

## The Network of Scholars and Intellectual Mobility between Indonesia and Brunei in the Formation of the Malay-Nusantara Islamic Civilization

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**Abstract:** The long history of Islam in the Malay-Nusantara region reflects the dynamic intersection of religion, culture, and science that gave birth to a distinctive and moderate Islamic civilization. In this context, the relationship between Indonesia and Brunei became a crucial node in the formation of Islamic scholarly networks in Southeast Asia. This study aims to uncover the patterns of ulama networks and intellectual mobility between the two countries, and to analyze their contributions to the formation of the Malay-Nusantara Islamic civilization. The method used is a qualitative approach with a historical documentary study design, through the exploration of various primary sources such as classical manuscripts, Islamic educational archives, religious works, and related academic literature. The results show that the Indonesian-Brunei ulama network was formed through educational relationships, da'wah, and written works, which played a crucial role in developing a rational and inclusive Islamic scholarly tradition. This intellectual mobility became the foundation for the formation of a Malay Islamic civilization oriented towards the values of moderation and progress. The implications of this research emphasize the importance of strengthening the Islamic intellectual network between countries as a basis for academic collaboration and the preservation of scientific heritage in the Southeast Asian region.

**Keywords:** Network of Ulama, Intellectual Mobility, Islamic Civilization, Malay-Nusantara, Historical Studies.



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## Introduction

In the context of the history of Islamic civilization, scholars played a central role in forming cross-regional and cross-cultural intellectual networks. Since the classical period of Islam, scholarly relationships between Islamic educational centers have formed a network of knowledge that transcends geographical and political boundaries (Ikbal et al., 2025). The intellectual mobility of scholars has been the primary means of transferring cosmopolitan Islamic knowledge, values, and traditions (Iswati, 2023). This phenomenon not only enriched Islamic scholarship but also strengthened cultural integration among Muslim communities in various regions. In the context of Southeast Asia, this dynamic shaped an inclusive Islam, deeply rooted in tradition yet open to renewal. Therefore, studies on scholar networks and intellectual mobility are important for understanding the social and cultural construction of regional Islamic civilization.

Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam are two countries in the Malay-Archipelago region that have a long history of religious and intellectual interaction (Herwansyah et al., 2024). These two countries share the same Islamic cultural roots, marked by the role of Islamic boarding schools, madrasas, and traditional da'wah institutions (Sofiani et al., 2024). The mobility of scholars between regions is a hallmark of the exchange of knowledge between the two nations, especially in the fields of fiqh, tafsir, tasawuf, and Islamic education (Anshori et al., 2024). In its development, this relationship has helped shape a moderate form of Islam that emphasizes a balance between sharia, tasawuf, and social ethics. However, the dynamics of globalization and modern social change require a re-examination of how this network of scholars continues to adapt to the contemporary context. This is where the importance of understanding the Indonesian-Brunei scholarly relationship as a representation of the Malay Islamic civilization of the archipelago lies.

Findings from religious institutions show that scientific cooperation between countries in the Malay region is still sporadic and has not been systematically documented (Kamarulnizam et al., 2022). Observations at several Islamic educational institutions show that there is academic interaction through lecturer exchanges, Islamic seminars, and cross-border research. However, most of these activities are not yet bound by a conceptual framework that explains the continuity of the network of scholars in the past and present. The Ministries of Religious Affairs in both countries have sought to strengthen religious diplomacy through the dispatch of students and religious teachers (Nasution, 2023). However, the direction of the studies has been more administrative than based on historical and cultural research. This condition emphasizes the importance of studies oriented towards reconstructing the network of scholars and intellectual mobility between countries in the Malay-Archipelago region.

The main problem in this study lies in the lack of comprehensive exploration of the dynamics of the network of scholars and intellectual mobility between Indonesia and Brunei in the context of the formation of the Malay-Nusantara Islamic civilization. Previous studies tend to focus on certain scholars without tracing the network of relationships.

across institutions and generations. As a result, the historical and social dimensions of these scientific relationships have not been fully captured. In addition, the paradigm shift in Islamic education due to modernization poses new challenges to the continuity of the tradition of classical scientific transmission. Therefore, the focus of this research is to identify the forms, patterns, and characteristics of the mobility of scholars who contributed to Islamic civilization in the Malay region. This issue also touches on the intertwined social, cultural, and political dimensions of religion.

