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THE EXPERIENCES OF THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ISLAMIC CIVILISATION & MALAY WORLD (ISTAC), INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA IN EMPOWERING THE MALAY WORLD & ISLAMIC CIVILISATION

Hafiz Zakariya¹ & Suryadi²

International Institute of Islamic Civilization & Malay World (ISTAC),
International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM)

hafizz@iium.edu.my

s.suryadi@hum.leidenuniv.nl

Abstract

Although Indonesia and Malaysia are now two independent nations, both countries have a lot in common, tied by a common religion, language and cultural heritage dating back centuries ago. In building a better tomorrow, both nations can benefit from each other's rich experiences. This paper will focus on an educational institute established at the International Islamic University (henceforth, IIUM) in 2016 initially named the Centre for Malay World and Islamic Civilization and now has been transformed as the International Institute of Islamic Civilization & Malay World (henceforth, ISTAC). The institute is established to support the efforts of the university in creating an academic and intellectual field of research and studies focusing on the Malay World and Islamic civilization. This study describes the scope, major types of activities and concerns of the institute. In so doing it will identify the potential areas for collaboration (such as academic exchange, research, international conference) with relevant institutions in Indonesia.

Keywords: *ISTAC; Malaysia-Indonesia Collaboration; Malay World Studies; International Islamic University Malaysia; Islamic Civilisational Studies.*

Abstrak

Walaupun Indonesia dan Malaysia sekarang sudah menjadi dua negara yang merdeka, namun kedua negara ini memiliki banyak persamaan dari segi agama, bahasa dan warisan budaya sejak berabad-abad lampau. Dalam membina hari esok yang lebih baik, kedua negara ini bisa saling memanfaatkan pengalaman masing-masing yang sangat kaya. Makalah ini memberi tumpuan pada institut pendidikan yang didirikan di Universitas Islam Antarbangsa Malaysia (selanjutnya, IUM) pada tahun 2016 yang semula bernama Institut Dunia Melayu dan Peradaban Islam dan sekarang telah ditransformasikan menjadi Institut Antarbangsa Peradaban Islam dan Dunia Melayu (selanjutnya, ISTAC). Institut ini didirikan untuk menyokong usaha-usaha IUM dalam menciptakan sebuah dunia akademik dan intelektual untuk pengkajian dan studi yang berfokus pada dunia Melayu dan peradaban Islam. Makalah ini mendeskripsikan ruang lingkup, aktivitas dan fokus perhatian yang utama dari institut ini. Dengan begitu, ia akan mengidentifikasi bidang-bidang yang potensial untuk menjalin kerjasama (seperti program pertukaran mahasiswa dan dosen, penelitian, konferensi internasional) dengan intitusi-institusi yang relevan di Indonesia.

Kata Kunci: *ISTAC; Kerjasama Malaysia-Indonesia; Pengkajian Dunia Melayu; Universitas Islam Antarbangsa Malaysia; Pengkajian Peradaban Islam.*

Introduction

The countries around the world take different ways of shaping their national identities, ideologies and cultural values, which are closely intertwined with nationalism. This paper deals with Malaysian experiences on these matters. In accordance with the theme of this symposium, that is “cultivating religious culture for nationalism”, and with passion to share experiences with its Indonesian neighbor, this paper describes how the Malaysian government stimulates the academic institutions to encourage researches and practical actions in framework of shaping and maintaining the national identity and cultural values of *Bangsa Malaysia* which is firmly rooted in Islam and traditions. It focuses on the rebranding of ISTAC and the major scope and activities of this institute.

To have a comprehensive overview about ISTAC, it is important to know what ISTAC is. This introduction, thus will give a brief comprehensive overview about ISTAC is the brainchild of the Honourable Tan Sri Dato’ Seri Utama Dr. Rais Yatim (Henceforth, Tan

Sri Rais), the Special Advisor to the Government of Malaysia on socio-cultural -matters with ministerial status, and President of IIUM. Its broad agenda is to advance the cause of Malay world and Islamic civilisation studies, research and related academic and non-academic activities. It was established through the International Islamic University Malaysia Board of Governors meeting in October 2015. Its full operation started in April 2016. This Centre was based at IIUM Jalan Damansara Campus. After almost one year of operation, in January 2017, with tremendous support from IIUM Rector--Professor Dato' Sri Dr. Zaleha Kamarudin; this Centre has been upgraded to the International Institute of Malay World and Islamic Civilisation. This paper comprises three main parts: a) an overview; b) highlights of its scope and major activities and; c) potential areas of collaboration.

