribing to the basic tenets of Islam, were quite often unaware of the scholastic traditions of religious knowledge.

Let us have a brief look at how Islam has transformed our culture here in the Malay world. Of the cultural influence that Islam had brought to bear on the Malays, those in the field of literature have been the most profound. As can be seen in the diversity and large numbers of literary works, religious literature at various stages of Islamization and Islamic deepening has played a major role. The literary heritage of the Malays is exclusively written in the Perso-Arabic script, including those literary works carried over from the Hindu period. The connection of literary activity with the royal court is richly reflected in the literature. Treatises on duties of kingship and concepts of state are represented in books like *Taj al-Salatin* (the Crown of Kings) and *Bustan al-Salatin* (the Garden of Kings).

Theologians who flocked to the royal courts translated and wrote works on Islamic jurisprudence, theology, and history. Even the state chronicles, which claimed a sacred origin for the ruling dynasties, were modeled on Persian or Indian works such as *Shah Namah* and *Akbar Namah*. Islam also introduced a wealth of writings on mysticism to the Malay world. These writings do not represent attempts at syncretism with polytheistic beliefs. They are doctrinal exercises in the tradition of Islam. Tales of heroes were among the earliest stories to be introduced to the area.

Richard Winstedt (1981:145) claims that “*the first task of the missionaries was to substitute for the Hindu epics tales of the heroes of Islam*”. These hero tales fitted into the feudal structure of the society as did the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* in the pre-Islamic period. From the Muslims’ lands of Persia and India, Mohd Taib Osman (1980:5) argues, came works bearing *Shi`ite* influence and spurious treatment of Islamic history and theology. Tales of the lives of the Prophets based on popular legends, *Sufi* thoughts couched in simplistic terms; and treatises on magic and divination had been circulating in the Malay Archipelago since the early days of Islam. It is from these sources that popular Islamic notions were introduced to the Malay masses.

On the Early Features of Islamic Manifestation. Although it is argued that a political entity had developed prior to the coming of Islam to present day Brunei, it is clear that Islam became the most important factor in the development of Brunei as a Malay multi-center by the sixteenth century, or even earlier. How can the phenomenon be explained? First of all, the fact that the Brunei Muslims concentrated in the Brunei town proper, while the people in the interior remained, for most of them and most of the time, non-Muslims needs to be briefly explained. Indeed, Islam became the centripetal point for urbanism – to live within a burgeoning community with its various urban elements and activities.

Like many other centers of Muslim polity, Brunei built various institutions and other facilities. The emergence of the Sultanate connotes the presence of ruler, palace, and principal religious institutions. The formal identity of Brunei as a Muslim state was expressed in the acceptance of Islam by the ruler, Awang Alak Betatar, long before the visit of Pigafetta to Brunei in 1521.¹⁰ The acceptance of Islam by the ruler brought about several changes into the capital. A mosque was built, and it became the symbol and place for identification of the ruler with Islam. Indeed, during the presentation of the Friday sermons, a special prayer was read for the ruler. In Brunei, the intensive Islamization of the capital as well as the administration was attributed to the various efforts made during the reign of the third ruler, Sharif 'Ali. His marriage to the ruling family and his eventual appointment as Sultan must also be seen as an evidence of the growing influence of Islam and the centrality of Brunei in the trading network.

For some time, scholars have questioned as to why Brunei failed, or rather was unwilling, to Islamize its interior inhabitants. Although Pigafetta did not give us an answer to this question, he let us examine the phenomenon through his, and others', accounts of Brunei during the sixteenth century. By 1521, Brunei prospered as a state capital and at the same time a trading center. Since the state officials preferred to stay in the capital, leaving their territorial domains to be administered by their local representatives, communications, and exchanges did not run in two-way traffic. Put differently, the human flow was centripetal, meaning local people who were interested in Islam and urban culture were induced to move to the capital and, in the long run, Bruneianized; and not the other way around. Since Brunei at the time was more interested in pursuing its inter-insular

¹⁰Indeed, during his visit, Pigafetta presented to the Sultan of Brunei, among other things, a vest in the Turkish fashion. This clearly shows that Pigafetta was aware about the influence of Islam and the Ottoman ruler in Brunei court. For further discussion on the Islamization of Brunei, see Donald E. Brown (1970).

and even international role, it could have not stressed its presence locally. By the sixteenth century, Brunei emerged as a very important nodal point of Islamic network in Southeast Asia, particularly following the downfall of Malacca and the rise of new centers such as Aceh, Johor, and Banten (Reid, 1988:6). Before making any general statement, it is important to look closely at Pigafetta's account.

The formation of states in Southeast Asia predated Islamization, meaning Islam did not found states but inherited them. The Muslim states, however, fostered the emergence of new institutions, including new towns, religious orders (*tariqas*), the use of a common language, and a political system. The concept is not far from what Ira M. Lapidus calls "*pluralistic social systems, organized on different institutional levels*" (Lapidus, 1989:50).

In the religious field, the Sultan enjoyed a paramount position. Religious officials were appointed and granted titles by him. The control, and perhaps influence, of the palace on religious matters continued to be a crucial factor in making religious ideas uniform and less prone to external pressure. This does not mean that Brunei was free from any religious controversy. In the early 1840s, Brunei experienced the first and, perhaps, the most significant religious schism. The leader of the opposition group was a non-religious official, Haji Muhammad. His success in mobilizing a large following was due mainly to his close contact with a faction of the ruling class, and the manipulation of the prevailing political rivalry among the elites. He obtained support from an increasingly strong prince at the time, Pengiran Temenggong, and even proceeded to found a splinter mosque across the river. The episode of Haji Muhammad illustrated the possibility of religious deviance if the political constellation is splintered and vicissitude exists. The fact, however, remains that the deviance was temporary and ended with the death of Haji Muhammad, including the political settlement that materialize in the early 1850s. Thereafter, the Sultan continued to be the paramount symbol of religious establishment in the country.