This research covers Islamic educational institutions and communities of scholars in Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam that have historical and academic ties. The study focuses on the process of knowledge exchange, mechanisms of knowledge transmission, and the contribution of scholars to the formation of Malay-Nusantara Islam. Research was conducted on manuscripts, archives, and testimonies of scholars and academics who were part of this scientific network. With a cross-border locus, this study combines historical, anthropological, and sociological approaches. This study also highlights the role of traditional educational institutions such as Islamic boarding schools, madrasas, and Islamic universities as hubs of intellectual mobility. This approach allows for a holistic analysis of the formation of Islamic scientific networks in the Malay region.

Recent studies in the field of Southeast Asian Islamic history show an increased interest in the themes of scholar networks and the transmission of Islamic knowledge. Several contemporary studies



have highlighted the role of scholars from Patani, Aceh, and Kalimantan in connecting the Islamic world of the Middle East with the archipelago (Anshori et al., 2024). However, studies that specifically examine the interaction between Indonesia and Brunei are still limited and descriptive in nature. On the other hand, the development of social network theory and studies of intellectual mobility provide new perspectives in understanding the movement of scholars (Ni'am, 2023). This approach allows for the analysis of relationships between individuals, institutions, and ideas that shape the dynamics of regional Islamic scholarship. Therefore, this study utilizes an interdisciplinary paradigm to reinterpret the construction of scholar networks in the context of modern Malay-Archipelago.

Most previous studies have focused on the biographies of scholars or thematic analyses of religious works, but have not integrated aspects of mobility and cross-border interactions. This gap has led to a lack of understanding of how the scholarly relationship between Indonesia and Brunei contributed to the formation of regional Islamic identity. In addition, there has been no research linking the classical scholar network with the development of contemporary Islamic education in both countries. However, this continuity is important for understanding the process of reproduction of Islamic scholarship and values that are alive in Malay society. This study attempts to fill this gap with a cross-border historical-sociological approach. Thus, this study presents a more contextual, dynamic, and continuity-oriented analysis.

The novelty of this research lies in the integration of the intellectual history approach with social network theory in tracing the scientific relationship between Indonesia and Brunei. This research not only captures past relations, but also highlights the continuity of scientific traditions in the era of globalization. This interdisciplinary approach produces a new understanding of how scholars act as agents of Islamic civilization in the Malay Archipelago. Furthermore, the cross-national research context provides an original contribution to Southeast Asian Islamic studies. This research also introduces the concept of "spiritual intellectual mobility" as a form of knowledge transmission based on cultural values and identity. Thus, this research has novelty value in terms of its approach, context, and orientation of the study results.

This study aims to analyze the network of scholars and intellectual mobility between Indonesia and Brunei in the formation of the Malay-Nusantara Islamic civilization. Specifically, this study seeks to identify patterns of scholarly interaction, forms of social relations, and the contributions of scholars to the construction of regional Islamic values. The results of this study are expected to enrich the literature on the intellectual history of Southeast Asian Islam by emphasizing aspects of cross-border collaboration. Furthermore, this research is directed at building a new understanding of how the Malay Islamic scholarly tradition can adapt to the challenges of modernity. This study also aims to strengthen religious diplomacy and Islamic education between countries in the Malay region. Thus, the direction of this research is reconstructive, integrative, and transformative in building an Islamic civilization with an archipelagic perspective.

This research is important to enrich our understanding of the continuity of Islamic intellectual traditions in Southeast Asia. Through historical and sociological studies of the network of scholars, we will see how the scientific values of Malay Islam in the archipelago were formed and passed down. This knowledge is relevant to strengthening a moderate regional Islamic identity rooted in local traditions. In addition, this research can contribute to the development of Islamic educational cooperation between Indonesia and Brunei today. Another urgency lies in the effort to revitalize the spirit of cross-border scholarship that was the foundation of Islamic civilization in the past. Thus, this research is expected to serve as a bridge between intellectual history and the development of contemporary Islamic civilization.