An Overview of International Institute of Islamic Civilisation and Malay World (ISTAC)

Historically, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) IIUM was established in 1983. Since the inception of its existence, IIUM had primarily emphasized the global and ummatic issues as opposed to the local and particular concerns. Therefore, though courses in specific disciplines like history exist in IIUM, it tends to focus on the global history of Muslims instead of Malaysia and Nusantara. As such the Malay Studies Institutes exist in other local universities but not at IIUM. In Tan Sri Rais' insightful view, in order to enrich its academic endeavours, IIUM should transcend its focus on the traditional niche areas/disciplines and embrace the multidisciplinary studies of the Malay World studies. In Tan Sri's perceptive view, the concern for the Malayness will complement rather than contradict IIUM's niche area, namely Islamization. This is so because there are more than 200 million Muslims in the Malay Archipelago. This represents about 25% of the total Muslim population in the world. Thus, the introduction of Malay World Institute at IIUM is timely because the Malay World studies would also enrich our understanding of the dynamic development of Islam

and its society throughout the world. Tan Sri Rais' proposal has been well-received and fully-supported by IIUM top management.

To realize this noble goal, the existing International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, which was established by the eminent scholar, Professor Syed Naquib al-Attas, has been rebranded by IIUM by incorporating Malay World Studies as additional element in its scope of study and research. Thus, the institute has been rebranded as the International Institute of Islamic Civilisation & Malay World. However, its famous brand and acronym, ISTAC has been retained and launched by the Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dato'Seri Dr. Ahmad Zahid Hamidi on 25th October 2017.

Academically, the establishment of Islamic Civilisation and Malay World Studies Institute at IIUM would fill a major gap in the academia. This is so because, internationally, Muslim experiences in the Malay world remain an understudied area. As Denys Lombard has noted, although the Muslims from the Malay-speaking world “are the most numerous of the Islamic world, classical Islamology has interested itself in them only very marginally. (Lombard in Reid, 1993:4)”

Furthermore, some Orientalists tend to portray Islam as practiced in the Malay Archipelago as the “peripheral Islam”, that is “syncretic Islam” influenced by local custom and pre-Islamic beliefs and practices, which differ from the “pristine” Islam as emerged and developed in the “heartlands” of Islam. This argument was put forth by Landon, who contends “Islam is but a thin veneer over indigenous Indonesian civilization”. (Landon, 1949: 164; van Luer, 1955:169). Echoes Landon, says that Islam is only “a thin, easily flaking glaze on the massive body of indigenous civilization”. In the case of British Malaya, (Winsted, 1951: 71-73) a prominent British administrator-scholar of Malay language and history, argued that whatever influence Islam had on Malay society was very limited and even that was strongly mixed with Hindu and Buddhist beliefs and practices. Such a line of thought has been refuted by a number of comparatively recent works on Islam in Southeast Asia.

(Roff, 1985: 7) in his critique of selected studies of Islam in Southeast Asia deplores “the extraordinary desire on the part of western social science observers to diminish, conceptually, the place and role of the religion and culture of Islam, now, and in the past, in Southeast Asian societies”. (Keddie, 1987:3-4) in perhaps her least known article, “Islam and Society in Minangkabau and in the Middle East: Comparative Reflections” echoes the same sentiment. (Keddie, 1987:3) points out that there is a tendency to exaggerate that Muslims in the Middle East are the good and normative Muslims while the “inhabitants of more recently converted areas are ‘bad’, ‘syncretic’ or ‘nominal’ Muslims, whose Islam is sometimes called a veneer over their pre-Islamic beliefs and practices.” Therefore, academically, the establishment of ISTAC is indeed an important paradigm shift brought about by Tan Sri Rais at IIUM.

