

## Islam and the Malay World: An Insight into the Assimilation of Islamic Values

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**Abstract:** The spread of Islam to the Malay World, a term used to refer to the majority of Malay-Muslim dominated nations such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei and the minority Malay-Muslim population of Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Singapore and Philippines brought several changes. Before the arrival of Islam the Malay civilisation was characterised by Hindu and Buddhist influence. The impacts of Islamic civilisation from the West Asia to the Malay world are enormous. The Malays then had not only given up their polytheistic belief in many gods to the firm belief in *Al-Tawhid*, but had changed their life towards Islam. The Malays had fully adopted a life based on Islamic principles as evidenced in social and religious gatherings such as wedding ceremony, *kenduri* (feast) and *doa selamat* (acts of thanksgiving to Allah). This paper attempts to highlight the unique relation of Islam and the Malay world through the former's expansion in terms of religious faith, assimilation of Islamic values in socio-religious life of the people, the roles of Islamic institutions such as mosques and *madrassahs*.

**Key words:** Islam · West Asia · Malay World · Socio-religious life and Islamic Institutions

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### INTRODUCTION

The 'Malay world' is a world which included many parts of Southeast Asia, stretching from Vietnam, Cambodia down to southern Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Brunei and Southern Philippines [1]. One of the earliest writings on the topic of Malay world is the text written by Abdullah Munshi in 1612 known as *Sejarah Melayu* or *Sulalatul Salatin* in Arabic [2]. Before the arrival of Islam to the Malay world, many parts of the region were under the Kingdom of *Sriwijaya*, between the seventh and the fourteenth century [3]. The Kingdom of *Sriwijaya* was greatly influenced by Hindu-Buddhist traditions. The Indian merchants from India came to Southeast Asia as early as the fourth century and continued their trading activities within the regions occupied by the Kingdom of *Sriwijaya* until the fourteenth century [4]. In fact the spread of Buddhism and Indian traditions contributed towards the growth of commerce and trade across the Malay world [5].

Thus, the Malay civilisation before Islam set foot was characterised by Hindu and Buddhist influences [6].

The influence of Indian cultures in the Malay world between the fourth and seventh century were from five perspectives as discussed in the following section.

*First*, the influence of the teachings of Hinduism and Buddhism. Both religions believe in the idea of the "transmigration souls." In accordance with this belief, every human beings had to undergo a series of lives, deaths and rebirths, depending on the form he would take in the next reincarnation. The ultimate journey of a human soul is the breaking away from the cycle of rebirths and uniting with the Divine. In Hinduism the liberation of the cycle is called *Moksha* while in Buddhism, it is *Nirwana* [6].

*Second*, the influence of Indian literatures, especially the two great epics of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, both of which were written in the language of *Sanskrit*. Scenes from the poems and stories are portrayed in the *wayang kulit* in Indonesia, Kelantan and Patani [6].

*Third*, the influence of arts from Indian schools of Arts, the Amaravati and the Guptas. The Borobudur in Java and Angkor Wat in Cambodia, are respectively Javanese and Khmer in design and workmanship, though both bear witness to the inspiration of Indian art and religion [6].

*Fourth*, the influence of Indian idea of kingship. The Indian Book of Manu (*Manu Smitri*) lays down a clear statement of the power and position of the king. As an example, “Kings are vastly superior to other created beings because they are made of the essences of the gods” [6]. Clearly, the traditional Malay concept of power or rather authority means loyalty to a legitimate authority and it is unthinkable that anyone could be disloyal to such a power. The Malay kingdoms were in Java, Sumatra and Malay Peninsula, whose leaders then used titles of Maharaja and Raja [7].

*Fifth*, the worshipping of nature or the belief of the presence of divinity in creations which is known as pantheism. The ancient Indians believed that mountains were the abode of gods. This aspect of pantheistic belief spread in the Malay world. Hindu and Buddhist temples and shrines were built close to a hill or mountain. Examples of such sites are Bukit Seguntang in Palembang and Gunung Jerai in Kedah, Malaysia [9].

**Islam and the Malay World:** The Malay world or sometimes fondly referred to as *Nusantara* refers to the world of islands. The arrival of Islam to the Malay world was through Pasai, a state in northern Sumatra in the twelfth century brought by the Arab traders from Saudi Arabia [9]. While Pasai was recognised as the pioneering state to accept Islam, it was generally accepted that it was Malacca that provided the impetus for Islamic leadership and administration of the Malay states in the region. Parameswara’s conversion to Islam after his marriage with a Pasai princess around 1414 and his adoption of the Muslim Megat Iskandar Shah was one reason for the rapid spread of the religion [1].

