

Southeast Asia as the Epicenter of the Rise of the World's Islamic Civilization

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Abstract

Southeast Asia, especially Indonesia and Malaysia, has the strategic potential to play an important role in the rise of global Islamic civilization. This study discusses how Southeast Asia, with its distinctive socio-religious characteristics, can be interpreted as a new growth center of moderate, inclusive, and contextual Islamic civilization. With the largest Muslim population in the world, the region is not only the epicenter of Islamic demographics, but also offers a model of religiosity that is adaptive to the local culture. Islam in Southeast Asia has undergone a process of acculturation that is harmonious with local traditions, making it a peaceful and relevant form of Islamic expression in the context of the times. This research aims to examine the potential of Southeast Asia as the epicenter of the rise of world Islamic civilization by highlighting the demographic strength, values of moderation, and the relevance of cultural Islamic approaches in responding to contemporary global challenges. This research uses a library research method with a normative-conceptual approach, which relies on a critical analysis of literature, intellectual discourse, and socio-religious dynamics in the Southeast Asian region. The results of this study show that Southeast Asia has a strong foundation to build a future Islamic civilization model that is inclusive, transformative, and globally insightful.

Keywords: *Islam, Southeast Asia, Rise of Civilization*

Abstrak

Asia Tenggara, khususnya Indonesia dan Malaysia, memiliki potensi strategis untuk memainkan peran penting dalam kebangkitan peradaban Islam global. Penelitian ini membahas bagaimana Asia Tenggara, dengan karakteristik sosial-keagamaannya yang khas, dapat dimaknai sebagai pusat pertumbuhan baru peradaban Islam yang moderat, inklusif, dan kontekstual. Dengan jumlah penduduk Muslim terbesar di dunia, kawasan ini tidak hanya menjadi pusat demografi Islam, tetapi juga menawarkan model keberagamaan yang adaptif terhadap budaya lokal. Islam di Asia Tenggara telah mengalami proses akulturasi yang harmonis dengan tradisi setempat, menjadikannya sebagai bentuk ekspresi keislaman yang damai dan relevan dengan konteks zaman. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menelaah potensi Asia Tenggara sebagai episentrum kebangkitan peradaban Islam dunia dengan menyoroti kekuatan demografis, nilai-nilai moderasi,

serta relevansi pendekatan Islam kultural dalam merespons tantangan global kontemporer. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode studi kepustakaan (*library research*) dengan pendekatan normatif-konseptual, yang mengandalkan analisis kritis terhadap literatur, wacana intelektual, serta dinamika sosial-keagamaan di kawasan Asia Tenggara. Hasil kajian ini menunjukkan bahwa Asia Tenggara memiliki landasan kuat untuk membangun model peradaban Islam masa depan yang inklusif, transformatif, dan berwawasan global.

Kata Kunci : *Islam, Asia Tenggara, kebangkitan Peradaban*

Introduction

Islamic civilization once reached the peak of its glory, coloring various aspects of world life ranging from science, culture, to community governance. However, in the course of history, the civilization has regressed due to various internal and external factors. However, the hope for the revival of Islamic civilization has never been extinguished. In this context, Southeast Asia, especially Indonesia and Malaysia, has emerged as a strategic region that is seen as having great potential in initiating the revival of global Islamic civilization (Bakar, 2010).

At least, looking at the number of adherents that reaches more than a quarter of a billion and is spread across several countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei Darussalam, and plus the Muslim communities in the Philippines and Thailand, Islam in the Southeast Asian region has the potential to be considered one of the important civilizational forces, in addition to the Middle East, Indo-Pakistan, and several other important regions. A report released by *the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life* in January 2011 stated that of the world's 1.6 billion Muslims, nearly 62.1% of them live in the Asia Pacific region, 19.9% live in the Middle East and North Africa, 15% occupy sub-Saharan Africa, 2.7% in Europe, and 0.3% in the Americas (A new Pew Forum, 2011). From these statistical data, it can be seen that two-thirds of the world's Muslim population lives in the Asia-Pacific region and only one-fifth occupies the Middle East and North Africa region, which is the majority of the population speaks Arabic.