The vision of the Institute is to become a leading hub in promoting Islamic Civilisation & Malay World in all aspects through research, academic, non-academic and socio-cultural activities. In the existence and operation of the Institute, the vision and mission must always be linked and tied to the needs of the *ummah*, Malays and nation. The International Institute of Islamic Civilisation and Malay World (ISTAC) aims to proliferate studies on the Islamic Civilisation and Malay World through learning, research and exchange of ideas and knowledge at a time where the world seems to thrive upon over simplification and ignorance of history and cultural heritage. Leveraging on the extensive expertise on Islamic Civilisation and Malay World at International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), ISTAC aspires to facilitate capacity building in the Muslim world through shared values of Islamic Civilisation and the diversity of the *ummah*. In this way, the shared values, interests and cultures of Islamic Civilisation will be conserved, promoted and evolve into the future, where Malaysia has a massive advantage to promote academic scholarship, economic growth and unity amongst Muslim countries to drive positive changes in the *ummah*.

In brief, the main objectives of the Institute are:

- a. To be the distinguished source of reference in learning, research and promotion of the Malay world and Islamic civilisation;
- b. To encourage academic collaborations with other institutions locally and internationally on aspects concerning Malay world and Islamic civilisation;
- c. To open up channels of scientific and cultural cooperation and exchange between the Malay World and Muslim world at large world to engage in intellectual and civilisational activities and relations;
- d. To nurture talents, scholars and experts in the Malay world and Islamic civilization through postgraduate studies, postdoctoral and academic fellowship activities;
- e. Encourage relevant activities on areas of fine arts, literature, culture; and in other related areas of priority.

During this inception stage, ISTAC organized various events to promote scholarship and appreciation of civilizational knowledge to help understanding of a people's path whilst informing their plans moving forward. The University's Special collection on Malay literature and Islamic artefacts (including manuscripts, first editions, letters and research materials) are in the process of being transferred to ISTAC Library wing.

ISTAC is fortunate in being able to draw on the expertise of distinguished external and internal researchers on Malay studies and other Islamic cultures. The broad scope of ISTAC covers various countries in which there are Malay-speaking communities from southern Philippines, Indonesia, Singapore, Patani, Brunei to Sri Lanka and South Africa. Through our network in Turkey and other Muslim countries, the Institute hopes to tap into an extensive network of scholars and research material on Islamic civilisation. ISTAC is continuing its efforts to foster collaborative relationships with other important institutions in Southeast Asia, West Asia, Europe, North America, Oceania, North Africa and East Asia.

Highlights of Major Activities, April 2016- January 2017

ISTAC's objectives are achieved through a wide-range of activities including seminars and Eminent Speaker Lecture Series, forums, cultural activities as well as publications. This paper will give a short description about those activities as follow:

“Academic Exchange Programme with Students and Lecturers from Fatih Sultan Mehmet Vakif University (FSMVU), Turkey”.

This activity started from 17 July 2016 to 13 August 2016. The Centre spearheaded an academic exchange program involving IIUM and FSMVU. This academic exchange program involved twenty four students, with twelve of them from Fatih Sultan Mehmet Waqf University (FSMVU) and the rest from Department of Architecture, Kulliyah of Architecture and Environmental Design (KAED), IIUM. The participants were involved in a joint academic programme. The training, educational and design planning programme were conducted throughout the third semester of 2015/2016 session. This programme helped to create a bond between the two nations involved in developing a common understanding of respective vernacular architecture. The theoretical and practical courses offered to the students were directed in producing a centralized design of the futuristic and ummatic Complex for The Malay World and Ottoman Studies planned to be at the Diplomatic Enclave, Putrajaya or Jalan Conlay, Kuala Lumpur. The project involves three related structures to serve the functions and needs of the centre namely, the main complex, the urban mosque, and researchers and visitors guesthouse. The exchange programme was conducted by distinguished academic instructors, five from IIUM, led by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Noor Hanita Abdul Majid, and three from FMSVU led by Prof. Dr. Ibrahim Numan.

Seminar Series

In order to promote vibrant intellectual milieu, the Institute had also organized a series of seminars on the Malay and Muslim world issues as follows:

1. Seminar on Understanding Turkish Vernacular Architecture

A public lecture on Understanding Turkish Vernacular Architecture was delivered by Prof Ibrahim Nouman, Dean Faculty of Architecture and Design, Fatih Sultan Mehmet Waqf University. The session which was conducted from 11.30 a.m. – 12.45 p.m. aims to give better understanding on Turkish Vernacular Architecture. The program succeeded to enlighten on the Turkish Vernacular Architecture.