The structure of state and society in Brunei resulted in and also affected the unique development of Islam and its concomitant propagation in the country. Although Islam has been strongly linked to the monarchy and the Malays, as can be seen in the popular adage "*masuk Islam, masuk Melayu*" (become Muslim means become Malay), Islam has continued to take root among non-Malays.

CULTURAL APPROACH TO ISLAMIC TRANSFORMATION

What was the impact of increasing contact with Islamic centres and its concomitant scripturalization on the field of ideas and thoughts and vice

versa? By examining and comparing the writings used in Brunei during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it is apparent that this issue is complex. The contents of *Hukum Qanun Brunei*, for example, show us that in the past knowledge of Islamic law, among the Bruneians were not superficial, even though the text was also full of references to *adat* (custom) law. Even Sultan Kamaluddin (d.1740) was hailed in the *Silsilah Raja-raja Berunai (SRB)* as a strict ruler in applying Islamic law (*memakai isti`adat orang yang salih*). He introduced many changes to state customs and formalities (Sweeney ed., 1968:37). Religious texts found in Brunei such as Ibn `Aṭā` Allāh's *Kitab al-Ḥikam* (commented upon and translated by a Bruneian in 1805),¹¹ al-Palembangi's *Sayr al-Salikin* (written in 1778), al-Banjari's *Sabīl al-Muhtadīn* (composed in 1781), and Haji `Abdul Mokti's various works indicate the desire and potential of the Brunei *ulama* to participate in Islamic scholarly undertakings.

However, if we look at the local writings on religious issues, it is apparent that only a few original ideas arose.¹² The *ulama* of Brunei were perhaps more occupied with Islamization and practical or administrative works. Their concern with scientific investigation and research was limited. Access to written material was limited to a few elite people, including the *ulama*. Orally, thus, played an important role in public instruction on Islam, as is evident in Friday sermons, religious lectures, and other religious sessions.¹³

On the other hand, the use of the mass media for the purpose of disseminating religious knowledge since the 1950s improved public access to Islamic teachings. Indeed, the media revolution significantly improved the wider distribution of cultural and religious knowledge to the population. Concurrently, the demand for the *ulama* to improve their scholarship and presentation of Islamic teachings materialized in the increasing sophistication of their religious outlook, primarily through better and more systematic education. For example, many were sent to famous

¹¹The popularity of *Kitāb al-Ḥikam*, among Southeast Asian Muslims, can be seen in the number of translations undertaken by local *ulama*. See, for further information, Martin van Bruinessen (1999).

¹²Some examples of these originalities can be found in the texts attached to the manuscript of *Al-Ḥikam* written by a Brunei scholar. Moreover, many points developed in the writings of Haji `Abdul Mokti show some serious attempts at making Islamic ideas easily available to and understood by his local audiences.

¹³So far concerted efforts to unearth the quantity and wealth of such collections have not been satisfactorily undertaken. Further classification, publication, and study of such collections, I am optimistic, will enrich and improve our knowledge of the religious and intellectual history of Brunei during the transition period.

educational centres. Also, they had to respond to current issues and other questions from the newly educated masses and others, not infrequently through the mass media.¹⁴

Now, let us look at another facet of Islamic spirituality. The influence of the *ṭarīqa* orders and Sufism in Brunei helped nurture the popularity of Sufi literature. For example, a text on the teaching of the Shadhiliya, *Al-Hikam*,¹⁵ was copied and commented upon extensively by a Brunei disciple in 1220 A.H. / 1805 A.D. Contemporary to this was the proliferation of the *Sammānīya*, introduced to Brunei by Khatīb `Abd al-Latīf. We do not as yet know exactly what literature the followers of the *Sammānīya* in Brunei produced. But, from the collection of Islamic manuscripts in this country, it is evident that such texts as al-Palimbangī's *Sayr al-Sālikīn* and *Silsilat al-Ṭarīqat al-Sammānīya* were known and read in Brunei (Mansurnoor, 2001).

Moreover, the introduction of the *Qādirīya* order, or to be more precise, the *Qādirīya wa-Naqshbandīya*,¹⁶ during the latter part of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century needs to be explained. It is possible that by that time, the *Sammānīya* and the *Shādhiliya* had almost fallen into oblivion, degenerated, or popularized. It is also possible that many Brunei brethren welcomed the *Qādirīya wa-Naqshbandīya*. What is clear, however, is that the recitation of the *Ratib Sammān* or *Dhikr al-Sammān*¹⁷ did form the common feature in most religious meetings among Brunei Muslims.

The *Qādirīya wa-Naqshbandīya*, thus, might have filled the gap in this intellectual-spiritual Sufi vacuum. Since the *Qādirīya wa-Naqshbandīya* emphasized both the *sharī'a* and Sufism, its appearance in Brunei, as in many other parts of Southeast Asia (Hurgronje, 1931; Friedmann, 1971; van Bruinessen, 1999; and Riddell, 2001), can be reviewed as a further phase of scripturalization. In order to understand the dual structures of the *Qādirīya wa-Naqshbandīya* in Brunei, we need to examine the works written by its first local teachers. So far, we have only piecemeal understanding of their ideas, as can be seen in the writings of Haji `Abdul Mokti bin Nassar, Pehin Muhammad Sa`d bin Juru Apong, and Khatib Sa`id Tengah.