Malacca was regarded the major catalyst in the eventual expansion of Islam to other regions such as Palembang in Sumatra, Patani in southern Thailand, North Borneo, Brunei and Mindanao in southern Philippines [1]. While in Cambodia, the Champ Muslims possess one of Southeast Asia’s oldest Kufic inscription (calligraphy) dating to 1035.

The tabulation of Southeast Asian Muslims in 2009 is shown in the following table [10]:

Country	Total Population	Muslim population (No.)	(%)	% of Total Southeast Asian Muslim Community
Brunei	388,190	260,087	67	0.1
Darussalam	14,494,293	304,380	2.1	0.12
Cambodia				
Indonesia	240,271,522	206,873,780	86.1	84.56
Malaysia	25,749,600	14,084,700	54.7	5.46
Philippines	97,976,603	13,716,724	14	5.6
Thailand	65,905,410	9,226,757	14	3.77
Singapore	4,463,542	791,782	17	0.32
Vietnam	86,967,524	86,968	0.1	0.03
Malay world	536,216,684	245,315,178		100%

With the arrival of Islam, the impacts of the faith and culture from West Asia are conspicuous. The paper analyses the impacts on the Malay world on the assimilation of Islamic values in social-religious and the roles of the Islamic institutions such as mosques and *madrasahs* as institutions to reflect faith and identity.

**Assimilation of Islamic Values in the Socio-Religious**

**Life:** The emergence and spread of Islamic civilization from West Asia had a profound impact on the Malay world. A very strong factor for the quick spread of Islam in the Malay world is the aspect of equality of man. W.F. Wertheim in his book entitled *Indonesian Society in Transition: A Study of Social Change* says the following [11]:

Islam gave the small man a sense of individual worth as the member of the Islamic community. According to the Hindu ideology he was merely a creature of lower order than the members of the higher castes. Under Islam he could, as it were, feel himself their equal, or even, in his equality as a Muslim, the superior of such of them as were not Muslims themselves, even though he still occupied a subordinate position in the social structure.

**Pillars of Islam:** Islamic religious tenets and principles are the main source of guidance among the Malays. While the basic principles and practices as instructed by the Qur’an and the *Sunnah* have remained, there are elaborations according to the Malay traditional practices. The most important fundamental religious practices followed rigidly by the Malays are the performance of “Pillars of Islam.”

The Malays observe all the basics tenets of Islam. Liturgical prayers are performed five times daily. They perform the religious ritual of fasting for 30 days during the month of *Ramadan* and pay *zakat* (tithe) on income and production. They also look forward to performing the

pilgrimage, a requirement once in a life time for those with financial means and good health [12]. For the purpose of prayer, it can be done alone or in congregation performed at the mosque or a small prayer house known as *surau* or *mussalla*.

Unlike the Arabs who will wear the long robe for prayer, the Malays maintain their traditional costumes. Normally, the Malays in Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei, adorn the *Baju Melayu* and *sarong* with a cap head dress or white skull cap [12]. The Champ Malays in Cambodia and Vietnam have Malay elements in their traditional costumes. Many of the men wear hand-woven *sarongs* and embroidered caps [13]. The Malays in Thailand and Philippines also wear *sarongs* with a cap head dress or white skull cap. The Indonesians, though diverse in the traditional costumes due to its large population across many islands, still have the *sarong* as the main costume and clothing made from *batik* or plaid cloth with either a *songkok*, a white skull cap or head dress [14].

Daily and Friday prayers are almost routine religious performance for the Malays. The most celebrated prayers, normally perform in congregation are those during the *Eid al-Fitri* and *Eid al-Adha*. The Malays would dress up for the occasion during the prayers. The Malays from Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei would adorn new *Baju Melayu* and gold threaded sarong called *samping* for the congregation prayer performed at the mosques [12].

The Malays from the various regions of the Malay world observe the month of *Ramadan* by fasting for 30 days. Fasting demands abstinence from eating, drinking and sexual relationship from dawn to sunset. During the month of *Ramadan*, the Malays prefer to concentrate on religious matters such as reading the Qur'an, normally after prayers during the day. While at night after the *Isya'* prayer, they would go to nearest mosque or *surau* to perform the commendable *terawih* prayer [12].