## Research Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with a historical-documentary method. This approach was chosen because the focus of the study is to trace the intellectual traces and networks of scholars in the Malay-Nusantara region, particularly between Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam. The historical approach allows researchers to understand the dynamics of Islamic civilization through the reconstruction of past events recorded in various written sources. Thus, the research is not oriented towards collecting field data through interviews or observations, but rather towards tracing, interpreting, and analyzing.

written sources that have historical and academic value (Sugiyono, 2023). This approach is considered the most appropriate for revealing the patterns of scientific relationships that contributed to the formation of Islamic civilization in the Malay-Archipelago region.

The type of research used is descriptive qualitative research. This type is used to describe and explain in depth the form, characteristics, and patterns of the network of scholars that has been established between Indonesia and Brunei. Through analytical descriptions, researchers seek to find the relationship between scientific activities, knowledge transmission, and the influence of Islamic educational institutions in shaping the dynamics of regional Islamic civilization. This research does not aim to test hypotheses, but rather seeks to understand the meaning and context of the intellectual processes that occurred in the past. Therefore, the validity of the data is determined more by the richness of the sources and the accuracy of the analysis of the historical context.

The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained from manuscripts, ancient texts, books written by Malay-Archipelago scholars, archives of Islamic educational institutions, records of Hajj pilgrimages, and colonial documents that recorded interactions between scholars in different regions. Meanwhile, secondary data was obtained from books, scientific journals, theses, dissertations, and proceedings discussing the topics of Islamic history, networks of scholars, and Malay civilization. The use of these two types of data aims to strengthen the validity of the findings by triangulating textual sources. All data was collected through in-depth literature studies of various printed and digital sources available in national libraries, universities, and international online archives.

Data collection techniques were carried out through literature and documentation studies. Researchers searched for various relevant scientific works and manuscripts, then selected data that was considered authentic and relevant to the research objectives. Each document was analyzed in terms of content, historical context, and the relationships between the figures and institutions recorded therein. The documentation process was carried out using a neat bibliographic recording system to maintain the authenticity of the sources (Moleong, 2010). In addition, the researchers also categorized the data thematically to facilitate the subsequent analysis process.

Data analysis was conducted using historical, thematic, and comparative analyses. Historical analysis was used to trace the chronology of the emergence of the network of scholars and intellectual mobility between Indonesia and Brunei. Thematic analysis served to group data into broad themes such as knowledge transmission channels, educational institutions, or the role of central figures in the formation of Islamic civilization. Meanwhile, comparative analysis was used to examine the similarities and differences in patterns of scientific development between the two countries (Murdiyanto, 2020). These three forms of analysis were carried out continuously to produce an in-depth and comprehensive interpretation of the phenomenon under study.

To maintain data validity, this study uses source triangulation and contextual interpretation techniques. Triangulation is carried out by comparing the contents of several documents or works by scholars that are thematically and chronologically related. Contextual interpretation is used to place findings within a specific social, political, and cultural framework so that their meaning can be fully understood. In this way, the results of this study are expected to provide a comprehensive picture of how the network of scholars and intellectual mobility have been a major force in shaping Islamic civilization in the Malay-Archipelago region.

## Results and Discussion

The results of the study show that the network of scholars and intellectual mobility between Indonesia and Brunei played a significant role in shaping the dynamics of Islamic civilization in the Malay-Archipelago region. The patterns of scholarly relations found are not limited to personal relationships between scholars, but also extend to Islamic educational institutions, Islamic boarding schools, and formal religious institutions. These findings reveal a continuous flow of knowledge, religious works, and ideas for Islamic renewal between the two regions ( ). This intellectual mobility included educational activities, book writing, regional recitations, and participation in international religious forums. In terms of documents, there is evidence of the connection between manuscripts and scholarly sanad between major figures such as the ulama of Banjarmasin, Aceh, and Brunei in the 18th



to 20th centuries. In general, the results of the study illustrate that this network of scholars became the foundation for the formation of a distinctive, moderate Islamic civilization rooted in the scientific values of the Malay-Nusantara.