¹⁴It is interesting to note that on 15 February 1956, *Pelita Brunei*, a government fortnightly (now weekly) journal, was first published. It had a section on Islam.

¹⁵This text was originally composed by Shaykh Ibn `Aṭā' Allāh al-Iskandari (d.1309).

¹⁶Among some brethren in Southeast Asia, the *ṭarīqa* was known as *Qādirīya wa-Naqshbandīya*. The emphasis is, thus, on the *Naqshbandīya*; whereas the *Qādirīya* is given only a complementary role.

¹⁷At the present time, several collections of *dhikr* (praise to God) such as *Sharaf al-Anām*, *Al-Dibā'i*, and *Dhikr Brunei* are widely practiced. Many elements of these collections, however, contain many features of the *Dhikr al-Sammān*. After all, the *ṭarīqas* in general uphold the practice of praising and memorizing the names of God.

One of Haji `Abdul Mokti bin Nassar's works presents multifarious information for Muslims. He quoted diverse interesting daily events and household matters as examples. Although the general atmosphere of the text was Islamic, it contained various aspects of local customs. For example, Haji `Abdul Mokti bin Nassar cited ways to enhance women's fertility by drinking water boiled with a certain tree bark (*damar putih*). Various tricks designed to attract one's love can even be found here. Such points are actually not alien to the literature widely read by Muslims in Southeast Asia. This literature is commonly known as *Kitāb al-Mujarrabāt* (the book of wonders). Many titles such as *Shams al-Ma`ārif* by Ahmad bin `Alī al-Būnī al-Maghribī, *Hayāt al-Hayawān*, and *Nuzhat al-Majālis wa-Muntakhab al-Nafā'is* by `Abd al-Rahmān al-Safūrī al-Shāfi`ī al-Miṣrī are known here in Brunei. Indeed, in the above text, Haji `Abdul Mokti bin Nassar often referred to *Hayāt al-Hayawān* and *Nuzhat al-Majālis*.

Haji `Abdul Mokti bin Nassar used an evolutionary approach to scripturalization. The tenor of his teachings was Islamic spirituality. There were closely oriented to the *Al-Qur'ān* and other Islamic texts. Many lines were illustrated with citations from the *Al-Qur'ān*, *Al-Hadīth*, the sayings of the *ulama*, and some well-known texts which, interestingly, as stated above, belonged to the Prophetic medicine (*Al-Tibb al-Nabawī*), book of wonders (*Kitāb al-Mujarrabāt*). Indeed, the inclusion and recognition of the local maxim and custom facilitated the inculcation of Islamic values, principles and even *Al-Qur'anic* verses. The use of local cultural nomenclature and vocabulary eased the dissemination of core Islamic teachings and morality.

Generally speaking that the scholarly world of Haji `Abdul Mokti bin Nassar belonged to the period of transformation and transition. He was at once an *adat*-oriented expert and a scriptural `ālim. He used popular vocabulary which was certainly familiar to his society in order to evolutionarily transmit a scripturalized version of Islam to the people's religious understanding and practices. In fact, he attempted to bridge the complex process of adaptation to Islam among his Muslim countrymen (Mansurnoor, 2000).

If the above discussion shows the internal dynamism of Islamic society, then, the administrative reform and socio-political changes since 1906 can be regarded as external factors in the religious reforms. For administrative efficiency, in 1911, the British Resident,¹⁸ inspired by the

¹⁸It is stated in the document entitled *Minutes of the State Council from 29 June 1907 to 31 August 1949*, p.13, as follows: "The Mohammadan Laws Enactment is submitted [to

British experience in the Peninsula, requested the *ulama* to formulate a legal document concerning family law.¹⁹ The enactment, then, became the sole reference in any religious dispute and adjudication in the subject. This reform made religious administration uniformed, standardized, and centralized (the *kadiship* was led by the Tuan Kadi²⁰ who later, in 1941, was given the titled Chief *Kadi*). This was also shown by the centralization and unification of religious education since the 1930s. The post-war period, witnessed further systematization of the religious administration by the establishment of the *Jabatan Hal Ehwal Ugama* (Department of Religious Affairs).²¹ All institutional changes in the field of religious organization during the residency, however, remained fully under the umbrella of the highest religious authorities in Brunei, the ruler, who was assisted by the *ulama* and other experts.²² Indeed, the strength of cultural approach becomes more apparent by the late 1950s.

A NEW ERA IN BRUNEI'S GOVERNANCE: HOW DID ISLAM PREVAIL?

Although according to the Agreement of 1905/1906,²³ the British Resident was not given any role in the administration of religious affairs in Brunei, he had a hand in various institutional changes concerning Islam. How and why was it possible? Our immediate reaction would be that the ubiquitous influence of the Resident could not make him aloof from "improving the efficiency of religious institutions". In other words, when

the] Council and is passed – To be brought into force when approved at a further Council Meeting", dated on 10 December 1911.

¹⁹It is also possible that the Resident merely asked the Brunei *ulama* or the State Council, after some amendments, to approve the Enactment. Nevertheless, it is stated clearly in the *Minutes of the State Council from 29 June 1907 to 31 August 1949*, p.17 that the Resident in 1913 "drafted a Law for that purpose on the lines of the law now obtaining in the Negri Sembilan [...] he, therefore, lays it before the Council for consideration".

²⁰The appointment of *qādī* seems to have taken place sometime after 1913 and before 1915, see *Minutes of the State Council from 29 June 1907 to 31 August 1949*, pp.17-23.