The Muslim population is predicted to continue to increase by 30% in the next 20 years, namely by 2030. The growth rate of the Muslim population is estimated to be twice that of non-Muslims, where the average annual growth of Muslims is around 1.5% while non-Muslims are only around 0.7% per year. The prediction of the growth of Muslims is based on *time series data*, where in 1990 the number of Muslims reached 1.1 billion, in 2000, it reached 1.3 billion with a growth value of 19.9%, in 2010 it reached 1.6 billion with a growth value of 21.6%, in 2020 it reached 1.9 billion with a growth value of 23.4%, and in 2030 it is projected to reach 2.2 billion with a growth value of 24.9%.² In other words, Islam is the religion that has the most followers in the world. This means that Muslims will make up 26.4% of the total population of the earth, which is projected to reach 8.3 billion by 2030. In other words, one in four of the earth's inhabitants is a Muslim (iclr, 2019).

When viewed based on the distribution of Muslims by country, there are four countries that have a very large Muslim population, namely Indonesia with a Muslim population of 204,847,000, Pakistan around 178,097,000, India around 177,286,000, and

Bangladesh around 148,607,000, all of which are countries in the Asian region (A new Pew Forum, 2011). In the Central Asian region, Muslims are concentrated in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. In the South Asian region, the majority of Muslims live in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Meanwhile, in the Southeast Asian region, the majority of Muslims are in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam. However, there are also a number of Muslim minorities living in Kazakhstan, India, Thailand, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Burma and Singapore.

If we pay attention to the exposure of the above statistical data, then talking about the contribution of Islam in the Asian region, especially Southeast Asia, it is not only important to look at its role in the past and present, but it is also necessary to predict its possible contribution to the identity of civilization in Southeast Asia in the future. Taking into account the pattern of religious expression that is multicultural, accommodating, tolerant, and peaceful, it is also necessary to take into account the possibility of Southeast Asian Islam making a positive contribution to the formation of the image of Islam at the global level, considering the region's position as a meeting point for all cultural expressions in the world.

Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with a library research method based on a normative-conceptual approach (Hamzah, 2020). The purpose of this approach is to understand how the construction of Islamic civilization in Southeast Asia is produced, shaped, and developed through intellectual narratives, historical documents, and socio-religious discourses rooted in historical experiences, local cultures, and regional political developments. This approach allows researchers to explore the interaction between Islamic values, Malay cultural expressions, and geopolitical conditions that give birth to a moderate, tolerant, and contextual model of Islam.

The main data sources in this study consist of academic literature, journal articles, works of Southeast Asian Muslim thinkers, as well as official documents related to social and religious dynamics in Indonesia, Malaysia, and surrounding countries. In addition, historical writings, reports from research institutions such as the Pew Research Center, and narratives from the mass media and civil society organizations are used as references to explore how the face of Southeast Asian Islam is positioned in the global discourse on Islamic civilization (Muri A, 2014). This study also examines the arguments of Western and Muslim thinkers against the diversity of Islamic styles in the region as a form of resistance to the concentration of Islamic authority only in the Middle East region.

The data analysis technique is carried out by content analysis and critical reflection on the sources studied, to capture both the structure of ideas and the socio-political meaning that underlies the narrative of the rise of Islamic civilization in Southeast Asia. The researcher adapts the interpretive framework to the text and discourse, paying attention to historical, cultural, and political aspects. The validity of the findings is maintained through triangulation of sources and cross-perspective readings, including views from traditionalist, reformist, and progressive intellectuals. With this methodology, the research aims to affirm that Islam in Southeast Asia is not just peripheral, but offers an alternative model of Islamic civilization that is able to

answer contemporary global challenges (Mekarisce, 2020).

Results and Discussion

The Originality of Islam in the Southeast Asian Region

The color of Southeast Asian Islam, which is very different from the color of Middle Eastern Islam as the birthplace of Islam, has actually become the concern of a number of Western scholars. Bruce Vaughn, for example, considers Southeast Asian Islam to be seen as having more moderate characteristics compared to Middle Eastern Islam. The attitude of moderation feels like a breath in the Islamic life of Southeast Asia. According to him, this could be because Islam came to this region through trade routes, not through military routes as is the case in South Asia and the Middle East. Especially in Indonesia, Islam has also experienced a creative da'wah process and acculturation strategy, which ultimately gives the impression that Islam in the region has animism, Hinduism and Buddhism (Fadhil, 2024).