2. Forum on The Failed Coup Attempt in Turkey: A New Wave for Democracy?

On 27 July 2016, ISTAC organized a forum on The Failed Coup Attempt in Turkey: A New Wave for Democracy? Four distinguished speakers were invited namely Dr. Mohd Iqbal Abdul Wahab (Laws), Assoc. Prof Dr. Saim Kayadibi from (Economics) and Assoc. Prof Dr. Ishtiaq Hossain (Politics) and Prof Dr. Wahabuddin Ra'ees (Politics).

The discussion was very informative as Dr. Iqbal started the sessions with the history of AK party and other political parties in Turkey. He also explained about the constitutional milieu in Turkey by highlighting the secularism is well-embedded within the Turkish constitution. The second panel Dr. Saim continued the session by briefly explaining the chronology of the coup and the causes behind the event. He claimed that the conspiracy had started a long time ago and led by exiled preacher Fethullah Gulen. The third panel, Dr. Ishtiaq enlightened the floor by explaining thoroughly how the social media helped to defeat the Turkish coup. He showed few pictures of Turkey's national building that been destroyed during the coup and also a few wonderful pictures depicts the enthusiasm of the crowds. Dr. Wahabuddin complimented the discussion by emphasizing the importance of wisdom in handling the ideology of secularism and liberalism in a country.

The forum ended by the Q&A sessions and souvenir-giving session by Prof Datuk Seri Dr. Salleh Yaapar, ISTAC distinguished

fellow. The responses of the participant was very positive. The forum succeeded to enlighten all the participants regarding the importance of unity among the Muslim *ummah* and also the solidarity towards the real value of democracy.

3. The Malays are the Indigenous People of Malaysia

On 8 August 2016, Prof. Datuk Seri Dr. Md. Salleh Yaapar, a distinguished fellow of ISTAC and Professor of Universiti Sains Malaysia has unraveled the secret of the Malay people and their mysterious origins in a public lecture organized by ISTAC.

The session which was conducted from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Al-Tabari Conference Room, Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM) entitled “The Malays: Their Origins, Migration and Travels”. The shocking scientific discovery created a spark in the interest of believing whether the Malays are really migrants in this modern state of Malaysia, as well as this region or are they the natives of this land from time immemorial? The Malays are found out to be genetically, historically, culturally and linguistically to be the people who roamed and settled this region of mainland and South East Asia archipelago since tens of thousands of years ago as the cradle of the East Asian population.

The activity was supported by Prof. Stephen Oppenheimer’s studies, which debunked the ‘Out from Taiwan’ theory and directed to the new one coined as the ‘Out of Sundaland’ theory. The theory reversed the whole East Asian ancestry to that of the Aslian and that of Proto-Malay stocks over 16,000 years ago. These people then in their course to survive had developed a steady maritime technology and moved out of the western Austronesian realm to reach the eastern seaboard of the Pacific Ocean, reaching and building colonies with interconnected bloodline as far as Hawai’i, Rapa Nui (Easter Island) and Aoteroa (New Zealand). Westward, they arrived to Madagascar and together to this day formed more than one thousand distinct ethnic groups with over 200 million speakers.

4. The 2000 years old ‘Kotas’ of South East Asia

On 2 November 2016, ISTAC were proud to organize our third seminar series entitled Lives in Ancient Southeast Asian Cities by Prof. Dr. John Miksic, Professor of Southeast Asian Studies, National University of Singapore (NUS). He is an expert and active contributor on regional historical, cultural and archaeological studies, especially in Southeast Asia region. The lecture started with welcoming speech by Honorable Tan Sri Dato’ Seri Utama Rais Yatim, Patron of Institute of ISTAC and Islamic Civilization (IIUM) and also President of International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). He pointed out the need to hone expertise in the Malay World and the Islamic Civilisation research as he seen very pressing nowadays.