²¹The original name for this department was *Jabatan Hal Ehwal Ugama, Adat Istiadat, dan Kebajikan*. Only in 1960 did the Department of Religious Affairs become a full department, see JHEU (1981:1-2).

²²On this phenomenon, see the information provided in *Minutes of the State Council from 29 June 1907 to 31 August 1949*, p.12.

²³The Agreement of 1905/1906 was certainly a key for the formal admission of the Resident to Brunei. The nature of his authority was specified in it, for example: "[...] The Resident will be the Agent and Representative of His Britannic Majesty's Government under the High Commissioner for the British Protectorate in Borneo, and his advice must be taken and acted upon on all questions in Brunei, other than those affecting the Mohammedan religion [...]". For further discussion of the Agreement, see for example Donald E. Brown (1970:155-157).

the Resident moved in to improve the rule of law and the legal system in the country, he may have felt the need to improve the application of Islamic law. This may have been particularly so since theoretically Islamic law (*shari'a*) encompassed all aspects of life. The Resident of course was more inclined to institute the Western legal system rather than to apply Islamic law. Indeed, his scheme focused on limiting the application of Islamic law to personal and family matters. Whatever the case may have been, his initiative struck a responsive chord among the leaders and *ulama* of the country as ideas of religious reform had already taken root in the region. In order to provide a background for our readers, it is important to discuss briefly the position of Islam in Brunei until the Residency period.

On the Religio-Cultural Innovations. Despite the political and economic decline during the 19th and early 20th centuries, Islam continued to exert its presence. The centrality of Islam in Brunei society and state must be looked at in the light of its guardians and followers. The “modern” history of Brunei, first of all, cannot be separated from Islam. Its first Muslim ruler was the recognized founder of the modern dynasty. Bruneians were proud of having one of their early rulers who belonged to the *sharif*. Their great ruler, Sultan Hassan, was accorded a position equal to the famous Aceh ruler, Iskandar Muda (d.1637).

Moreover, the Sultans always appointed religious officials (*pehin manteri ugama*) in his court and granted them the titles. The control, and perhaps influence, of the palace on religious matters continued to be a crucial factor in making religious ideas uniform and less prone to external pressure. From quite an early period a religious bureaucracy emerged, it was responsible directly to the ruler. Interestingly, the remnants of such a bureaucracy survived until the coming of the Residency period. For example, a higher religious official ([*pehin*] *tuan imam*), Haji Mohidin, continued to serve during the Residency. Indeed, during the 1910s, religious and traditional officials were promoted in large numbers. The maintenance of a religious bureaucracy kept Islam in a high profile. Nevertheless, the formality and popularity of Islam seem to have not resulted in intensive intellectual activities.²⁴

The Bruneians identified closely with Islam. First of all, they pledged obedience to a Muslim ruler, the Sultan. It has become an axiom in the country that the religion of a ruler dictates the religious choice of his people (*cuius regio eius religio*). Islam was absorbed into and at the same

²⁴See, for further information, *State of Brunei Annual Report, 1911* (Bandar Brunei: Resident Office, 1912:12); and P.L. Amin Sweeney ed. (1968:1-82).

time influenced the customs. The mutuality and interdependence of the two entities were best represented in the classical collection of Brunei laws (*Hukum Qanun Brunei*). The influence and application of Islam among the Bruneians can also be seen in their respect for the religious functionaries (*manteri agama*). They were the trouble soothers, the teachers, and the educators of their children. Despite its popularity among the Bruneians, it is a fact that Islam was almost unknown among the interior people, a fact that cannot fail to be noted as a manifestation of “no compulsion in Islam.” Tolerance and diversity did prevail.

The fact that Islam was singled out not to be under the Resident’s “authority” indicates, *inter alia*, the strength of its existing organization. The highest authority in Islamic affairs resided with the Sultan. Through his appointed officials (*manteri agama*), the ruler elaborated Islamic teachings and managed religious affairs. In the capital, the higher religious officials consisted of no less than four *pehin manteris*. It is not necessary, however, that the posts were always manned. Moreover, the social structure of Brunei town and the division of its wards seem to have kept Islam alive among the people. Through local religious functionaries (*imams*) and his parochial religious centers (*balai*), people continued to attach to and identify closely with Islam.

Reform in various fields during the early part of the Residency paved the way for reform in the administration of Islam. I shall briefly pinpoint its major features. What happened in Brunei during the turn of the century cannot be isolated from its surroundings and milieu as well as its ties with the Muslim world; and, more importantly, from its past. Some events which anticipated the changes that were to come had taken place in nineteenth century Brunei. For example, the founding of “Brunei House” (*Rumah Wakaf*) in Mecca in 1807, the writing of *Syair Rakis* by Pengiran Shahbandar, and the socio-religious circumstances which surrounded the emergence of Haji Muhammad in the early 1840s.

In Brunei, the “scripturalization” was marked by new waves of religious and administrative development such as the introduction of the *Shādhiliya* and *Qādirīya wa-Naqshbandīya* orders, emphasis on referring to the standard *fiqh* texts (Islamic law according to the Shafi’i school), and the introduction of a new system of government since 1905/1906. All these developments facilitated the institutionalization of Islamic visions, teachings, and administration within novel bodies and forms.

What was novel in the Brunei society by the turn of this century? The Agreements of 1888 and 1905/1906 made the ruler, more than ever before, the paramount symbol of Islam in the state. The ruler responded to this

favorable socio-religious development, for instance, by initiating closer ties with the Ottoman Sultan, `Abd al-Hamid (1876-1909). In this context, it is not surprising, therefore, to find, as reported by William H. Treacher (1889:40), that a Brunei youth was sent for study and training in Istanbul by the 1880s. Indeed, parallel to such identical phenomena in Southeast Asia, it is possible that more Bruneians would have had better access to the Middle East, particularly through pilgrimage and prolonged stay among the *Jawi* community in Mecca. Moreover, the ties were confirmed by a letter allegedly sent in 1903 to the Ottoman Sultan, requesting for help against the threat of the Brookes of British.