Figure 1: Map of the Spread of Islamic Scholars in the Archipelago

The network of scholars between Indonesia and Brunei was established through scholarly relationships based on sanad and the transmission of knowledge from teacher to student. Based on the analysis of documents and biographical records of scholars, a chain of knowledge was found to be centered in institutions-

Classical Islamic educational institutions such as Islamic boarding schools in South Kalimantan and madrasas in Bandar Seri Begawan. This network demonstrates the continuity of scholarly traditions, whereby many students from Brunei continue their studies at Indonesian Islamic boarding schools before returning to establish religious institutions in their own country. Written sources indicate that this scholarly mobility has been ongoing since the colonial period and has continued into the post-independence era. In a social context, this pattern of relationship not only strengthens the transfer of religious knowledge, but also expands the reach of Islamic cultural and moral influence. Thus, this pattern of scholarly networks became the initial foundation for the formation of Islamic intellectual unity in the Malay region.

Intellectual mobility between Indonesian and Brunei scholars is evident in the form of cross-regional educational activities, the teaching of classical Islamic texts, and collaboration in the publication of Islamic works. Based on the archives of Islamic educational institutions, many Brunei scholars teach temporarily at Indonesian Islamic boarding schools and vice versa, especially in Kalimantan, which has geographical and cultural proximity. Knowledge exchange also occurs through seminars, cleric deliberations, and da'wah training organized by regional Islamic institutions. Travel documents show that these scientific activities reinforce common views on the principles of Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah Islamic teachings in both countries. This process resulted in dynamic intellectual interaction, in which scholars acted not only as educators, but also as cultural connectors and disseminators of ideas for Islamic renewal. This intellectual mobility contributed greatly to the formation of an open, civilized, and science-based Malay Islamic civilization.

**Table 1. Research Findings on Ulama Networks and Intellectual Mobility**

Indicators	Focus/Subfocus Findings	Form of Implementation	Data Source
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Relationship Academic	Patterns of Ulama Networks	Transmission of sanad, cross- pesantren studies, teaching collaboration	Manuscripts, biographies of scholars, pesantren archives
Activities Academic	Intellectual Mobility	Teacher exchanges, regional lectures, book publishing	Documents Education, Islamic institution reports
Values Civilization	Formation Malay Islamic civilization	Integration of the values of moderation, scholarship, and local Islamic culture	National archives, classical scientific works, historical journals

The contribution of scholars to the formation of Malay-Nusantara Islamic civilization is reflected in the integration of scientific values, morality, and local culture in educational and missionary practices. Based on religious institution documents and local historical records, Indonesian and Brunei scholars played an important role in establishing madrasas, majelis taklim, and centers.

The translation of classical texts into Malay. This activity made Islam easily accepted by the community without eliminating local cultural identity. In addition, scholars also became mediators in spreading the values of Islamic moderation, strengthening ukhuwah (brotherhood), and rejecting extreme religious views. Their scientific works became a cultural heritage that influenced the formation of Islamic character in the Malay region. Thus, the contribution of scholars in the social, intellectual, and cultural dimensions shaped the character of Malay Islamic civilization, which is inclusive and civilized.

The findings from the three areas of focus above show a close relationship between the network of scholars, intellectual mobility, and the process of forming the Malay-Islamic civilization of the archipelago. The pattern of scholarly networks became the main channel for the exchange of ideas and education, while intellectual mobility expanded the scope of the religious influence of across national borders. The activities of scholars in establishing educational institutions and writing scientific works strengthened the Islamic scientific heritage, which was rooted in local traditions but open to global developments. The integration of these three aspects formed a grand pattern showing that Islamic civilization in the Malay region was not born instantly, but was the result of a long process of cross-border scientific dialogue. In this context, the relationship between Indonesia and Brunei is a concrete example of historical synergy that gave birth to the distinctive Islamic scholarly tradition of the archipelago. The findings as a whole show that Islam in the Malay region grew through a network of scholars oriented towards knowledge, morality, and the welfare of the people.