Prof. Dr. John Miksic started the public lecture by introducing the concept of ‘kota’ or city that is believed created from outside influences beyond the South East Asian region itself. The existence of ‘kota’ in Southeast Asia has first emerged in the region of Cambodia then East Java, the center administration of Majapahit before reached out to Malay Archipelago. There were also influences of Islam in these ancient urban areas in Southeast Asia. He proclaimed, the Malay World (Alam Melayu) can be classified by two characteristics that are language and ceramic/pottery styles. From his work nearly 50 years in Southeast Asia studies, he found many artifacts and monuments that showed the existence of the city, especially in Malay World. For instance, there are many stones in Lembah Bujang that came from India, Rajastan, Pakistan and Java as evidence 2000 years ago Lembah Bujang was the biggest port in Asia. He also clarified that there is still limited research been done as many evidence from ancient Malay times were remains or been ruined as they settled in the middle of the water such as Srivijaya government in Palembang.

Participants also were amazed by the slide presentation that depicts all the artifacts discovered along his works in Southeast

Asia studies and followed by Q&A session. Prof. John Miksic ended his lectures by recorded his gratitude to the organizer. He was hoping authorities and also private institutions give the best effort to establish an archaeological institution in Malaysia. He also hopes the Malay solidarity being emphasized in order to achieve regional unity, especially in the Malay world.

5. The Earliest ‘Talking Machine’ of the Malay World

On 5 January 2017, Dr. Suryadi from the University of Leiden (Netherlands) delivered the above lecture, organised by ISTAC in collaboration with the Department of History and Civilisation, IIUM. Dr. Suryadi’s talk was entitled “Muslims met the ‘Talking Machine’ in the early 20th century: Muslim Experiences from The Malay World”.

Throughout the lecture, Dr. Suryadi elaborated on the extensive trading of gramophone in Southeast Asia during the first half of the twentieth century which enabled groups of people other than Europeans to gain access to the technology which called ‘*mesin bitjara*’ in Malay. According to him, the domestication of ‘talking machine’ and gramophone discs, which produced mechanical sound, affected the lives of natives in the regions, both socially and individually, and give rise to questions about their own culture, religious beliefs and identity. The variety of uses of the machines epitomized their complex attitudes towards technology.

Looking at the attraction and irritation of modern sound in the early twentieth century Malay society, the lecture explored the Muslim’s acceptance to the initial recording of Qur’an on gramophone discs in the Straits Settlements and the Dutch East Indies. Apart from discussing the fatwas of *ulama* on this matter, the lecture also discussed the debates among the Malay Muslim on the mediation of women’s voice and other issues dealing with Islamic beliefs on gramophone.

Academic Programmes

The International Institute of Islamic Civilisation & Malay World is both a research and postgraduate institution, which covers two broad areas:

- a) The interdisciplinary studies of history, literature, economy, politics and other aspects of Malay world.
- b) The study of all aspects of Islamic thought and civilisation.

Unlike the traditional Malay studies elsewhere, Malay World studies at IIUM will not only focus on conservative topics such as history and philology alone, but it will place great emphasis on the various contemporary issues and challenges facing the Malays in the Archipelago in particular and the Austronesian world in general. Thus, this aspect of Malay World study will be particularly responsive to the needs of the *ummah* in the Malay world.

Similarly, the field of Islamic thought and civilisation is not only confined to the historical periods of the rise and fall of various Islamic civilisations throughout history across the region. Moreover, it would also encompass the major issues facing the contemporary Muslim world. Currently, the Institute offers master's and doctoral degrees. The existing academic programmes offered by the institute are as follows:

Master's Programmes

1. Master of Arts in Islamic Thought and Civilization (mixed mode)
2. Master of Arts in Islamic Thought and Civilization (research)
3. Master of Arts in Malay World Studies (research)

Doctor of Philosophy Programmes

1. Doctor of Philosophy in Islamic Thought and Civilization (mixed mode)
2. Doctor of Philosophy in Islamic Thought and Civilization (research)
3. Doctor of Philosophy in Malay World Studies (research)

It offers the following fields of specialization:

1. Islamic Civilisation
2. Islamic Thought

3. Islamic and Other Civilisation
4. Islamic Science
5. Islamic Spiritual Culture and Contemporary Society
6. Muslim World Issues
7. Philosophy, Ethics, and Contemporary Issues
8. Malay World Studies

As the programmes undergo further expansion and more expertise become available, the niche areas of the Institute shall be expanded too to include many other important issues relevant to the needs of the *ummah*. Besides, academic programmes, The Institute had also conducted academic exchange programme with its partners from abroad. For example, in 2016, academic exchange programme was organized with our partner in Turkey, Faith Sultan Mehmet Vakif University (FSMVU). Moreover, the two partners had also exchanged staff with when one staff from FSMVU taught in IIUM for two weeks in December 2016. In return, through Erasmus Programme, IIUM had also sent two lecturers to deliver lectures at FSMVU in Turkey for 2 weeks (From May to June 2017).