In brief, the stability of religious life in the country prevailed mainly by virtue of political and administrative measures as well as religio-cultural policy. Indeed, the joint-governing period heralded a new development in the application and administration of Islamic law. The religious officials and administrators, however, continued to be recruited from the existing religious bureaucracy. This was unavoidable since the Sultan continued to be the highest authority in religious affairs.

Since the early part of the 20th century, the application of Islamic law was circumscribed and restricted to family matters. Yet, under the Residency system, the application of the law became more systematic and fixed. Previously, most of the legal issues were dealt with at the local levels through the *ulama* and other local leaders and only, if no solution could be reached at this level, were they submitted to the ruler; but by this time, certain legal cases were reported and transferred to the *Qāḍī* court. Although such a legal institution was not a novelty in Islamic law and Islamic history in Brunei, it means much in terms of the systematization of Islamic reform and institutionalization of law. In the light of this development, it is surprising that only in the 1950s more changes and reform in the administration of Islam in the country took place.

Resuscitating the Da`wa Since the 1950s: Revivalist Spirit of the Post-Pacific War. Since the post-Pacific War (1939-1945), Brunei launched major reform in all fields. The rapid development of the country and the growth of its population after the Pacific War necessitated the improvement of religious services. For example, on 31 January 1948, Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin approved the formation of a board of 18 religious advisers with the stipulation that all religious appeal cases be “heard and decided by the Board”. In order to facilitate the work of the Board, various enactments on the administration of Islamic law in the Malay Peninsula were introduced for observation and consideration.

Cultural symbols won favor in enhancing religious devotion and popular expression. During this period, official religious celebrations were held in Brunei. In 1948, for example, during the celebration of the *Hijra* New Year, the *Jāmi`-Mosque* Committee in Bandar Brunei organized an *Al-Qur'an* reading competition for Muslim men in the town. This was the first open competition ever held in the country. Since 1962, the *Al-Qur'an* reading competition had been held in conjunction with the coming of the fasting month of *Ramadan*; more specifically it was designed to allow Brunei to send its best readers to the international competition organized in Kuala Lumpur during the second half of *Ramadan*.

Moreover, the celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday (*Mawlid*) developed into a public occasion before 1956. Indeed, less elaborate celebrations had been regularly held by the Bruneians even before 1950s. The difference was the grand parade around town organized during the 1950s. Interestingly during this period, two socio-religious organizations took over the sponsorship of public celebrations. Since 1953, the Islamic Unity (*Perkasa*) of Bandar Brunei and the *Ikhwānul Muslimīn* of Kuala Belait had held celebrations of *Mawlid* and *Hijrah* New Year in their respective district. The elaborated celebrations of other important events in Islam took place publicly only in the 1960s. The state dignitaries were invited to the celebrations. Indeed, during the occasions, the ruler delivered religious messages and religious speeches were offered.

During the 1950s, a number of interesting features emerged in conjunction with the arrival of *Hari Raya Puasa* (*Īd al-Fiṭr*). First of all, as followers of the *Shafi`i* School, Bruneians started and ended their fasting according to the sighting of the new moon of *Ramadan* and *Shawwal* respectively. In order to ascertain the sighting, a committee consisting of the *ulama* and meteorologists was formed under the aegis of the Chief *Qāḍī*. It observed the possible location of the new moon from the hills and sea-coasts on the 29th *Sha`ban* and *Ramadan*. Its observation was, then, submitted to the Chief *Qāḍī*, who presented it to the Sultan for a final decision. In addition, the collection of funds and goods, besides *zakāt* and *zakāt al-fiṭr* (*fiṭrah*), was centrally organized. They were distributed to patients in the hospital, prisoners, and needy orphans.

In 1951, a proposal was made to replace the Courts Enactment of 1908. In 1954, the Religious Consultative Council was established. The Sultan was chairman of the Council. Following the establishment of the Department of Religious Affairs in the same year, various activities on the propagation of Islamic teachings and the administration of Islam were taken over from the Office of the Chief *Qāḍī*.

The end of the British Residency system in 1959 paved the way for the implementation of the modern constitution, the 1959 Constitution. It coins several provisions concerning Islam, including the official status of Islam as state religion. By the end of the 1960s, debates and calls for the full implementation of Islam as a way of life based on the key position of Islam in state system and society. Here, the role of education cannot be ignored.

Education was not merely a catalyst of change but it was a part of change. Thus, the return of newly trained students from higher religious education abroad, especially Al-Azhar University after the 1960s, accelerated and strengthened the trends toward new approach to Islamic affairs.

In order to have better perspectives of new intellectual trends among Brunei religious scholars of the period, I shall summarize some ideas on religio-cultural issues expressed by them in published materials, as follows:

Cultural features:

- Concern was expressed over the negative elements of Western culture such as moral decadence, Missionary activities, religious controversies, social unrest, adoption of anything Western, violent, and pornographic materials.
- Religion was crucial to maintain unity and stability of the country (after the 1962 rebellion, this theme was emphasized again and again).
- To bring peoples closer to religion, more literature on Islam should be written; thus, clearer and better idea of Islam be spread, especially among the youth who were thirsty of reading materials.
- Women: to be modern intellectual and professional yet remain Muslim and oriental. Knowledge and morality will last to the old age than any other for women.
- Islam is *akal*, no one without *akal* can grasp Islamic beauty (1973) – science, research and technology of the modern era are relevant to Muslims.
- Life must be pursued in two levels: physical and mental; Islam provides ways to achieve this.
- Eradication of corrupt customs must be made but with care and sensibility.
- Religious and ethnic pluralism: Brunei tolerates difference but it is not plural state (1998). Cooperation and harmony predominate the writing on the issue of the diversity of people in the country (the official position: Brunei is not a plural society). Competition and cooperation can bring the more good to the people.