Finally, the pilgrimage to Mecca is the central yearly religious events for millions of Malays. This is a central event of many Muslims' religious experience in the world: more capital, both financial and spiritual, is spent in performing the *hajj* than in most other activities of one's religious life [15]. *Hajj* is an observance to be performed only once in a lifetime by every sane, adult and free Muslim provided he is physically fit to undertake the trip and the passage to and from Mecca is safe and the pilgrim has the means and the money to undertake the journey [16]. The pilgrims from Southeast Asia stay in a broad range of housing in the Hejaz, from five-star hotels right outside the main mosques in Mecca and Medina to

shabby rented apartment blocks, located miles from the center of each city. These options represent the differences in wealth that are characteristics of Southeast Asian pilgrimage: Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei, for example, mostly stay in extremely comfortable surroundings, while the pilgrims from the region's poorer nations (usually Thailand, the Philippines and Indonesia, not to mention the small numbers who come from Cambodia or Vietnam) stay in considerable less august circumstances [15].

Despite of the discernable differences, the sole aim of the pilgrimage remains as one of the noblest acts of devotion to seek repentance and forgiveness from Allah with the hope that the ritual washes off the sins.

**Communal Feast:** The Malays normally organize thanksgiving feasts to commemorate certain occasions. In Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei, communal feasts are better known as *kenduri*. In Southern Thailand, they are referred to as *makan pulut* (glutinous rice), usually serving chicken or beef *rendang* (stewed in coconut milk). While in urban areas such as Bangkok, the communal feastings are referred as *thambun* (making merit) [17]. A Malay communal feast is held for a variety of reasons but most commonly to offer thanksgiving or *shukur*

The most noticeable religious element of the Malay feasts is the aspect of supplication or *doa* which is conducted first followed by the feast. The ritual of supplication is normally done by an *imam* or a religious teacher (*uztaz*). In Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei, this communal feast is known as *kenduri doa selamat*. In Java, it is called *selamatan* while in Kalimantan in north Borneo, it is called *ringgo* [12]. Another important communal event for the Malays is the recitation of *Surah Ya-Sin* every Thursday night which is performed weekly at the mosques. Normally, after the recitation and the supplication, there will be a small feast for the people. On most occasions, this event coincides with another religious ritual called *tahlil arwah* (prayer for the dead). In this ritual, the emphasis of supplication is to seek forgiveness and blessing for the dead. However, on most occasions, the recitation of *doa* is to seek safety, security, protection or fulfillment of hopes for the people [12].

The month of *Ramadan* is one the most celebrated month in Islam. There are two kinds of communal feast during the month of *Ramadan*. The first is known as *iftar*, the fast-breaking communal feast after the call of *azan* which is normally held at the mosques or *surau*s.

The Malays believe the commendable manner to break the fast is with *tamar* (dates) then followed by a meal which is considered a full dinner [12]. In villages across the Malay world, the exchange of *kuih* (pastry or cake) is practiced during the month of *Ramadan* among the neighbours. The second communal feast is called *more* (supper) after the *terawih* prayer. Unlike *iftar*, the meal normally consists of tea and small cakes.

Another important communal religious feast for the Malays after the month of *Ramadan* is the *doa Selamat Hari Raya Fitri* (thanksgiving for Eid celebration). This is normally done during *Hari Raya Eid Fitri*, right after the congregational prayer performed at the mosques. While on the occasion of *Eid Adha*, another important communal gathering in Islam is observed. As part of the Islamic ritual of *Eid Adha* is the *korban* (slaughtering of cows or goats) either done within the compound or near the mosques. This is an important ritual observed by the Malays in all regions in the Malay world.

**Marriage and Wedding:** Marriage is a pivotal rite of passage for people who have reached adulthood and become recognized community members. To remain unmarried, particularly of a Malay girl, constitutes a social aberration. The notions of customary marriages across the Malay world contrast with the romantic unions people seek in the West. Marriages are often arranged by the parents or require their approval [14]. In order to ascertain the status of the girl, the man's parents normally assign a relative to *merisik* (confidential examination) of the eligibility of the girl. Then, the traditional customary practice of *meminang* (proposal of marriage) by the prospective groom's parents is held for the taking of the girl as a daughter-in-law to be.