A number of other scholars have also concluded that it is not too different. According to Mark Mancall, what makes the face of Southeast Asian Islam different from other faces of Islam in other parts of the world is that Southeast Asian Islam does not come directly from the Middle East, but through India. Thus, the teachings of Islam taught have undergone modifications from the results of the Islamic experience in India and have also been heavily influenced by elements of Sufism. It is not surprising that the face of Islam in this region seems softer and tends to contain a lot of mystical elements, because it has experienced an encounter with Hindu-Buddhist culture. Not to mention that historically, Islamic preachers in Indonesia especially on the island of Java—are guardians, namely Sufi figures who teach Islamic teachings with great politeness and tolerance of differences (Azra, 200. 52–53). In the early 1950s, Harry J. Benda had also said that the history of Indonesian Islam as well as that in other Southeast Asian regions was essentially the history of the cultural expansion of the *students*. The historical journey of the students has had an impact on religious and political life in Indonesia (J. Benda, 1958).

Southeast Asian Islam, especially in Indonesia, can be said to be able to transform into a new Islamic entity. In addition to being the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, the Islamic tradition that has developed in Indonesia is very distinctive and unique. Even until the early 1980s, Indonesian Islam was considered to be outside *the mainstream* of Islamic tradition. According to a number of scholars, this is due to the phenomenon of syncretism in Indonesian Islam which will not be found if it is compressed with Middle Eastern Islam (Azra, 2001).

However, it is unfortunate that Indonesian Islam, including Southeast Asian Islam in general, is read disproportionately by Anthony Reid. Reid considers the phenomenon of Indonesian Islam as a marginal Islam, not *mainstream Islam*. According to him, this is due to the slow pace of Indonesian Islam in entering the Islamic world, so that it cannot shape and color Islamic doctrine and civilization in general. When Indonesian Muslims began to interact with the world's Muslim community, the idea of Islamic civilization was long established. On the other hand, Indonesia's geographical location far from the Muslim community of the Middle East is considered by Reid to have kept Indonesian

Muslims away from the social and political problems of other Muslim countries.

Nevertheless, Reid's argument was widely opposed by other scholars. A number of studies conducted by Roff (1985), Bulliet (1995), Keddie (1987), Ricklefs (1979; 1998), Hefner (1987), and Woodward (1989) debunk all of Reid's arguments. It is not true that Indonesian Islam is a peripheral Islam, both religiously and intellectually, compared to Middle Eastern Islam. Indonesian Islam is different because it does have a different socio-political environment and also has unique religious practices and interpretations.¹⁰ This phenomenon must be read in reverse that Muslim owners in Southeast Asia have succeeded in developing different thinking. Of course, this is not an easy endeavor. In fact, there are indeed a number of efforts developing among Southeast Asian Muslim scholars to formulate ideas that substantively respond to Islamic thought, as well as various Islamic ideas that have relevance to the historical, sociological, cultural, and political context of Southeast Asia. This is very evident in several concepts that have been offered by Southeast Asian Muslim scholars, such as the concepts of *indigenization and contextualization* of Southeast Asian Islam. The efforts made have succeeded in making the expression of Islam in Southeast Asia different from that in the Middle East and other Islamic worlds. In the 1900s, for example, Southeast Asian Islam was dubbed by leading international media such as *Newsweek* and *Time* magazine as Islam with a *smiling face*. Southeast Asian Islam in general has been considered a brand of *peaceful* and moderate that has no problem with modernity, democracy, human rights, and other issues in the modern world (Azra, 2005). This is important to continue to be promoted to a wide audience. With the diversity of policies taken by each country in providing religious services as a whole, the Islamic community in Southeast Asia can jointly build strategic steps towards the formation of Islam as one of the civilizational forces.

Another thing that is no less important is the phenomenon of intensifying cooperation between countries in the Southeast Asian region in various fields of life. As is well known, bilateral cooperation between countries in the region has experienced intensive development in recent decades. Various cooperation agreements have been signed, both in the fields of economy, industry, trade, education, culture, and regional defense and security, involving not only interstate governments, but also businessmen and other *civil society groups*. The closer and mutually beneficial cooperation between the two parties will certainly provide a stronger color and contribution to the creation of the Southeast Asian region as one of the centers of Muslim civilization in the world. (Lee, 2022)

In addition, it also seems important to have a serious appreciation of all existing intellectual, cultural, and religious treasures as a starting point for efforts to develop and strengthen the image of Islam that is friendly, tolerant, modern, and civilized in the future. In this regard, there are a series of important figures who have helped to give color to the Islamic pattern in Southeast Asia, such as Syamsuddin Sumatrani, 'Abd Shamad al-Palimbani, Yusuf al-Maqassari, Nuruddin al-Raniry, Raja Ali Haji, and Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani. With various other variables that can be added, the future of the Southeast Asian Muslim community is predicted to experience increasingly meaningful and calculated developments. Therefore, prioritizing this discourse is something

important to do.