Moreover, in 2017, such academic collaboration has expanded to include universities in China especially the Beijing University for Foreign Studies and Hainan University. In October 2017, IIUM hosted visiting scholars from Hainan University for 1 week. Moreover, the Institute has also held discussions with relevant institutions in Indonesia to organize academic and staff exchange as well collaborative research with the Institute. It is hoped that more collaboration with relevant institutions in Southeast Asia and the Muslim world will materialize in the near future.

Future Programmes

As the Institute attempts to be a prominent educational institution in Malaysia and the region, strategic networking is of paramount importance. In 2017, the Institute plan to focus on establishing cooperation with institutions in Indonesia and China on aspects concerning Malay world and Islamic civilisation;

Second, to open up channels of scientific and cultural cooperation and exchange within the Malay World and Muslim world at large world to engage in intellectual and civilizational activities and relations. To promote the above objectives, the following activities may be relevant:

1. Establishing linkages with relevant institutions in Indonesia through MOU/MOA
 - a. Academic exchange programmes (students and staff).
 - b. Facilitate exchange of knowledge, expertise, training and skills, cultures and mutual values.
 - c. Enhance the numbers of students and staff involved in mobility activities in Indonesia and China.
 - d. Collaborative learning environment through sharing and complementing facilities and technologies in Nusantara partner universities.
2. Research collaborations on Malay world and Islamic issues.
3. Organising regional/international conferences on various aspects of Malay world and Islamic civilisation.
4. Research and promotion of manuscript collections at the Library of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas at Institute, Persiaran Syed Sirajuddin.
5. Provision of Fellowships/visiting scholars.

Conclusion

ISTAC aims to lead the way in Malay and Islamic civilizational research. It is founded based on the belief that the Malay world is rich with tradition and history that has been formed to a large extent by its interactions with other civilization in the neighboring region and most particularly by important Islamic civilization in the past. It aims to leverage on this repository of knowledge and ties of the past and present to facilitate capacity building in both the Malay world and fellow Muslim countries. In this way, the shared values, interests and cultures of Islamic civilization will be conserved, promoted and evolve into the future. Malaysia has a massive advantage to promote the academic scholarship, economic growth and unity amongst Muslim countries to

drive positive change in the *ummah*. It is hoped that the establishment of the Institute can further foster academic and research collaborations between Malaysia and Indonesia in particular and the Malay Archipelago and Muslim world at large.

In the process of nation-building, Malaysia has merged traditions and Islam as essential parts of its own national identity. This choice has been translated into regulations, state's instruments and action programs, including the scholarly field. Holding firmly on Malay-Islamic norms and values, Malaysia is continually trying to build-up its national identity. For example, in translating the concept of 'educational tourism', Malaysia has been promoting and encouraging many international students from Islamic countries in Asia, Middle East and Africa, to study in its universities. This is one of the nation's strategy to introduce its national culture and identity worldwide and to achieve an important political role among the Muslim countries. The contemporary modern Malaysia demonstrates the success story of "Islamisation of knowledge" (*Islamisasi ilmu pengetahuan*), which now becomes the distinctive characteristics of *bangsa Malaysia*.

With the spirit of mutual learning and mutual benefit between the neighboring nation-states, Indonesia could learn from Malaysian experiences in shaping and strengthening its national identity through religion. Similarly, Malaysia too could learn from Indonesia especially through its solid concept of unitary state (*negara kesatuan*) based on *Pancasila* which continues to be debated and interpreted diversely by Indonesian citizens.

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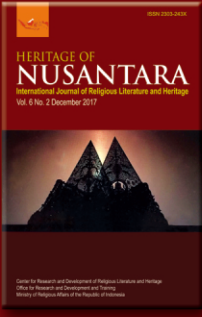
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