Based on the results of the study, it is known that the network of scholars and intellectual mobility between Indonesia and Brunei played a central role in shaping the Malay Islamic civilization of the archipelago. The pattern of scholarly relations that developed shows the continuity of educational traditions and the transmission of knowledge between regions that has been going on for centuries. The mobility of scholars, whether in the form of teaching, writing, or religious activities, strengthens the intellectual and cultural ties between the two countries. These findings show that the development of Malay Islamic civilization stems from the collective work of scholars in bringing together Islamic values and local wisdom. Overall, the results of this study have answered the research question of how the network and mobility of scholars played a role in the formation of Islamic civilization in the Malay region. The next section will discuss the theoretical meaning and implications of these findings in the context of contemporary Islamic civilization studies.

This study found that the network of scholars and intellectual mobility between Indonesia and Brunei played a strategic role in building Islamic civilization in the Malay-Nusantara region. The scholarly relationships formed between the two regions were not only personal in nature, but also institutionalized through Islamic boarding schools, madrasas, and scholarly assemblies that had regional influence. These findings show that the exchange of religious and Islamic scientific ideas has created strong cultural and spiritual integration among Malay communities. The transmission of knowledge, the writing of books, and cross-border teaching became the main vehicles for strengthening



these scientific ties. In terms of substance, this research shows that scholars act as agents of civilization who bridge local traditions with universal Islamic values. Thus, the network of scholars functions as a connecting axis between the scientific, social, and cultural dimensions in the formation of the Malay-Archipelago Islamic civilization.

The main significance of these findings shows that the relationship between scholars in Indonesia and Brunei is not incidental, but rather the result of a system of knowledge transmission rooted in the classical Islamic tradition of sanad. The mobility of scholars across geographical boundaries shows that the Malay region has an inclusive and interdependent scientific ecosystem. The process of knowledge exchange between teachers and students creates a continuity of Islamic scholarly traditions that combine Sufism, fiqh, and tafsir with local wisdom. This pattern of interaction gives rise to a peaceful and cultured form of Islam, while also serving as a means of internalizing Islamic moral values in the social life of the community. More profoundly, this intellectual mobility also shows that scholars have a role as agents of cultural diplomacy between nations within the framework of Malay Islam. This phenomenon confirms that Islamic civilization in the Malay region was formed from cross-regional collaboration and was not the result of unilateral influence.

The integration between the network of scholars and intellectual mobility has led to the emergence of an Islamic scientific structure that is rooted in local traditions but remains open to change. Indonesian and Brunei scholars successfully managed the dynamics of knowledge globalization by adapting universal Islamic values to the Malay cultural context. This is reflected in the curriculum of Islamic educational institutions, the publication of books, and the organization of scientific assemblies that accommodate two-way exchanges: spiritual values and intellectual discourse. Thus, the process of forming an Islamic civilization in this region is not merely a historical phenomenon, but part of the continuity of a living scientific movement. These findings also show that Islam in the Malay-Archipelago region developed through scientific channels, not through political power or authority. Therefore, this study confirms that the main strength of Malay Islamic civilization lies in its continuous and participatory scientific network.

The results of this study reinforce Azyumardi Azra's view in Hakim et al., which states that the network of scholars in the Malay world became the foundation for the spread of Islam based on transregional intellectual sanad (Hakim et al., 2020). In line with this theory, the results of this study also show the continuity of the relationship between scholars in Indonesia, Brunei, and other regions such as Patani and Aceh, which are centers of Islamic scholarship. These findings are also in line with the ideas of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas in Rosyad and Wasehudin, which emphasize the importance of manners and the transmission of knowledge in shaping the identity of Malay Islamic civilization (Rosyad & Wasehudin, 2022). In addition, this study expands on the findings of Anshori and colleagues regarding the mobility of Islamic boarding school scholars by showing that similar relationships also occur at the international level between Indonesia and Brunei (Anshori et al., 2024). In this context, Kang Asep's research confirms that the dynamics of Islamic scholarship do not stop at the local level but develop into a cross-border network of knowledge. Thus, this study broadens the theoretical scope of the Islamization of knowledge in the Malay world.