The Urgency of Islam in Southeast Asia

As one of the important cultural identities embraced by the majority of the population, the Muslim community in Southeast Asia has a long and winding history. It began from its arrival around the 13th century through the trade and da'wah efforts of the Sufis, the emergence of various kingdoms and sultanates, to the current period of nation states. Islam in Southeast Asia holds the hope of a bright and exciting future to become the new mecca of Islamic civilization. This optimism is based entirely on a series of very strong reasons, namely: *First*, in the last two decades, Indonesia has experienced a "great harvest" of Muslim scholars in various fields who have completed their studies in various countries, and have produced various works that are worthy of academic consideration. All of this is certainly a very significant development for the Southeast Asian Muslim community. It can be said that since the 1980s, the Muslim middle class has only experienced development. If in Indonesia there is no special terminology that represents this new group, it is different from in Malaysia which refers to the Muslim middle-class group as "*new Malay*" (Alatas (Syed), 1996). *Second*, the rapid growth of the Muslim middle class in various sectors of the economy, business, banking, and other strategic sectors, in addition to those who serve in the government. *Third*, the economic growth in the Southeast Asian region is significant and has become one of the important world economic powers. Fourth, the strong current of democratization which doctrinally has a strong relevance to Islamic values.

Fifth, the rapid growth of Islamic financial institutions such as banking, insurance, *Baitul Mal wat Tamwil*, and so on. The change in the political currents of the government in Indonesia and Malaysia since the 1990s which have more accommodated a conciliatory approach between Islamic teachings and Muslim groups has contributed to the emergence of a number of new Islamic institutions, such as Islamic banks better known as sharia banks, a banking institution that consistently applies sharia law, Islamic insurance (takaful), Islamic people's credit units better known as *sharia banks Bait al-mal wa al-tamwil* (BMT). At the same time, a number of religious donation institutions for zakat, infaq, and alms (ZIS) also developed which were collected from people who had enough to distribute to eligible groups. The recent emergence of the phenomenon of sharia financial institutions, it is hoped that economic empowerment cooperation will gain the right momentum. The shock of the American economy, which is one of the mecca of the world economy, also provides an opportunity for the emergence of the sharia economic system as one of the alternatives that can be developed, in order to form economic cooperation in the regional scope in Southeast Asia. Of course, this is not to be understood as an offer of an Islamic system exclusively, but rather directed at the possibility of forming a strong Southeast Asian economic zone that can be avoided from various economic shocks that often arise. (Mukti, 2020)

Sixth, the higher religious fervor as indicated by the vibrancy of places of worship, the higher the number of pilgrims, and the rapid growth of Islamic publications. A number of these symbolic Islamic phenomena cannot be denied. There have been several new tendencies in religious practices, Islamic institutions, Islamic lifestyles

adopted by a number of Muslim groups. Many mosques were established with Middle Eastern architectural styles that were enlivened by various spiritual activities that were attended by many young people. On the other hand, the enthusiasm to perform Hajj and Umrah to the Holy Land of Makkah among Muslims is also growing rapidly. According to available data, the number of pilgrims from Southeast Asia reaches 225,000 people per year. This number is still much more than the number of pilgrims from other Muslim regions in the world (Alzeer & Abuzinadah, 2024).

Seventh, there is a similarity in Malay culture that strengthens the Sunni Islamic pattern, so that it can strengthen cultural cooperation between nations in Southeast Asia. In general, Sunnis are indeed the majority group of Muslims in the world. Only about 10-15% adhere to Shi'a. This difference in religious understanding is more triggered by the absence of agreement on the leadership after the Prophet PBUH. The existence of this diversity of Islamic patterns is certainly a very valuable asset for efforts to build a new Islamic civilization in Southeast Asia (Wahyono & D. Gamon, 2020).