**ISLAMIC REVIVALISM IN BRUNEI SINCE THE 1970S:
GOING MORE OPEN AND GLOBAL**

Empowered by its religious and cultural legacy, Brunei has actively and optimistically extend hands to the world. The development of Islam in the country, with all its manifestation, paved the way for an open and

positivist approach to friendship and cooperation. Indeed, the coming of the British in 1906 can be considered an important watershed in Brunei's lofty heart – being open to the world, but with principle. If it has succeeded in moulding the resilience of culture and dynamism of Islam, the path to initiate communication with the world is made smoother. As I have argued elsewhere, Brunei's choice of particular school of thought and legal system cannot be seen as hindrance to tolerance and universalism. The choice, indeed, paves the way for more confident outward-looking approach and cooperation among world communities. More particularly, the experience and the fact of life in the country has born the moderate way of religious living and believing.

As early as 1967, the idea of implementing Islam as the way of life has won some public support. In Brunei, the return of a few students from the Al-Azhar University from 1963, as shown above, injected new religious vigor and agenda, including religious sophistication, new institution, and Islamic policy. Consequently, Islamic revivalism was carried in more confident and consistent patterns; for example, the organization of conferences, the establishment of Islamic financial institutions, and the handling of religio-political issue.

Although Brunei has enjoyed full control over its foreign affairs only since 1984, it unofficially participated in many international Islamic forums. For example, during the 1960s and 1970s, several religious leaders of Brunei participated in international Islamic conferences such as those held in Baghdad, Mogadisho, Cairo, and Kuala Lumpur. During this period, Brunei participation was rather low profile. The situation has greatly changed since Brunei fully regained independence in 1984.

Brunei quickly joined various international Islamic bodies. Concomitant with its official admission into diverse regional and international organizations such ASEAN (Association of South East Asia Nations), United Nations, and Commonwealth, Brunei became also a full member in the Organization of the Islamic Conferences (OIC). Indeed, shortly after its admission, the Sultan attended the summit conference of the OIC held in Casablanca on January 16, 1984. Again, during the summit conference of the OIC in Dakar on December 1991, the Sultan actively participated in the Conference. By formally joining OIC, Brunei also has access to OIC affiliates such as Islamic Development Bank (IDB) and Islamic Economic and Social Council (ISESCO). For example, in 1989, Brunei held an international seminar on Islamic civilization in the Malay world in cooperation with ISESCO. The seminar was attended by prominent Muslim and non-Muslim scholars from all five continents. And, as we shall see shortly, Brunei has

taken advantage of the experience of the IDB in running Islamic banks to set up its own Islamic financial and banking system.

At the regional level, Brunei has actively taken part in various Islamic committees and bodies. For example, it soon joined the forum of senior religious officials of Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore. By the admission of Brunei, the forum which was set up in 1974, had four member states. The forum was originally designed to develop better cooperation in the field of Islamic calendar, especially regarding the beginning of the months of *Ramadan*, *Shawwal*, and *Dhu al-Hijjah*. Lately, the forum has included in its agenda various religious and social issues concerning the general affairs of Muslims in the region. Moreover, the closer cooperation between the members led to the holding of more activities in Brunei with the support of other members. A good example for such activities can be seen in the organization of two regional seminars on the concept of the *Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama`a* and Islamic values held in September 1985 and October 1988 respectively. During the seminars, papers were presented by Muslim scholars from Brunei and other Southeast Asian countries.

The active participation of Brunei in various Islamic organizations, at the international and regional levels, has many positive impacts upon Muslims in the country. Better knowledge and information about Brunei's link with Muslim countries and about their affairs through its participation in various Islamic organizations and committees made Bruneians more aware about their link to Muslim World. Accordingly, Bruneians became more eager to learn about them and to develop closer contact with them. Again, the structural links developed at a state level eased Bruneians to extend their links from the "old friends" to new Muslim countries. As a small country, Brunei has advantages of being accepted in the memberships of various Islamic organizations. On the other hand, Brunei's wealth adds weight to certain plans of these organizations.

Despite its openness and diplomatic warmth, Brunei is fully aware about its own limitation. It is true that Brunei has established diplomatic ties with many Muslim countries, including Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Malaysia, Indonesia, Oman, and Iran. It has also joined other Muslim countries in giving support to Muslims in Palestine, Afghanistan, and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Again, it set up various symbols of Islamic revivalism, including the opening of Islamic financial centers. Yet, Brunei continued to declare its commitment to a long established version of Islamic practice and belief system in the country. At the same time, interestingly, diverse changes took place in the organization and administration of Islam in the country. They have taken place smoothly without using new labels. Thus, despite changes in the expression of Islam

in the country, Brunei maintains its commitment to the beaten path.