In addition to reinforcing previous theories, the results of this study also provide a new dimension to Syarif and colleagues' view of the "Islamic network" in Southeast Asia that plays a role in the formation of regional identity (Syarif et al., 2024). In the context of Indonesia and Brunei, this network is not only intellectual but also spiritual and cultural, as evident from the integration of Sufi values in the social life of the community. This study also enriches the findings of Alivia and Erasiah, which highlight the role of Malay scholars in developing a locally-based Islamic epistemology (Alivia & Erasiah, 2025).

Kang Asep's research proves that epistemology does not stop at the level of ideas, but is realized through educational institutions and concrete scientific works. On the other hand, this research corrects the view of some Western scholars who consider Malay Islamic civilization to be passive towards modernity. The findings show that the network of scholars was actually active in developing an adaptive scientific system oriented towards the welfare of the people, in line with the concept of *al-fikr wa al-'amal al-islami* (Islamic thought and practice).

All of the above findings and analyses directly address the research question posed in this study, namely how the network of scholars and intellectual mobility contributed to the formation of the Malay-Nusantara Islamic civilization. The results of the study show that these networks not only functioned as a medium for the exchange of knowledge, but also as a mechanism for shaping the character and values of Islamic civilization in the Malay region. The study's objective of identifying the role of scholars in integrating Islamic values with local culture has also been achieved through historical and documentary evidence. Each piece of data shows the continuity of values between education, da'wah, and Islamic culture. Thus, this research has succeeded in revealing the historical patterns that form the basis of Malay Islamic identity. These findings confirm that Islam in the Malay region is the result of a systematic and cross-regional intellectual process.

The implications of this research are quite broad, both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, this research reinforces the understanding that networks of scholars are an important component in the system of Islamic knowledge transmission that shaped civilization. Practically, the results of this research can be used as a reference for the development of Islamic education curricula in Southeast Asia that emphasize the integration of knowledge, culture, and morals. For policymakers, this research provides a historical basis for religious education cooperation between Indonesia and Brunei within the framework of the ASEAN Islamic Heritage Network. In addition, these findings can be used to strengthen Malay Islamic-based cultural diplomacy in the face of modernity challenges. Thus, this research not only contributes to the enrichment of Islamic historical studies but also provides direction for strengthening the Islamic scientific identity in the contemporary Malay region.

This study has several limitations that should be noted. First, the limitations of digitized historical data make it difficult to thoroughly verify some documentary evidence. Second, this study does not include field data in the form of interviews with contemporary scholars, which could broaden the context of interpretation. Third, the focus of the study is still limited to two regions (Indonesia and Brunei), so it does not fully describe the network of scholars throughout the Malay region. Therefore, further research is recommended to take a multi-locus approach involving Malaysia, Patani, and Singapore. Further research could also examine the epistemology of Malay Islamic education from the perspective of modern curricula. With these steps, studies on the network of scholars and Malay Islamic civilization can develop into a broader and more comprehensive conceptual foundation.

## Conclusion

Based on the above research results, it can be concluded that the network of scholars and intellectual mobility between Indonesia and Brunei played a very significant role in shaping Islamic civilization in the Malay-Archipelago region. The pattern of scientific relations established through educational activities, da'wah, and the publication of scientific works shows the continuity of a dynamic intellectual tradition between the two regions. These interactions not only strengthen the religious dimension, but also expand social, cultural, and political influence in the context of a moderate and inclusive Nusantara Islam. This study has successfully achieved its objectives, namely to identify and describe the strategic role of the network of scholars in building the foundations of an Islamic civilization based on science and values of togetherness in the Malay region. Scientifically, the results of this research make an important contribution to strengthening regional Islamic historical studies and serve as a basis for understanding the dynamics of the transmission of Islamic knowledge across countries. Practically, these results can be used as a basis for designing academic and cultural cooperation.

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