Of course, these various strengths and opportunities that can still be added are important basic capital in building joint steps, both between governments, as well as between socio-religious institutions and educational institutions in this region for the realization of a new power of Islam in Southeast Asia. However, in accordance with its tolerant and inclusive nature, this new Islamic civilization in Southeast Asia must be built together with other communities in the spirit of mutual respect, mutual care, mutual respect, and mutual help on the basis of universal humanity and fraternal relations among peoples around the region.

It is fully realized that this area was built together with other religious communities whose contributions are very important and significant. The willingness of the Indonesian people to live together and coexist in order to build a nation fully has a strong religious foundation in Islam. That in its most important source of teaching, namely the Qur'an, Islam views differences in beliefs and plurality of religious understanding as valid, natural (*sunnah Allâh*) and human. Therefore, it is fully realized that building Islamic civilization in Southeast Asia means building the future of the region with all the components and strengths of the nations and the various communities that exist in it.

However, as the greatest force of religion, the Muslim community is the main key to the building of an inclusive, tolerant, multicultural, and modern Southeast Asian civilization in the future. Without this kind of cultural spirit, not only will Southeast Asia as the center of Islamic civilization not be realized, but also all the prerequisites necessary for the creation of national security and stability will be destroyed. In accordance with the open, dynamic, and pluralistic Malay ethos, the image of Islam in Southeast Asia is completely contrary to the assumptions of some who view Islam as an exclusive, static, monolithic, literal, scriptural, and terror-tinged teaching. Therefore, the recent emergence of religious movements that take destructive measures must be seen as deviant and contrary to the true basic values of Islam. This is what Howard Federspiel alleged about two decades ago, that since four hundred years, Indonesia and Islam in the Southeast Asian region in general have displayed heterodox religious beliefs and practices, which today are slowly but surely starting to shift to orthodox patterns.(Federspiel, 2009)

The birth of orthodox religious beliefs in Islam, including those that developed in Southeast Asia, according to Vartan Gregorian, cannot be separated from the decline of Islamic supremacy caused by the colonial expansion of Europe. From this emerged two schools of thought in Islam that can still be said to be very relevant, namely traditionalists and reformists. Traditionalists believe that the cause of Islam's decline can be traced to moral laxity and deviation from the true teachings of Islam. Consequently, the response raised by this group is an invitation to Islamic revival. While the other sect, better known as the reformist sect, felt that the decline of Islam was more due to the chronic failure to modernize Islamic society and institutions. This splinter group of sects has tried to ask critical questions about the possibility of modernizing Muslim society and institutions without westernization. What are the tips for protecting people's cultural heritage and traditional practices in the global era and how to develop a common existence between modernization and traditionalization without westernization(Moosa, 2006).

The existence of the school of thought as mentioned above, is certainly one of the real obstacles to realizing Southeast Asian Islamic civilization as the mecca of new Islamic civilization. As the majority force in Southeast Asia, the basic attitude of the Muslim community must be entirely respectful, protective and protective, and provide a conducive climate for other religious groups to express their values and culture openly. This is based on the fact that all components of religion and culture basically have the same spirit and values, namely peace, equality, justice, openness, and the realization of universal humanitarian ideals for the entire nation.

In the meantime, linking Islamic identity with Malay culture in Southeast Asia is an undeniable necessity. Doctrinally, there is no reason to reject and negate the possibility of the emergence of various forms of religious expression. In his famous book, *tsaqafâtuna bain al-infitah wa al-inghilaq* (Islamic Civilization between Inclusiveism and Exclusivism), Yûsuf Qaradhâwî emphatically mentions this "diversity" (*tanawwu'*) as one of the main characteristics and basic character of Islamic civilization. Meanwhile, sociologically and historically, this diversity or plurality arises due to the contact of Islam with various cultural localities that are indeed diverse. So, at this point, it can be fully understood about the importance of custom or tradition (*'adat al muhakkamah*) as one of the sources of law. Therefore, the difference in the cultural expression of Islam in Southeast Asia compared to the centers of Islamic civilization in other regions such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Indo-Pakistan, and Iran should not be understood as a peripheral or fringe phenomenon of Islam that is distorted and impure, but should be seen as an alternative Islamic cultural pattern that can take an important role and position in the future.