New Economic and Financial Institutions: Islamic System. The increasing pressure on many Muslim countries to have an Islamic system of finance led to the establishment of many new financial institutions. Since the mid 1970s, attempts were made among various Islamic circles to run Islamic banking system. In Brunei, concrete steps toward the foundation of Islamic financial institutions took place in 1990. Heavy Islamic symbols could be seen easily in public places and formal occasions in the country, since Islam has been the official religion (*ugama rasmi*) of the state. Moreover, Islamic revivalism in the 1970s led to the adoption of many Islamic activities, expressions, and practices by individuals, society, and state. The celebrations of the new century of the *Hijra* in Brunei during the late 1970s and early 1980s, marked an important milestone in Brunei's commitment to Muslim World.

In the 1980s, several activities were geared to involve Bruneians in various issues concerning Muslims worldwide. For example, in response to increasing numbers of Islamic banks founded in many Islamic countries, in 1987 a committee for the foundation of Islamic Bank in Brunei was formed. More specifically, a definite plan for establishing an Islamic system in banking took place after the Ruler announced his support for the enterprise in late 1990. Indeed, a year later in September 1991, an Islamic savings bank, known as *Tabung Amanah Islam Brunei* (TAIB), was established. It was modeled mainly on the existing example founded earlier in Malaysia. The primary aim of the institution was to provide financial services and business transactions in an Islamic way (Abdul Aziz Juned, 1992:188). The success of the TAIB in attracting customers led to the undertaking of another major step in the Islamization of the financial system when on 13 January 1993, the International Bank of Brunei was restructured to become the Islamic Bank of Brunei. A few years later, the Islamic Development Bank was founded.

Although Brunei Darussalam was not among the early protagonists of Islamic financial system, it did not want to be left behind by its brethren. Its participation in the increasingly popular and successful system shows that Brunei is well aware about its ties with the wider Muslim World. When Southeast Asia was plagued with major financial crisis in 1997, Brunei was not exempted. However, its economic structure, especially its singular source of income, oil, saved it from the destabilizing effect of the crisis. What did the crisis leave on Brunei's Islamic resurgence?

Religio-Political Issues. Political solidarity among Muslim countries has been seen by many scholars as shallow and non-substantial. Expressions

of solidarity were often regarded as lip-service, thus, rarely materialized. Reasons for this tendency are traced back to the internal structure of modern Muslim governments and to their relations with the established states, particularly those of the West, as well as their relations with their Muslim neighbors. Yet in the past few years, when the economy of many Muslim countries got better, at the same time enjoying political stability, concrete common actions were, indeed, undertaken. For example, the Muslims did take almost a common stand toward the Afghanistan issue in the early 1980s when the Soviet Union had interfered in its affairs. Again, concrete actions were taken by diverse Muslim countries to help their brethren in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Their solidarity towards their co-religionists in these two countries, as we all know too well, did not stop at the moral solidarity alone.

In the case of small countries like Brunei, options to build “independent” foreign relations may be rather limited. Indeed, as an author puts it, foreign policies of such countries are heavily influenced by external factors. However, it is interesting that Brunei has succeeded in steering a more realistic approach to solidarity among Muslim countries. It never failed to join common stands adopted by other Muslim countries toward contemporary issues among Muslims.

Brunei has strongly supported the rights of the Palestinian people. The support was shown clearly in the speech by the Brunei ruler, when Brunei was admitted to the United Nations as the 159th member state in 1984. For Brunei, the overall solution of the Palestinian question was the only answer to the political crisis in the Middle East. As a member state in the OIC (Organization of Islamic Conferences), not surprisingly Brunei has been applying the general policy of the organization toward Muslim countries. Similar straightforward approaches were adopted in dealing with the Soviet Union’s interference in Afghanistan and the independence of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Nevertheless, Brunei faces a dilemma comparable to other Muslim countries when dealing with political crises among Muslim countries. For example, while Brunei had adopted cautious approaches to the Gulf crises, it joined other Muslim countries in calling for the end of wars between Iran and Iraq. Again, Brunei called for the immediate peaceful solution to the Kuwait crisis in order to establish peace in the region as a whole. Although Brunei officially condemned the Iraqi annexation of Kuwait, it strongly urged for negotiation and a political solution to the crisis. Indeed, the idea of Muslim unity was reiterated time and again by Brunei in various OIC meetings.

With the increasing awareness of the Bruneians about their brethren in other Muslim countries, they began to realize their importance. Thus, diplomatic ties were formally established with many of these countries. At least six Muslim countries have permanent representatives in Brunei. It will be interesting to look how the official positions toward Islamic issues have been accommodated by and molded in public opinion.

Economic Growth and Islamic Movement in Brunei. It has been a common talk among scholars concerning the trickling downs of oil money from the Middle East to Southeast Asian Muslims aiming to resuscitate Islamization which often meant the spread of a particular approach to Islam, puritanical or Wahhabi movement (*Salafi*) (cf. Jones, 2004). In many parts of Southeast Asia, such financial and ideological support did bring new vigor into the local communities, pursuing the on-going process of puritanical movement, establishing new roots of the movement and, more significantly, founding many symbols of material modernity and sophistication. These trends can be observed among Muslim minorities throughout the region and certain urban Muslim communities in Malaysia. In Indonesia, the impact of such oil money-related development is so obvious that enumeration seems to be too redundant. Interestingly, Brunei has been resilient toward the *Salafi* challenge, despite the quiet and eclectic internal change (Mansurnoor, 1996).