In Indonesia, marriage ceremony varies from one that is lavish and expensive to one that is simple. In areas where a bride's dowry forms the crux of a nuptial agreement, a marriage would require so many buffaloes, horses, gold jewelry and so on. In some regions in Indonesia, a marriage ceremony is a simple event conducted by the *Qadi* and members of the family at the bride's house [14].

In many parts of the Malay world, the aspect of marriage is a technical legitimating of a marital contract between the couple as publicly witnessed by others. It involves a clear utterance of 'giving away' (*ijab*) by the *wali* (normally the father) and an equally clear utterance of acceptance (*kabul*) by the groom. The whole process is called *akad nikah*. The bride and the groom seal the

contract by signing the proper papers (*surat nikah*) and by the groom making a customary bridal gift called *mas kahwin* [12]. The *mas kahwin* is money that varies according to the amount fixed by the respective country's religious ministry.

In the Philippines, in all marriages the groom's family pays a sum known as *mautaud*, which is pre-agreed by both sets of parents. In the island of Cagayan de Sulu of Southern Philippines, a wedding ceremony is a celebrated occasion. The festive air of the ceremony is kept alive by the continuous beating of the *kulintang gongs* (drums); the staccato fire or firecrackers or of actual guns, the weird sounds of accordion music accompanied by drum beats [18]. The Champ Malays describe their marriage rules as inclusive. The Champ communities tend to marry largely within the neighborhood where they grew up [13].

Marriage is designed to bring about religious, moral, social and physiological benefits to the husband and wife [19]. In Islam, marriage is a social and moral safeguard as well as social building unit. Through marriage, families are established and family institutions are considered to be the fundamental unit of society.

### Roles Mosques and Madrasahs

**Mosques:** Mosques serve as the focal point of the religious and communal life of Muslims in the Malay world. These mosques are found throughout the Malay world to serve the needs of the Muslim community. In the less inhabited areas, *suraus* (small praying houses) are built to fulfill the socio-religious needs of the Muslims. Technically, a mosque is a place of worship for the Muslims. But, in the Malay world, particularly, where the Muslims are minorities, mosques serve many different functions apart from conducting the congregational prayer. They are important venues for Islamic educational programs, deliberations of community affairs and function as the community service centre and even as secretariat office.

In many regions of the Malay world, the main function of a mosque is as a house of worship. Muslims go to the mosques daily to perform their five prayers. Congregational prayers are commended whereby the reward is twenty-seven times that of praying alone. Compulsory congregational prayer every Friday adds further significance to the role of the mosque as the house of worship for Muslims. Other important religious occasions for the Muslims are prayers on *Eid Fitri* and *Eid Adha* and the *terawih* prayer during the month of *Ramadhan*. The *akad nikah* of a Malay marriage

ceremony is often conducted at a mosque as Muslims believe in the blessing of the mosque for a long lasting marriage for the couple.

Mosques and *suraus* across the Malay world are the learning centers for children to learn and read the Qur'an. Learning to read the Qur'an is *fard 'ayn*, a religious obligation for every Muslim, male or female. Other forms of education offered by the mosques are religious classes for children and adults and religious lectures and talks. Another important role of the mosques in the Malay world is the main venue for religious-communal life of the Muslims. Important religious events such as *korban* (slaughtering of cows and goats) on *Eid Adha* and the Prophet's (saw) birthday or *maulud* are held every year.

Majority of the mosques and *suraus* are funded by Muslims themselves, either through *waqf* (endowments) and donations. There are mosques constructed from funds, the bulk of which from endowments from wealthy families or from the Muslim business community. Others were built from monies raised through various activities like house-to-house donations, public contributions, donations from traders and sales of souvenirs. In Muslim countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei, the respective governments allocate some funds for the building and maintenance of mosques [20]. In Thailand, the government gives subsidies to meet the management expenses of the mosques but they are required to register officially and become a member of *Chularatchamontri* socio-religious bureau [17]. In Cambodia, there are 268 mosques and 200 *musalla* which are active in 317 Muslim villages [21].