More or less, it is in the pattern of expression of Islamic religious diversity that is multicultural, accommodating, tolerant, and peaceful, that it can be initiated about Southeast Asia as one of the centers of Islamic civilization in the world. Considering the various strengths and potentials available today, it does not seem like an exaggeration to initiate the possibility of the emergence of a new mecca of Islamic civilization in Southeast Asia.

Towards the Future of Islamic Civilization in Southeast Asia

As Islam grows stronger in Southeast Asia, it is reasonable to be optimistic that the Muslim community in the region will emerge as one of the most important and important cultural forces (Houben, 2003). This optimism certainly needs to be followed up with various concrete steps, including increasing cooperation in economic empowerment of the people, strengthening educational cooperation, strengthening cooperation in socio-religious institutions, cooperation in research and development, as well as publishing academic works, mainstreaming inclusive, tolerant, friendly, and peaceful Islamic patterns, and various other forms of program cooperation ("Towards a Peaceful Future of Asean in an Era of Turbulence," 2015).

As a group of countries that fall into the category of "Third World," one of the main problems of Muslims today is the still high poverty rate and low access for some people to economic resources. This is due to various factors such as low levels of education and scientific qualifications, limited mastery of technology, and limited capital. Therefore, cooperation in empowering the people needs serious attention from all parties (Aprianto, 2016). At least in the case of Indonesia, the issue of economic empowerment must receive more serious attention related to the still high number of madrasah graduates (Tsanawiyah and Aliyah, and even STAIN, IAIN, and UIN, as well as students of other Islamic universities and Islamic boarding schools) who have not received adequate access in the economic field. This is important, because one of the most effective ways to carry out the transformation of the social class that is more often identified with economic class for certain groups of people is through education. Therefore, access to quality education is the main key in the macro development process and for the empowerment of each individual on a micro scale.

In addition, there needs to be a closer connection between Islamic educational institutions and the world of industry and entrepreneurship. Madrasahs, Islamic boarding schools, and Islamic universities should not only emphasize normative and religious aspects, but also equip graduates with practical skills that are relevant to the needs of the modern job market. Internship programs, business incubation, digital training, and the development of student cooperatives can be a bridge that expands economic access for graduates. In this way, Islamic education not only produces individuals who are spiritually religious, but also economically independent and competitive at the national and global levels (Naimah dkk., 2020).

In this context, Indonesia has long been concerned about quality Islamic education for its people, both education organized by the government and the community. For the level of Islamic universities organized by the government, for example, the government through the Ministry of Religion has organized no less than six State Islamic Universities (UIN), 15 State Islamic Religious Institutes (IAIN) that have been established since the 1960s, and 31 State Islamic Religious Colleges (STAIN). (Salahuddin, 2017) Especially for UIN, the government has given a wider mandate for the higher education institution not only to organize Islamic studies study programs, but also to develop the field of study of science and technology study programs. Of course, the educational process pursued through various Islamic educational institutions, both universities and other educational institutions, will undoubtedly play an important role in the process of modernizing Muslim society.

Evidently, a number of alumni of this educational institution have progressive, inclusive and tolerant Islamic thoughts (Abdullah, 2017).

In addition, in order to strengthen the quality of Southeast Asian Muslim human resources, it is also necessary to strengthen cooperation in the field of education. As the most important and main social capital for strengthening Islam's contribution to the face of civilization in Southeast Asia, attention to educational cooperation needs to be strengthened and expanded in various forms, such as strengthening institutional management, developing learning design, providing library materials, developing educational technology, improving the quality of personnel and teachers/lecturers, model development, student and student exchange, and various other educational cooperation. This collaboration is not only intended for equal access to education to all levels of society, but also hopes to build Muslim human resources that are increasingly qualified and able to compete at the global level. In fact, the phenomenon of the "great harvest" of Muslim intellectuals in the last two decades is expected to be strengthened in the form of mastery of access to various business fields and economic institutions for the empowerment and welfare of the ummah (Tadjuddin et al., 2016).

However, there are also aspects that should not be ignored in an effort to build Southeast Asian Islamic civilization which is projected as a new mecca of world Islamic civilization. The radical Islamic movement that has emerged in the Southeast Asian region must receive extra serious attention from all parties. Now is the right time for scholars, leaders, and all elements of Southeast Asian Muslims to continue to develop moderate Islamic teachings as a counterpart to the Islamic radicalism movement. All elements of Muslims are obliged to socialize Southeast Asian Islam as moderate Islam, peace-loving Islam, and merciful Islam *li al-'âlamîn*.