How could this process revolve? Being financially and religiously strong, Brunei could simply close its doors to the *Salafi* entry and offer. For example, no Brunei student was ever sent on Brunei government scholarships, let alone on foreign ones, to any higher educational institution in Saudi Arabia. In the mid-1970s, when Bruneian students were withdrawn from Malaysian campuses, an envoy led by the incumbent *Mufti* was sent to Egypt and Saudi Arabia to observe and look for study opportunities (Haji Abd Hamid, 2000). Curiously toward the end of the 1980s, a few higher religious officials were sent to study in the “Westernized” Islamic Institute (IAIN, *Institut Agama Islam Negeri*) of Jakarta. Normally, Brunei graduates in Islamic studies at Al-Azhar University complete their Master or Doctoral programs in Malaysian universities and especially Al-Azhar in Cairo. Put differently, by design and strength, in the second half of the 20th century, Brunei determined to overtly reject the puritanical onslaught in its diverse manifestation. Indeed, this trend represents the long-established religious practices, particularly moderation.

The control over education and its potential religious leaders has worked nicely toward administrative centralization. Many Bruneians have been sent abroad to complete various degrees in Islamic studies. The intellectual

training undergone by the Bruneians in various Islamic educational centers formed the strongest link between the Muslim World and Brunei. If in the past Bruneians, like their Southeast Asian co-religionists, had gone to Mecca for higher study, after the Pacific War (1939-1945), they joined Al-Azhar University for their university education. Indeed, it is interesting to note that the leadership of the Department of Religious Affairs, and later the Ministry, has been dominated by Al-Azhar's trained scholars.

Following the revival of the *Wahhabi* movement during the 1920s, Bruneians opted for positive withdrawal. For them, the extent of intellectual contacts were curtailed in the Holy Cities, outside the formal pilgrimage seasons. Under such circumstances, Al-Azhar with its open approach to *Madhhabism* provided a more appropriate environment for study for Bruneians. Indeed, the Brunei graduates of Al-Azhar continued to influence the prevailing religious system and uphold the status quo, while introducing changes from within.

Having achieved greater scholarship, these Al-Azhar's trained scholars had no difficulty in building ties with other Muslim scholars internationally. Before joining Al-Azhar University, they had studied at the Al-Junied Religious School in Singapore, and the Islamic College of Malaya in Klang, Malaysia. Under the arrangement, Brunei scholars completing their first degree at Al-Azhar enjoyed access to a diverse academic circle. The years of interaction with different colleagues enabled them to be more open minded and provided them with a wider vision. As noted by Mona Abaza (1994), in her study of Indonesian students in Cairo, such students brought home with them outlooks nurtured by diverse social, intellectual, political, and cultural exchanges during their long stay in Egypt. Indeed, a Brunei student in Cairo reported in 1961 that his stay in Cairo not only introduced him to purely religious subjects but also to diverse disciplines, even nationalism, and military drills (*Pelita Brunei*, 1961).

Again, various collections of writings and poems written by Brunei students abroad, including Cairo, indicate that they read widely and participated in current scholarly debates and development. Nevertheless, the strongest link maintained by these graduates was with their *alma mater*. Talented students continued to be sent to Cairo and, lately, Amman for higher religious studies. Again, the experts in the different religious disciplines have come mostly from Al-Azhar University; whereas middle rank officials generally completed their higher studies at religious institutions in Singapore and Malaysia.

Despite their erudition in religious scholarship, Bruneians who graduated from Al-Azhar University opted for the evolutionary approach

towards reform in the religious field. Local patterns of religious expression remained strong and respected. It is interesting to note here that in 1953, a religious organization, *Ikhwan al-Muslimin*, was founded in Brunei, in the new booming oil town to be more precise. However, it had obviously nothing to do with the *Ikhwan al-Muslimin* of Egypt. Is it possible that the adoption of the name was inspired by the popularity of the Egyptian *Ikhwan al-Muslimin* during the period? Indeed, the *Ikhwan al-Muslimin* of Brunei initiated various activities which had a novel orientation. For example, it actively organized public celebrations on salient occasions in the Islamic calendar, including the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad, the *Hijra*, and the sending down of the *Al-Qur'an*. Yet, as can be seen in the charter of the movement, it is evident that it inspire to propagate some mild forms of reformist agenda. Curiously, during this period no Bruneian had graduated from Al-Azhar University.

During the 1990s, the impact of Islamization and revivalism was strongly felt in the country. At the same tone, Brunei was also vigilant toward any deviance in this trend as can be seen in its affirmative action against *Jama'ah al-Arqam* in 1991. In the light of this complex contour of Islamic revivalism, Brunei reexamined its overall education policy and undertaking. The focus was on how to install religious values among all Bruneians, especially pupils and students, and at the same time move forward as sophisticated citizens in the era of ICT (Information and Communication Technology). In this context, higher education remained a pivotal concern. Exclusivism in Islamic education slowly gave way to comprehensiveness as advocated by prominent Muslim thinkers and educators. To me, the ongoing debates launched, policies made, and changes introduced in making Islamic education more easily available, sophisticated, and responding to challenging were all natural outcome of the unending search for Brunei's way to live fully Islamic and Bruneian at the same time within the context of undeniable global environment with all its concomitant challenges and opportunities. The drama is always just beginning to unfold.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The historical process of Islam in Southeast Asia is continuing and will never be complete. Indeed, Islam has become part the region's history. With its universal message, Islam has been all out and throughout globalist, open, tolerant, and accommodating. Indeed, its spread and manifestation in Southeast Asia, including the Malay world, represent an ideal type *par excellence*.

In Brunei, like the most parts of the Malay world, Islam transforms religion without political dislocation and dynastic change. This could not happen without the quality of the new religion and peace it propagates. The manifestation of Islam in Brunei represents the many important points and sublime values as now reflected in the "Islamic Declaration of 2004". Propelled this strong foundation and deep cultural embrace, Islam as manifested in Brunei facilitates the outward-looking character the country opted since the beginning of the 20th century.

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