In Singapore, the multiplicity of functions of the mosques is particularly evident in a group of six mosques, namely the Mujahirin Mosque, Mujahidin Mosque, Assakirin Mosque, An-Nur Mosque, Al-Muttaqin Mosque and Al-Ansar) that were built from 1977 to 1980 [20]. This is the most tangible and significant multi-functional feature of the mosques as this characteristic added a new dimension of their socio-religious functioning for the benefits of Muslims. The mosques are not only the house of worships and learning of Islam but are venues for the organizations of many social functions such as weddings, gatherings and even accommodation for travelers.

**Madrasahs:** The term *madrasah* is firstly used in Aceh from the term *meunasah*, (probably a corrupt form of Arabic *Madrasah*), which means a small place of worship which later functioned as elementary schools for

children to study Qur'an and basic teachings of Islam [22]. In Indonesia, the Islamic educational institution is called *pesantren* which stems from "santri" which means one who seeks Islamic knowledge. In Java and Madura, *pesantren* is familiarly known as *pondok*, while in Sumatra it is generally known as *surau* [23]. In the Philippines, the Islamic school is called *makatib*, from the Arabic word *kataba*, "to write," and typically consists of small tutorial classes conducted at the mosque or the home of the teacher [24].

The *madrasahs* in the the Malay world is a very important Islamic educational institution. Muslims built a mosque and a *madrasah* whenever they settled down. In majority of instances, the school is part of the mosque [25]. A *madrasah* Islamic education normally teaches pupils the essential aspects of worship in Islam, recitation of the Qur'an, study of Arabic language, *Jawi* and Islamic sciences. In Singapore, a *madrasah* education includes the study of basic mathematics and social studies [26]. The Muslims in the Philippines normally opt for a *madrasah* education but the government has rationalized the curriculum by broadening their education to include subjects like mathematics, science, social studies and English which was implemented in 1990, known as integrated *madaris* [27]. However, the Department of Education is hindered by constitutional restrictions that prevent direct support to religious school [28].

The mediums of instruction at primary level are Malay and Arabic while at secondary level, the medium of instruction is Arabic. In Cambodia, the children study in Arabic and in Champ language [13]. The medium of instruction for *madrasah* education in the Philippines is Arabic as the Muslims want to preserve their Islamic identity in view of their long negative experiences of colonization under the Spanish and American imperialism [24]. *Madrasah* Islamic education in secondary level in the Muslim world is conducted in the Arabic language and along the model curriculum of Al-Azhar University [29]. This is to ensure the eligibility of the students later in higher education in universities in Egypt and West Asia.

The majority of the *madrasahs* in the Malay world are privately funded by Muslim themselves. Brunei offers free schooling to its entire citizen. However, full religious schools at the secondary level are offered to only the best students [30]. As the Sultanate Kingdom is a nation with huge oil reserves which are its major source of revenue, the government builds mosques, universities and schools for its people [31]. Registered religious schools in

Malaysia and Indonesia are subsidized by the respective Religious Ministries. In Thailand, the *madrasahs* are part of the mosques and they obtain some forms of subsidy through Thailand's socio-religious bureau. The integrated *madaris* receive some financial assistance from the Department of Education and the options embodied in such schools remains limited, for most part, to those who can afford them [24]. After the collapse of the Khmer Rouge regime, Cambodia's Muslims began to receive some help from outside donors, primary from Malaysia and other Muslim countries in the region. Much of the help continued to be directed toward religious reconstruction and refugee work [32].

The spread and enhancement of Islam in the Malay world was actualised by the important roles played by Islamic institutions such as mosques and *madrasahs*. Both institutions possess distinctive characters and mechanisms for the proper propagation, learning and practice of Islam throughout the Malay world. In countries where Muslims are the minority and required to use names that reflect nationalism and attend schools with modern education, mosques and *madrasahs* represent the only venue for them to maintain their identity, assimilation and acculturation of Islamic values.

**The Pattern of Conversion and the Assimilation of Islamic Values in the Malay World:** The Islamization of the Malay world came to the coastal city-states through Muslim merchants and traders of the Arab and Indian. Since the beginning of the eighth and ninth centuries, there were many merchants and traders of Arab and Indian who focused their trading activities in the islands of Malay Archipelago. Some of them even stayed permanently in these regions. Islam was spread through *dakwah* as well as intermarriages with the locals [33]. The Muslim settlers intermarried with the local population and became integrated with the local community [34]. Thus, Islam began from the trading ports of the coastal city-states. Such coastal city-states were centers for the diffusion of Islamic values to the Malays. The important city-states in the Malay world between fifteenth and seventeenth centuries were Malacca, Aceh or Makassar [35]. As was the case in these regions, in most of the other regions in the Malay world to which Islam spread, peaceful and voluntary conversion was far more important than force and conquest. The main characteristics of the Muslim missionary movement were more of preaching and persuasion rather than force and violence as they do come as conquerors.