The problem of radicalism that arises in Islam can be seen from at least two sides. First, the distortion of the understanding of Islamic doctrine to justify the understanding of radicalism and terrorism. Second, the rampant practice of violence that unexpectedly develops in a number of Muslim countries in fact in response to the socio-political conditions in each region. This is where communication, information, and education efforts are needed for the public that the practice of radicalism in Islam is a distortion of religious understanding.

In addition to through formal channels in educational institutions, the dissemination and education about moderate Islam can also be carried out effectively through the mass media. One of the strategic steps has been taken by the Ministry of Religious Affairs in collaboration with The Muslim World League in the International Conference on Islamic Media which took place in Jakarta in December 2011. This conference became an important milestone in the history of the development of Islam in the Southeast Asian region. In the forum, Indonesia was trusted by the participants to form *a follow-up committee* tasked with initiating various agendas to strengthen the role of Islamic media. This momentum must be used as well as possible, because as a country with the largest Muslim population in the world, Indonesia has a moral responsibility to take a leadership role and make a real contribution to the future direction of Islamic development for the benefit of global ummah.

In order to be able to carry out the function of socialization and education to the

maximum, the position of the media must be strengthened. The media in Muslim countries now has to admit that it is still very weak. The content of media reports in Muslim countries, especially in the Southeast Asian region, has not focused on the reporting of moderate Islam and the merciful Islam *of li al-'âlamîn*. Facts on the ground show that the direction and orientation of media reporting are still controlled by the big three, which are not controlled by the West. This is a serious problem for efforts to build a new mecca of Islamic civilization in the Southeast Asian region. Because by doing so, the direction of news will continue to be controlled and determined by the big three owners of international media agencies. So it is not surprising that the news of Islam that appears in the midst of society is still dominated by the face of Islam which is very contrary to the true spirit of Islam, namely peace-loving Islam, which is closer to the representation of the face of Islam in the Southeast Asian region. Of course, there must be efforts to end this phenomenon, including by strengthening the role of the media in Muslim countries. Because that way can create a balance of information in the new world. The goal is none other than so that the voice of Muslims, especially Southeast Asian Muslims, can be well understood, where Islam has been most often misunderstood by many circles (Ruliansyah, 2023).

A number of strategic agendas to overcome this problem have been designed, including a plan to organize a forum that provides a space for dialogue between media people, including Western journalists who have had many misunderstandings about Islam. They need to be given clear information about how democracy and tolerance have worked well in Indonesia. By acting as a follow-up committee at the International Conference on Islamic Media, Indonesia has a great opportunity to become a new figure in the process of communication, information, and education in moderate and peace-loving Islam in Southeast Asia. It is through various strategic efforts like this, both through formal and informal education processes, that Islamic protests can actually be socialized to the public to the maximum.

Conclusion

Southeast Asia, especially Indonesia and Malaysia, has great potential to become a new epicenter in the rise of global Islamic civilization. This potential lies not only in the demographic strength with a significant number of Muslims but also in the Islamic pattern that has been formed historically, namely Islam that is moderate, inclusive, and synergistic with local culture. Islam in the region developed through a peaceful process of acculturation and da'wah, making it an expression of Islam that is friendly to plurality and democracy.

The region also shows positive dynamics in various strategic sectors, such as Islamic education, sharia economics, and the strengthening of the Muslim middle class which contributes in the intellectual, political, and social spheres. The historical experience and socio-religious maturity of the Southeast Asian Muslim community show that the region is capable of being a pioneer for a model of Islamic civilization that is not only contextual but also relevant to the demands of modern times. In this context, the face of Southeast Asian Islam is seen as an alternative to the rigid and exclusive model of Islam.

Nevertheless, emerging challenges such as radicalism and distortion of Islamic teachings demand a critical response from Muslim thinkers and institutions in the region. Efforts to strengthen progressive Islam must continue to be carried out through education, media, and cultural diplomacy. By affirming a peaceful and civilized Islamic identity, Southeast Asia is not only able to reposition itself in the landscape of Islamic civilization, but also to shape a more humanist and common benefit-oriented global Islamic future.

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