Almost everywhere in the regions of the Malay world, trading contacts paved the way for the conversion of the Malays to become Muslims. Although Muslim merchants and traders paved the way for Islam, the dedicated Muslim missionaries - theologian, preachers, teachers and pilgrims who followed did much of the real work of persuasion and spreading of Islam to the Malays [36]. The latter have, in recent years, been especially active in the work of *dakwah*, in persuading and spreading out a more vigorous and consistent religious life among the locals.

Muslim merchants and traders introduced the local Malays to the values and rituals of the Islamic faith and impressed upon them that much of the world in the West Asia and Africa had converted to Islam. They came to the islands not to make a profit and not to establish themselves as superior, but primary to present the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (saw) and to establish Islam [37]. The marvelous success that has been achieved has largely due to them, who won their way to the hearts of the locals, by learning their language, adopting their manners and customs and began quietly and gradually to spread the religion of Islam [38]. The long intercourse with the locals has made them very rigid observers of their religious duties. The "Pillars of Islam" were adopted and practiced by the Malays while other values in Islam gradually found the way into their hearts. The Malays slowly purged away many of the forms of pre-Islamic beliefs and customs and later assimilated Islamic values into the socio-religious dimensions of life such as in communal feasts, marriages and weddings.

Another factor to consider in the spread of Islam in the regions of the Malay world is the Muslim mystical movement known as Sufism. The second half of the thirteenth century saw a great upsurge of the Sufi movement throughout the world of Islam and this is the main factor in the spread of Islam [36]. The Sufis principally came from India and had facilitated the convenient conversion to Islam by the fact that the early Indian Muslim missionaries were able to syncretise Islamic teachings with existing customary law (*adat*) [39]. The Sufis had tolerated some aspects of the teachings contrary to the Islamic doctrine such as the worshipping of saints and the continuance of time-hallowed offerings at the graves of ancestor, ruler and teacher [39]. Consequently, the work of conversion has proceeded with a measure of tolerance as time was required to disentangle completely from the Hindu-Buddhist legends and traditions. Even so, there are glimpses of the previous

legends and traditions in certain regions of the Malay world today but through Sufism it also paved the way for a measure of spiritual care for the people in the traditional Malay areas.

In summarizing of the coming of Islam to the Malay world, it can be concluded that Islam was introduced by the Muslim merchants and traders. Islam was welcomed by the Malays since it treats everyone as equal while at the same time it is relatively simpler to practice compared to the Hindu-Buddhist beliefs. The social aspect of intermarriage was a major contributor for the assimilation of Islamic values to the Malays. The “Pillars of Islam” and other tenets of Islam were also simple to learn and practice and this explain why Islam was readily accepted and assimilated into the life of the Malays. Other contributing factors for the assimilation and preservation of Islamic values are the important roles played by the numerous mosques, *suraus* and *madrassahs* across the regions in the Malay world.

#### CONCLUSION

Islam and the Malay World have a unique and peculiar relationship. Islam has played an important role in the everyday life of the people in the Malay world. The Malay world is very intimately attached to Islamic teachings and also very close to the Arab culture. The teaching and practice of Islam are expressed everywhere throughout the Malay world. Generally, the five daily prayers have become the important daily routine for all the Muslims in the Malay world. The governments of Muslim-majority nations in the Malay world build mosques and educational institutions. Muslims in other parts of the Malay world continue to observe their religious duty and at the same time build mosques and other Islamic institutions.

From the time of their conversion to the present day, the people in the Malay world have shown an unwavering loyalty and tenacity in their adherence to Islam. Islam, a religion that came from West Asia, is undoubtedly the greatest factor in shaping the life and destiny of the people in the Malay world. The history and cultural processes of the people in the Malay world was indeed a dynamic transformation from the Hindu-Buddhist culture to Islamic civilisation based of the concept of *Al-Tawhid*, “There is no god but Allah.” Though there are variations in the practice of Islam, generally, in many parts of the Malay world, the commitment towards this concept gives the people in the Malay world a unique identity as a true Muslim.

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